The changing Image of Insurgency in Kashmir

AMAN JASWAL

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To my Parents, grandparents, sister, and my brother.

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a critical gap in current knowledge by examining the recent shift in the rhetoric of insurgency in Kashmir. The research empirically investigates whether this shift from nationalism to Pan-Islamism represents a genuine transformation or remains largely symbolic. The objectives include analysing the reasons behind this shift and evaluating its authenticity. The prevailing literature frequently emphasises the visible shifts in the conflict's changing nature, yet often neglects a comprehensive exploration of the underlying motivations and reasons that propel this transformation. This research, systematically integrating meta-analysis of secondary literature, historical study, expert interviews, and case studies, seeks to provide substantial empirical evidence to ascertain the authenticity and validity of this change, which is highly relevant to the academic community, particularly in the fields of terrorism and counter-terrorism studies.

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NOTE:

Please note that, due to the acute sensitivity surrounding the subject matter of this thesis, the names of the interviewees involved in this research have been redacted for confidentiality purposes. For any inquiries or clarifications, please reach out to the author of this thesis via the following contact details: amanjaswalmusic@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to investigate the rationales behind the shift in the imagery and rhetoric of Kashmiri youth and militants from nationalism to Pan-Islamism occurring since 2017 and whether this shift represents a genuine transformation or remains largely symbolic. Two research questions are derived from this main aim. Firstly, what are the reasons for the shift in the imagery and rhetoric of the insurgency in Kashmir from nationalism to Pan-Islamism? Secondly, is the new change real or symbolic? By investigating the underlying rationale and nature of the shift, the study aims to contribute a detailed and comprehensive assessment often overlooked in contemporary literature, encompassing both the research topic and the methodologies employed in its investigation. However, it is noteworthy that the scope of the thesis does not encompass an exhaustive inquiry into the development of prescriptive solutions aimed at the ongoing trajectory of change. While this study is ardently committed to enriching the nuanced comprehension of the evolving Kashmir conflict, the development of precise, pragmatic solutions aimed at addressing the evolving patterns of radicalization necessitates a specialised and exhaustive analysis, which can be developed as a separate and isolated research endeavour.

The conflict in Kashmir is a protracted dispute between India and Pakistan which has endured for seven decades. In the aftermath of India's partition, the Maharaja (King) of Kashmir formally acceded to India on the 26th of October 1947, thereby integrating the region of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into the territory of India (Ganguly, 1997; Akbar, 2002). Therefore, this enduring conflict has been marked by various insurgent groups advocating for distinct outcomes. One faction seeks the establishment of an independent Kashmir, encapsulated by the slogan 'Kashmir Banega Khudmukhtar' (Kashmir will be independent), while another group with a dominant Muslim religious background aspires for Kashmir's union with Pakistan, epitomised by the tagline 'Kashmir Banega Pakistan' (Kashmir will be with Pakistan) (Bose, 2003, 57-58).

However, a discernible shift in the dynamics of this conflict has been noted since 2017, amongst the youth and militants in Kashmir. This shift entails a transformation in their discourse, imagery, and narrative from the aspirations of an independent Kashmir and its potential merger with Pakistan to that of a radical Pan-Islamist vision. As academics (Jadoon, 2018; Devadas, 2018, 80-81) observe, this shift represents a departure from a predominantly nationalist outlook toward one characterised by Pan-Islamism. This transformation manifests in calls for the implementation of Sharia law and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, the assertion of the supremacy of Islam, and criticisms of nationalism and democracy. Instances of this ideological transition are evident in various manifestations, including the adoption of imagery, rhetoric, and symbols reminiscent of radical organisations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the uptick in religious observance reflected in mosque attendance and dressing style, and the emergence of insurgent groups such as Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind (AGUH) and the Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) in the Kashmir valley (Jadoon, 2018; Pandya, 2020, 119).

In contemporary scenarios, the existing literature (Rashid, 7 January 2019; Fayyaz, 21 November 2017) talks about the usage of black ISIS flags unfurled in Kashmir. However, while it underscores the existence of these phenomena, it lacks a comprehensive analysis of the underlying stimuli driving the utilisation of symbols as forms of propaganda in the context of the recent ideological transformation. Furthermore, Jadoon (2018) and Shah (2020) while they provided valuable insights into the penetration of Islamic State ideologies and the formation of new militant organisations AGUH and ISJK led by local militant leaders in Kashmir, their studies have omitted crucial socio-political dimensions that are contemporaneously unfolding in the Kashmir valley and are intrinsically interconnected with the evolving trends. They do not comprehensively explore the essential themes required to determine the authenticity of the new militant organisations and their adoption of Islamic State ideologies. As a result, the existing literature lacks a robust and systematic foundational framework that would

enable a more comprehensive and exhaustive critical examination of the phenomenon in question. This will be further explored in the literature review section.

Moreover, there is a noticeable presence of two separate discourses within the literature on Kashmir: one focusing on its culture and history (Zutshi, 2003; Akbar, 2002), and the other on the current phenomenon of jihadism in the region (Dixit, 2020; Tomilson, 12 May 2019). These discourses often exist independently, highlighting a significant lack of systematic analysis and thorough examination of the key themes linking historical context with contemporary socio-political culture. This absence of a unified approach significantly impedes the ability to derive dependable and cohesive findings concerning the nature of this transformative shift, considering that the enduring cultural and historical underpinnings shaping Kashmiri society exert a profound influence on the changing image of the Kashmir conflict today.

Moreover, Jadoon (2018), Taneja (2019), and Shah (2020) examine the impact of Islamic State ideologies on Indian security and the strategies employed by Islamic State propaganda, scrutinising whether this influence poses a tangible threat. However, these studies overlook exploring the underlying rationale behind the shift in rhetoric among militant leadership, a crucial aspect for understanding current developments. Additionally, they neglect to consider the role played by socio-religious organisations in the heightened religiosity that contributes to this shift. Furthermore, Katoch (26 June 2018), and Routray (27 September 2018) provide a report focusing on instances of black flag waving by certain militants who espouse Islamic State ideologies. Nevertheless, these reports lack a comprehensive analysis of the influence of Hindu nationalism as a reactionary force against Islamic revivalism, as well as the impact of Wahhabism on current radicalisation trends. Moreover, their limitations impede the incorporation of expert opinions, resulting in a superficial analysis that lacks a detailed critical assessment of the underlying reasons behind the phenomenon and fails to ascertain its authenticity. While these reports acknowledge the phenomenon, they fall short in critically analysing it within the context of the pertinent themes driving its manifestation.

Furthermore, while the aforementioned literature, provides valuable insights behind the Islamist trends of Kashmir within specific segments of their research, it lacks a comprehensive and critical examination of prominent militant leaders such as Zakir Musa and Eisa Fazli to understand the rationale behind their motives, decisions, and their radicalisation process. These studies do not encompass a detailed analysis of the roles played by these leaders in contributing to the evolving socio-political landscape of the region and their significant impact on the ideological change of the youth following their rhetoric. Thus, they collectively exhibit a notable methodological limitation in which person-centred and event-based case studies should be conducted to obtain these valuable insights. Moreover, the previously cited literature predominantly relies on a very restricted set of expert interviews, especially among the security experts who occupy the vanguard in the realm of counter-insurgency efforts. This limitation stems from a variety of subjective and objective factors, which may significantly impact the validity and reliability of their research findings.

Consequently, to address the multiple gaps in the literature review, this thesis undertakes a comprehensive approach that encapsulates various themes and arguments. Firstly, this research incorporates discussions on the cultural and historical context of Kashmir, aligning them with contemporary narratives of jihadism in the region. By doing so, it aspires to provide a more critical understanding of the evolving nature of the conflict, delving into the deep-seated culture and civilization change that has endured in Kashmir. Secondly, this thesis presents a logical and comprehensive framework that synthesises the various themes previously explored in isolation. By interconnecting all of these themes together, this study methodically constructs a layered argument that underlies the rationale behind the shift in insurgency dynamics. Thirdly, the thesis delves into the intricate psychological dynamics, complexities and mindset of Kashmiri youth, militant leaders, and their familiarity with the jurisprudence they espouse with difference to the radical jurisprudence, as well as the roots of the self-radicalization process. This exploration is essential in understanding the

multifaceted aspects of identity conflict and the significant influence of these militants in disseminating radical Islamist ideologies. Most critically, it seeks to assess various elements building up to the adoption of the current symbolic imagery and the authenticity of the ideological change. Moreover, the comprehensive examination of relevant literature and the gaps will be presented in the literature review section of the thesis.

Based on the gaps presented above, two main research questions need to be addressed to achieve the aim of this thesis:

Q.1 What accounts for the shift in the imagery and rhetoric of the insurgency in Kashmir from nationalism to pan-Islamism?
Q.2 Is the new change real or symbolic?

In alignment with the two research questions, there are two hypotheses that necessitate comprehensive investigation within the purview of this thesis. Therefore, for this purpose the underneath hypothesis 1 answers the research question 1 and similarly the hypothesis 2 answers the research question 2.

Hypothesis 1: The shift in the imagery and rhetoric of the insurgency from nationalism to Pan-Islamism in Kashmir has occurred for two reasons:
- The disillusionment of the militant groups and youth with different politics supporting nationalistic narratives.
- The reaction from the revivalism of Hinduism in India that is posing the threats to Kashmiri Muslim identity.

Hypothesis 2: The nature of the shift from nationalism to Pan-Islamism is largely symbolic.
- There is no theological knowledge amongst the militants and youth who possess the change.

- Black flag waving is generally an expression of discontent towards the state.

To establish this argument, this research employs a comprehensive methodological approach to scrutinise the validity of its hypotheses, integrating various techniques to thoroughly investigate the subject matter. The study incorporates expert interviews conducted on the ground, event-based case studies, and person-centred case studies focused on militant leaders advocating for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Kashmir. These methodologies, along with a historical-based study, a meta-analysis of secondary literature and expert interviews, will provide substantial empirical evidence, enhancing the credibility and accuracy of the research in discerning the nature of the observed change. This approach will be discussed further in the methodology chapter.

The four main chapters of this thesis facilitate an in-depth analysis of the themes that address the central research questions:

Chapter 1 explores the intricate civilizational and inter-cultural dynamics entrenched in Kashmir's history. It traces Kashmir's transformation from a predominantly Hindu heritage to the emergence of a liberal Sufi Muslim identity, emphasising the role of Sufism in shaping "Kashmiriyat." This historical narrative contrasts sharply with the present embrace of radical Islamic ideologies by some Kashmiri youth and militants but also challenges India's unification amidst an anti-colonial narrative. This departure from historical norms highlights Kashmir's historical resilience *against* radical jihadist Pan-Islamic influences, portraying it as instead an inclusive, secular, and nationalistic society. Understanding this historical context can provide insights into the potential responses of Kashmiri society to the proliferation of fundamentalist Islamic symbols and examine the influence of such ideological currents on the sociocultural fabric of Kashmir.

The second chapter focuses on establishing a conceptual framework essential for investigating the underlying causes and cognitive processes involved in the shift from nationalism to Pan-Islamic ideologies. It conducts an in-depth analysis of the

fundamental concept of "Umma," which underpins Pan-Islamism, asserting the inherent religious unity of all Kashmiri individuals belonging to the faith. Concurrently, the chapter critically examines nationalism, exploring its narrative in the region concerning statehood, nations, nationalism, and patriotism. Following this, it investigates the relationship between Umma and nationalism, highlighting their contradictory nature but also their coexistence, particularly in the context of Kashmir. This exploration lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapter, which delves into the coexistence of two dominant narratives in Kashmir: Kashmiri nationalism, advocating for Kashmir's independence or merger with Pakistan through political means, and Islamist Kashmir, advocating for a caliphate based on Sharia law due to religious sentiment. The chapter then explores theories and literature on overlapping identities and identity conflicts arising from the juxtaposition of Umma and nationalism in Kashmir's practical landscape.

Chapter 3 builds upon the conceptual framework established in Chapter 2, focusing on the analysis of Kashmiri nationalism and Islamist narratives. It traces the development of Kashmiri nationalism from 1931 to 1947 and evaluates its pervasive influence in Kashmiri society, while also examining the overlapping identities of different nationalist aspirations in the region. Additionally, the chapter explores the narrative of Islamist Kashmir, emphasising the long-standing values of Sufi Islam and Jamaat e Islami ideologies, alongside a marginal tendency towards the Wahhabism and a Salafist school of Islamic thought. The latter part of the chapter delves into the origins of disillusionment among Kashmiri youth and militants, especially due to the events occurring in the period between 2008-2010, attributing it to Indian-state violence, unfulfilled promises, corruption, and betrayal by separatist groups. This disillusionment fosters resentment and frustration among the youth, fuelling the pathway to radicalization.

In continuation of chapter 3, Chapter 4 investigates the intricate factors propelling the evolution of insurgent discourse within the Kashmir region. Through a meticulous examination, it critically dissects various themes including the interplay between Hindu

revivalism in India and the revivalism of Islam in Kashmir, alongside the emergent phenomenon of Islamophobia. Additionally, the chapter conducts a nuanced exploration through a person-centred case study focusing on Zakir Musa and his associated organisation (AGUH). By scrutinising the divergences between the adopted rhetoric and imagery of these radicalised individuals and the doctrinal underpinnings of established extremist organisations, it seeks to discern the nature and authenticity of ideological transformations. Furthermore, the chapter deliberates on the plausibility of an Islamic state emerging in Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) in Kashmir, considering the dissemination of fundamentalist Islamic symbolism and imagery facilitated by digital platforms, juxtaposed with the prevalent resistance exhibited by the majority of Kashmiri populace against this process.

Following an extensive analysis of the thesis, it is imperative to underscore that the evolution of insurgency imagery and rhetoric in Kashmir stems from disillusionment among militant groups towards political entities associated with the Indian administration and separatist factions advocating for integration with Pakistan, which leads to the rejection of both of nationalist narratives. Additionally, the revivalism of Hinduism in India and increased Islamophobic sentiments threaten Kashmir's Islamic identity, prompting a defensive adoption of a stricter interpretation of Islam among certain segments of the population. In such a vulnerable environment, the dissemination of radical ideologies through the Internet facilitates exposure of Kashmiri youth to radical literature, rhetoric, and imagery, leading to allegiance with extremist groups. However, it is argued that these individuals lack comprehensive religious knowledge and organisational structure compared to established extremist groups. Moreover, their targeting of government and police officers over civilians highlights a distinction between them and the indoctrinating organisation, and these individuals lack concrete evidence to substantiate their physical connection with the radical organisation to which they claim allegiance.

Consequently, it is suggested that the youth and Militants reject nationalistic narratives and adopt Pan-Islamic rhetoric with the purpose of expressing their grievances towards the Indian state and separatist leader, legitimising their Islamist cause, and garnering public support through imitation of these more radical groups' identities. However, this transformation does not necessarily reflect a genuine belief in Islamist principles or the establishment of a caliphate or Sharia law, as claimed symbolically. Furthermore, the presence of radical groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Kashmir is justified as symbolic, as their claim of responsibility for attacks in Kashmir primarily serves as an effective strategy to instil fear and perpetuate their influence across different geographical areas without the need for actual physical presence.

In conclusion, the shift towards radicalization among militants and youth in Kashmir predominantly manifests as a symbolic characteristic rather than a genuine transformation. Nonetheless, the thesis also acknowledges a minor, genuine radicalised aspect of the change, albeit on a limited scale, influenced by the persistent circulation of radical ideologies and figures in the region. However, the establishment of an Islamic state in Kashmir is deemed challenging due to the rejection of such ideologies by the majority of the Kashmiri population. This rejection stems from the enduring nationalist discourse in Kashmir, which recognizes the adoption of radical Islamist ideologies as counterproductive to their nationalist aspirations, rooted in the longstanding and contradictory values of Kashmiriyat identity deeply entrenched in their collective psyche till the present time.

The employment of this symbolism serves the purpose of articulating anti-Indian sentiments and provoking the Indian administration. The strategic impetus underpinning the Kashmiri nationalist struggle remains unaltered, maintaining its fundamental political character. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Kashmiri nationalist discourse not only stands in contrast to the tenets of pan-Islamism but also contradicts the prevailing international geopolitical dynamics. Additionally, the influence exerted by radical pan-Islamist ideologies remains relatively limited. This suggests that the Kashmiri

society, well-informed about the intricacies characterising this evolving phenomenon, does not regard the radical pan-Islamic discourse as a viable or justifiable objective. On the contrary, the pursuit of radical Islamist rhetoric is not in the best interest of the Kashmiri population. Such a course of action would potentially legitimise the use of force by Indian authorities against the people of Kashmir under the pretext of combating a religiously driven insurgency rather than addressing the territorial issue at its core (Devadas, 2019). Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the stark disparities in nature and historical foundations between the Islamic jurisprudence of Kashmir and radical Pan-Islamism. While this study does demonstrate a subtle inclination toward the adoption of Islamist radical jurisprudence, it is essential to acknowledge that the prevailing conditions of oppression and the persistent threats to the Muslim identity in Kashmir may provide fertile ground for increased radicalization. This suggests the looming danger of the amplification of radical jurisprudence. Hence, comprehending the foundational tenets of this emerging inclination holds great significance in the context of the current academic literature and is an important insight with potential significance for stability in the region. It equips researchers and policymakers with the understanding necessary to counteract these shifts through understanding. Moreover, a detailed version of the research findings is further discussed in the later parts of the introduction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Kashmir conflict, spanning over seven decades, remains the longest-standing border dispute between India and Pakistan. Hashmi and Sajid (2020) characterise it as one of the most enduring and intractable conflicts in modern Indian history, often termed a "frozen conflict". However, Tremblay (2018) challenges this notion, suggesting that the Kashmir issue transcends mere intractability, implying deeper complexities. Furthermore, Bose (2021, 2) contends that the Kashmir conflict is a direct consequence of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, a view echoed by Ganguly (1999). They elucidate the limited options available to princely states post-partition, which were to accede to India, Pakistan, or maintain independence. In light of the foregoing discussion, it can be contended that the partition of India in 1947 engendered divergent narratives that Kashmir was about to be envisioned. However, Bose (2021, 4) notes that the prospect of Kashmir remaining independent was largely hypothetical, lacking practical viability and calling it as 'purely notional'.

Exploring the divergent nationalist narratives shaping the Kashmir conflict, Varshney (1991, 999) identifies the Kashmir conflict as the source of three compromised visions of nationalism, namely, religious nationalism espoused by Pakistan, secular nationalism advocated by India, and ethnic nationalism embodied in the concept of Kashmiriyat all actively competing against each other. This underscores the multi-faceted nature of the conflict, rooted in diverse ideological paradigms. While Ganguly and Bajpai's research (1994, 400-402) aligns with the analysis of competing nationalisms espoused by Varshney (1991), nevertheless, the research posited by Ganguly and Bajpai (1994) and Varshney (1991) diverge in its emphasis on the strategic significance of Kashmir's location between India and Pakistan. This research limits the scope of the geopolitical dimension as a primary driver of the conflict, while explicitly focusing on the interplay of competing nationalist ideologies. They also lack the rhetoric of the denial of 'Azadi' (freedom) by India as a major driver of this continuing conflict and aggravating resentments towards the state.

Asthana and Nirmal (2001), Waqas (2012) and Ganguly (1997) assert that the concept of Kashmir's independence culminated in October 1947, when tribesmen from Pakistan invaded and instigated an attack on the region to capture the Muslim majority region against the king. Although both scholars attribute the culmination of the idea of an independent Kashmir to the actions of the Muslim rebels sent from Pakistan, however, Snedden (2013, 36-65) presents a contrasting perspective, highlighting the role of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in initiating the anti-Maharaja (king) uprising, thereby calling into question the narrative linking the rebel incursion to the Maharaja's decision to accede to India. Furthermore, Ganguly (1997) and Akbar (2002) provide historical documentation of the formal accession of the Maharaja (King) of Kashmir on the 26th of October 1947, resulting in the integration of the region of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into the territory of India. Moreover, the scholarship by Asthana and Nirmal (2001) and Ganguly (1997) overlooks the significant aspect of the 1948 United Nations Resolution Act, which advocated for an internationally supervised plebiscite to determine the future of Kashmir, serving as a seminal influence in Kashmir's aspirations for self-determination as the source issue for the conflicting narratives. In contrast, Schofield (1996) argues that initially, Pakistan declined to withdraw its troops from its occupied territory, and subsequently, India refused to permit a free vote, fearing that the Muslim-majority population would opt to join Pakistan.

Moreover, the decision to accede to India and the subsequent denial of the Kashmiri right to self-determination has contributed to a growing sense of alienation towards India, perceived as an occupying force. In this light, Bazaz (2007) work argues about Indian state governance and its democracy as a means of intimidation and terror while Bhattacharjea (1994) recalls Kashmir as a state of 'wounded valley'. Furthermore, Duschinski and Hoffman (2011) argue about the contestations over Law, Power, and Representation in Kashmir Valley, while Bose (2003) and Faheem (2016) talk about the three generations of Kashmiri Azadi and the impacts of militarization. The preceding research prompts inquiry into the historical evolution of Kashmiri independence wherein

the discourse surrounding Kashmir's right to self-determination transitioned into a narrative portraying Kashmiris' grievance against the Indian state. This transformation narrows the focus to addressing human rights violations and improving economic conditions, thereby obscuring the fundamental issue of self-determination. Furthermore, it calls attention to the portrayal of Kashmiri people as radical Islamists, who have historically engaged in mobilisation predating the creation of India and Pakistan, as poor, uninformed, marginalised, and incapable of making reasoned decisions regarding their destiny. This shift in narrative warrants critical examination to understand the factors and motivations behind this recontextualization of Kashmiri aspirations and experiences within the broader geopolitical discourse.

Moreover, Duschinski, Bhan, Zia, and Mahmood (2018) delve into the nuanced interpretations and significance of Kashmiri "azadi" (freedom), highlighting a notable scarcity in scholarly attention towards comprehending its essence and profound implications for the Kashmiri populace. This dearth in understanding has contributed to a limited grasp of the motivations underlying the historical and ongoing resistance of ordinary Kashmiris against the Indian state. Additionally, Hussain (2018) conducts a comparative analysis of the historical and contemporary notions of freedom in Kashmir. Notably, the aforementioned literature explicitly centres its inquiry on the Kashmiri identity, offering insights into the rationale behind the cultivation of the sentiment of Kashmiri "azadi," its ramifications, and its utilization within the insurgency landscape. However, this literature review identifies a significant research gap concerning the understanding of the evolving narratives surrounding Kashmiri "azadi" and the underlying rationales to understand the changing narratives which would be later addressed. This gap serves as a focal point for the present research endeavour, which aims to elucidate this overlooked aspect of understanding the mindset of radical Islamic militancy.

Meanwhile, Bose (2003, 57-58) contends that the protracted conflict in Kashmir has been characterised by divergent narratives advocating for distinct outcomes. One

narrative promotes the establishment of an independent Kashmir, encapsulated by the slogan 'Kashmir Banega Khudmukhtar' (Kashmir will be independent), while another faction, primarily composed of individuals with a strong Muslim religious background, seeks Kashmir's union with Pakistan, symbolised by the tagline 'Kashmir Banega Pakistan' (Kashmir will be with Pakistan). However, there exists a significant segment of the population that advocates for the region's integration with the Indian state. To shed some light on the rhetoric and objectives of certain insurgent groups, Santhanam (2003) argues that Hizbul Mujahedeen is one of the oldest insurgent groups with its goal to make Kashmir free from India and merge it with Pakistan, while Pelton (2000) talks about JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir liberation front) whose goal is to make Kashmir an independent nation. In the complex milieu of the Kashmir conflict involving India, Pakistan, and proponents of an independent Kashmir, Masoodi (2018) identifies a notable transformation in objectives and discourse. He observes a discernible shift from a predominantly nationalist agenda to one advocating for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate under Sharia law, particularly embraced by youth and militants amidst the ongoing conflict. This transition underscores a significant gap in the current body of research on the subject.

Moreover, Ahmad (15 May 2017) in his article *"With Call For 'Islamic Rule', Zakir Musa May Have Signalled Ideological Split in Kashmir Militancy"* and Mir (25 May 2019) in his article *"Why Zakir Musa, Voice of a New Extremism in Kashmir, Survived as Long as He Did"* give scenarios of the prevalence of ideologies supporting 'Islamic governance' and where militant commander Zakir Musa, said that "people should not involve in a nationalist fight as, nationalism and democracy is haram in Islam, the motive should be the supremacy of Islam". The proliferation of reports alleging the prevalence of radical Pan-Islamic ideologies and self-radicalization is concerning, particularly due to the lack of rigorous scrutiny in the research process. This raises apprehensions regarding the accurate portrayal of the conflict as being primarily motivated by jihad rather than a nationalistic desire fuelled by the emotions of 'azadi'. Consequently, there is a pressing need for systematic and expert-driven research methodologies to produce more robust

evidence-based insights. Such methodologies may include conducting interviews with knowledgeable individuals on the ground, analysing event-based case studies, and undertaking person-centred case studies focusing on militant leaders advocating for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. These research approaches must be pursued in an organized and methodical manner to ensure a thorough and critical examination of the complex dynamics at play.

In contemporary scenarios, Rashid's (7 January 2019) article, "Black Flags in Kashmir – Mere Shadows or the Coming of Islamic State?" sheds light on such instances which highlight the waving of ISIS-related flags during protests in Kashmir. Adding to this perspective, Fayyaz (21 November 2017) and Ali (10 January 2019) talk about the usage of black ISIS flags unfurled in Kashmir. However, it is imperative to note that the aforementioned literature predominantly serves to underscore the existence of these phenomena. It lacks a comprehensive analysis of the underlying stimuli driving the utilisation of symbols like flags and slogans as forms of propaganda in the context of the recent ideological transformation. This raises questions concerning the heightened religiosity among the region's youth and militants, their understanding of the jurisprudential aspects underpinning these evolving dynamics, as well as the role played by socio-political religious organisations in radicalising young individuals who perceive themselves as oppressed by the state. The aforementioned reports primarily provide an account of the unfolding events, yet they fall short of furnishing a comprehensive overview of the underlying themes and phenomena that warrant in-depth exploration.

Furthermore, works authored by Farooqi (26 December 2017), Tomilson (12 May 2019), Shah (2020) and the European Foundation of South Asian Studies (2021) provide valuable insights into the penetration of Islamic State ideologies and the formation of new militant organisations AGUH and ISJK led by local militant leaders in Kashmir characterised by a renewed emphasis on the implementation of Sharia law and a growing willingness to embrace martyrdom. Moreover, Shayista Farooqi (26 December 2017) discusses the formation of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group,

led by local militant commander Zakir Musa. This development indicates a notable shift in the region's militant landscape. Timsit (11 May 2019) delves into the activities of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) within the local militant scene, challenging Pakistan's strategic influence. The creation of Al-Qaeda's affiliate, Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGUH), and IS's declaration of Kashmir as a 'province' reflect these shifts. However, Timsit's analysis has been criticised for lacking a critical examination of the motivations behind militants supporting both Kashmir's merger with Pakistan and radical Islamist groups (11 May 2019). Moreover, the literature highlights the need for systematic analysis based on concrete evidence rather than speculation and superficial evidence of the present. It also underscores the importance of verifying the legitimacy of social media platforms and the authenticity of media outlets associated with Al-Qaeda. The European Foundation of South Asian Studies (2021) contributes to this discussion by noting the ideological transformation in J&K from a struggle for national self-determination to a more globalised, non-national form of Jihad. Additionally, Shah (2020, 25) contributes to this discourse by highlighting the waving of black flags associated with ISIS during protests, as well as the growing trend of martyrdom among jihadists in Kashmir. These actions signify a departure from conventional Sufi practices, a harmonised and peaceful form of Islam, and reflect a notable shift in the jihadist landscape.

However, the literature mentioned above has omitted crucial socio-political dimensions that are contemporaneously unfolding in the Kashmir valley and are intrinsically interconnected with the evolving trends. These scholars have indeed observed the ongoing changes; however, their analysis often lacks the critical examination of underlying factors and rationales. They do not comprehensively explore the essential themes required to determine the authenticity of the new militant organisations and their adoption of Islamic State ideologies. These dimensions entail the disenchantment with political procedures evident within militant factions and the younger demographic, the resurgence of religious identity and comprehension of jurisprudence and its correlation with the initial radical framework, alongside the reactions of Kashmiri society to the ongoing changes. Thus, it can be seen clearly that none of the research above has

their focus of the study on critically analysing the rationale and reasons behind the changing nature of the insurgency. As a result, the existing literature lacks a robust and systematic foundational framework that would enable a more comprehensive and exhaustive critical examination of the phenomenon in question.

Furthermore, it is notable that prior studies conducted by Pandya (2020), Geelani (2019) and Devadas (2018, 2019), while providing valuable insights behind the Islamist trends of Kashmir within specific segments of their research, lack a comprehensive and critical examination of individual militant leaders such as Zakir Musa and Eisa Fazli to understand the rationale behind their motives and decisions.

Aggarwal (2023, 11) states that currently there are no studies on Zakir Musa and its organisation AGUH (Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind) and ISJK (Islamic state of Jammu and Kashmir) that advocate recently, the desire to make Kashmir a part of the Islamic Caliphate. The existing studies, despite their merits, do not encompass a detailed analysis of the roles played by these leaders in contributing to the evolving ideological landscape of the region. Additionally, they do not delve into the intricacies surrounding the rationales behind pivotal historical events, including the formation of new militant organisations like AGUH and ISJK. Thus, the absence of specific person-centric studies within the scope of the research conducted by those mentioned above including Pandya (2020), Geelani (2019) and Devadas (2018, 2019) is noteworthy, as their primary research focus did not centre on comprehensively addressing the recent shifts in dynamics within Kashmiri youth and militant movements. It is worth noting that all of the above-mentioned reports collectively exhibit a notable methodological limitation in which they lack the understanding of militant mindset to understand their actions, decisions, and jurisprudence through the use of person-centred and event-based studies to justify their findings regarding the ideological change being real or symbolic.

While some literature presented by scholars such as Zutshi (2003, 2018), Akbar (2002), Snedden (2013), and Walter Lawrence (1895) only discuss the culture, identity politics

and history of Kashmir, some other literature of Geelani (2019), Devadas (2018, 2019), Dixit (2020) and Tomilson (12 May 2019) and Jadoon (2018) addresses more profoundly the imagery of jihadism in contemporary Kashmir. However, it is observable that these two discourses frequently coexist in relative isolation, thereby exhibiting a notable dearth of systematic analysis and the comprehensive exploration of the central themes inherent to the interconnection between historical context and contemporary socio-political culture. This absence of a unified approach significantly impedes the ability to derive dependable and cohesive findings concerning the nature of this transformative shift.

In the contemporary analysis of the Kashmir conflict, recent research endeavours offer valuable insights from various perspectives. Bose (2021) delves into the conflict's history, geopolitics, and the human tragedy experienced by the people of Kashmir while Hussain (2018) and Whitehead (2018) explore the conflict through the lens of Kashmiri nationalism and the concept of a separate Kashmiri nation. Moreover, Tremblay (2018) examines the conflict's dynamics by emphasising governance and identity politics, while Zutshi (2018) focuses on the prominent Kashmiri Muslim identity. Additionally, while Ahmad (2017) addresses the misrepresentation of the introduction of Islam in Kashmir and Bhat and Wani (2017) looks at the rise of the Muslim identity through the lens of the social religious organisation Jamaat-e-Islami, Bose (2021) and George (2017) look at the Hindu nationalism and its revivalism; at the same time, Bjørgo and Mareš (2019) look at the impact of vigilantism against minorities. However, it is worth noting that despite these valuable contributions, none of the aforementioned research comprehensively analyses the current transition amongst certain insurgent groups towards adopting an Islamist symbolic imagery. In addition, it is also imperative to acknowledge that while these themes have been individually examined in isolated studies, the need to amalgamate these critical issues into a cohesive framework is apparent in order to derive a conclusive and accurate understanding of rationales behind the changing pattern of insurgency demands exploration.

Specifically, it is imperative in Kashmir to acknowledge the dearth of research that comprehends the militant mindset, the multifaceted role of socio-religious organisations, the role of revivalism and religion, the role of social media and internet, the role of historical analysis of Kashmir and the discernible influence of Islamic jurisprudence involved in shaping the ongoing insurgency in Kashmir. The literature falls short of providing a comprehensive approach that synthesises these themes to fully apprehend the underlying logic propelling the symbolic shift in the insurgency. Furthermore, they do not delve into the intricate psychological dynamics that underpin the militant perspective leading to the adoption of radical Pan-Islamist rhetoric. Therefore, while these themes have been individually examined in isolated and small-scale studies, the need to amalgamate these critical issues into a cohesive framework is apparent to derive a conclusive and accurate understanding of rationales behind the changing pattern of insurgency demands exploration. This comprehensive perspective is essential for exploring the reactions of Kashmiri society to insurgency, unravelling the complexities of identity, the role of socio-political religious organisations and grasping the jurisprudential dimensions at play, and, most crucially, elucidating the reasons behind the adoption of the current symbolic imagery, which constitutes as the primary focus of this thesis.

Therefore, to rectify the deficiencies observed in the literature review as scrutinised earlier, this thesis undertakes a comprehensive approach that encapsulates various themes and arguments to synthesise the aforementioned topics systematically into one detailed study. Firstly, this research incorporates a historical-based study on the cultural and historical context of Kashmir, aligning them with contemporary narratives of jihadism in the region. This integration aims to establish a cohesive and meaningful narrative bridging the historical roots of Kashmiri society and the current socio-political dynamics in the valley. By doing so, it aspires to provide a more holistic understanding of the evolving nature of the conflict, delving into the deep-seated culture and civilization that have endured in Kashmir, beyond the superficial drivers of the present. This facet holds paramount significance as it facilitates an explanation of the enduring cultural and

historical foundations that shape the dynamic of Kashmiri society, thus exerting influence on the evolving portrayal of the Kashmir conflict in contemporary times, as well as the corresponding reactions of Kashmiri citizens to such transformations.

Secondly, this thesis presents a logical and comprehensive framework that synthesises the various themes previously explored in isolation, including, but not limited to Kashmiri nationalism, the concept of Pan-Islamism, identity politics, religious revivalism, militant jurisprudence, the role of Internet and media, the concept of symbolism, and more. By connecting these themes together, this study constructs a layered argument that better explains the shift in insurgency dynamics. It is important to emphasise that these themes are interwoven and collectively contribute to the current state of conflict and its evolving trends in Kashmir.

Finally, the thesis thoroughly examines the intricate psychological dynamics, complexities, and mindset of Kashmiri youth, militant organisations, and their leaders, including their understanding of jurisprudence compared to radical interpretations, as well as the origins of the self-radicalization process. This investigation is crucial for comprehending Kashmiri society's response to insurgency, unravelling the multifaceted aspects of identity conflict, evaluating the influence of socio-political religious organisations, and understanding the jurisprudential dimensions involved. Most importantly, it aims to decipher the rationale behind the adoption of the current symbolic imagery among the youth and militants, and the extent to which these radical ideologies and symbols have influenced the region, which serves as the central focus of this research. Moreover, this thesis comprises a multifaceted methodological approach which is discussed in the methodology section.

METHODOLOGY

To address the essential themes regarding the research question, the thesis employs an array of methodologies, including expert interviews conducted on the ground, event-based case studies, person-centred case studies focused on militant leaders advocating for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Kashmir, a historical study and meta-analysis of secondary literature. Expert interviews offer valuable insights from counter-radicalization efforts. Given the scarcity of comprehensive literature on contemporary radical Pan-Islamism, interviews with such individuals provide invaluable perspectives on militant groups' recent changes and youth radicalization processes. Moreover, event-based case studies are vital for providing insights into the disillusionment of politics among militants and Kashmiri youth, and the Islamization of Kashmiri Muslim identity. Additionally, a person-centric case study centred on militant leader Zakir Musa and his affiliated organisation will be conducted, aiming to extract valuable insights into the catalysts driving his radicalization process, his mindset, and his influential role in shaping the ideological transformation observed among Kashmiri youth. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of secondary literature strengthens all the evidence presented above by critically examining the relevant studies regarding each theme of the research. This combinative methodological approach ensures a systematic, impartial, and rigorously substantiated analysis, enhancing the research's credibility and facilitating well-founded conclusions.

To evaluate the validity of the hypotheses, this study employs a qualitative interpretivist approach, which encompasses a collection methodology and analytical methods. The collection methodology involves an analysis of secondary literature and conducting semi-structured expert interviews. The analytical methodology comprises an analysis of event-based case studies, person-centric case studies focusing on the biographical approach of militant leaders and their organizations (such as AGUH and ISJK), historiographical analysis of pre-colonial Kashmir based on a historical study, and a review of the secondary literature revolving around themes of historical, theological, and cultural, thus yielding into an argumentative analysis.

The rationale for this methodology is to examine the issue from diverse angles. First, semi-structured expert interviews serve as a primary means for delving deeply into the subject matter, aiming to illuminate unpublished understanding of various perspectives and exemplifying experiences of key experts on subject matters that stand important to understand the changing nature of insurgency. Second, a historical-based investigation is pivotal in furnishing essential context for comprehending the historiographical evolution that has shaped perceptions of the region over time. Third, an analysis of secondary literature facilitates the synthesis of existing research findings, allowing to identify and review major themes and patterns relevant to the research question. Additionally, event-based case studies offer a meticulous examination of specific incidents or developments within the conflict, illuminating their significance and implications in shaping the changing nature of insurgency. Last, person-centric case studies focusing on militant leaders furnish valuable insights into their backgrounds, motivations, and strategies, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors propelling the adoption of radical Pan-Islamic ideologies in the Kashmir insurgency. Moreover, this analysis also unravels the influence of such symbols and figures on the radicalisation process of the youth in the region.

Chapter 1 is a historical-based analysis to examine the pre-colonial sentiment of Kashmir and the inception of the Kashmiri identity that incorporates a vision of a harmonious Kashmiri homeland, which is different from a nation with a radical Pan-Islamic aspirations. Through the employment of a historical-based study, the research deploys a historiographical analysis and secondary literature analysis to argue and compare various key arguments and gather evidence and insights regarding two pivotal historical junctures. First, it will investigate how Kashmiri society, throughout its history, has consistently pursued the concept of homeland and collectively resisted perceived foreign occupation. This historical pursuit has often challenged foreign rule and tyranny while advocating for a homeland grounded in Kashmiri identity. This underscores the emergence of a nationalist sentiment predating modern definitions of nationalism and the concept of a nation-state. Secondly, this research will examine the emergence of the Kashmiri Muslim identity in the 13th century, which embraced the Sufism values and its

civilizational shift during this time. Therefore, the role of historical analysis is imperative to provide evidence and explain the indigenous Kashmiri identity and the embracement of nationalistic ethos throughout, thus comparing and contrasting it with the new vision of Kashmir as a Pan-Islamic nation as reflected in the current changing trend. Additionally, the research will incorporate primary sources from this period to corroborate the assertions.

Chapter 2 critically reviews the secondary literature about the theological foundation of Umma and the cultural theme analysis addressing key themes of ethnicity, nationalism, internationalism, and identity. This critical evaluation will provide essential evidence of the contrasting relationship between nationalism and Umma. Furthermore, by employing the methodology of meta-analysis, the research will also grasp a theoretical framework of nationalism and the Umma model as a solid foundation to analyse the contemporary Kashmiri nationalist movements as well as the emergence of Islamist narratives in the region in the next chapter. Based on the argument raised in Chapter 2, chapter 3 undertakes an examination of the secondary literature pertaining to the published speeches of the first Prime Minister of Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, to gain direct insights into the developing vision of Kashmiri nationalism. This would further contribute to the central argument that underscores the significant contradiction between the deeply ingrained desire for Kashmir nationalism and patriotism and the notion of radical Pan Islamic ideology emerging in the region. Collectively, the meta-analysis of these essential themes will help unravel the intricate dynamic of the different narratives regarding the future of Kashmir and the nature of the identity issues in the conflict.

Moreover, Chapter 3 will feature an analysis of event-based case studies focusing on three significant incidents spanning the period of 2008-2010: The killing of teenager Tufail Mattoo, the double murder rape case, and the Amarnath land agitation, all of which resulted in mass civilian casualties due to actions by the Indian state. The conspicuous level of grievances caused in the three events makes it imperative for the research to pursue an event-based approach for the mentioned three scenarios. The

analysis of these three case studies is instrumental in discerning the role of oppression in the radicalization process particularly between 2008 and 2010, comprehending the disillusionment experienced by emerging militants in the context of Kashmir's merger with the states of India and Pakistan, and investigating the pivotal role of the internet during this phase in providing a platform for the dissemination of radical ideologies. This interplay between oppression, disillusionment, and the internet will significantly aid in enhancing the research's capacity to establish an in-depth understanding of the rationales underpinning the shifting imagery and rhetoric in Kashmir.

In addition, Chapter 4 incorporates a comprehensive examination of person-centred case studies aimed at elucidating the motivations, rationale, target, and radicalisation processes inherent in today's typical militant leaders like Zakir Musa of the AGUH and Eisa Fazli of the ISJK, who play pivotal roles in shaping the mindset among the radicalized Kashmiri youth in Kashmir. This analytical approach serves to uncover their techniques for disseminating ideologies within the public sphere and provides valuable insights into the nature of their radicalization by assessing the relationship between these leaders and radical Islamist groups such as the Islamic State (IS). In the field of political violence, Aggarwal (2023) emphasises the lack of psychological person-centred case studies on militant leaders. As mentioned in the literature review, there has been no research that includes case studies on the militant leadership of AGUH (Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind) and ISJK (Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir) (Aggarwal, 2023). Therefore, the absence of in-depth person-centric case studies will detract from the comprehensive understanding of the intricacies characterising the mindset of militancy. In this regard, drawing upon Jerrold Post's (2003) profound insights into the psychology of militant leadership, it becomes evident that the role of the leader transcends mere authority. Post (2003) astutely observes that the leader assumes the role of a unifying force, offering a coherent and compelling narrative that imparts religious, political, or ideological justification to their diverse cadre of followers. This unifying message serves as a crucial mechanism through which a sense of purpose and direction is instilled among these followers. Consequently, scrutinising the portraits and profiles of terrorist leaders provides invaluable insights into the intricate psychology and motivations that

drive their dedicated followers and understand the rationale behind their decisions and actions (Post, 2003, 70-81). Therefore, the incorporation of such case studies of militant leaders as discussed above would significantly enhance the critical evaluation of the research, providing a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing militant behaviour towards radicalisation and the adopted symbolism.

Alongside the individual case studies, event-based case studies, and expert interviews, this study consistently integrates a meta-analysis of secondary literature to substantiate and assess the conclusions drawn from the aforementioned methodologies. Supporting evidence will be derived from an analysis of key cultural, theological, and historical themes central to this investigation, including but not limited to identity politics, the impact of socio-religious political factions and legal systems, the sociological aspects of religious resurgence, the role of Internet and media, the concept of symbolism, and the complex phenomenon of radicalization.

Furthermore, this research also utilises semi-structured expert interviews with subjects across diverse disciplines, including journalists from local media outlets in Kashmir, senior officers from the Jammu and Kashmir Police, the Indian Army, academia, intelligence agencies, and the political realm. This analytical approach deployed within the extensive literature review conducted will be reviewed and analysed for more conclusive findings. In this light, it is essential to acknowledge a notable scarcity of comprehensive literature regarding the contemporary manifestation of radical Pan-Islamism and the changing imagery. Consequently, this research addresses this critical gap by engaging with experts actively involved in counter-radicalization efforts, given their position as primary responders to the ongoing transformation. While certain media reports make passing references to prevailing views on this phenomenon, these reports tend to serve primarily as public-facing communications and often lack the requisite depth for scholarly investigation. This research, in contrast, endeavours to transcend the realm of superficial understanding by carrying out in-depth and detailed interviews with seasoned security officers. These interviews are intended to offer a novel perspective on the evolving trends within militant groups, shedding light on the underlying elements

contributing to the motivation and rationales that have hitherto remained undisclosed and unexplored in previous reports and research endeavours.

In the process of selecting interviewees, careful consideration was given to the level of expertise held by each participant. This ensured that security officers were senior police, and army officials with their key involvement in counterterrorism and radicalisation and that they possessed a substantial amount of expertise on the ground. Moreover, journalists were chosen from credited media organizations, whether local or national, and they possessed a substantial duration of experience working in media-related roles on the ground in Kashmir. All this was done to ensure that the participants remained experts in their understanding. Furthermore, it was imperative for the selected interviewees to be native Kashmiris rather than individuals stationed from external regions. This criterion was crucial for enhancing the depth of understanding regarding the region, as native interviewees would have a heightened familiarity with the language and cultural nuances, thus minimizing the perception of being regarded as outsiders by ordinary Kashmiris and fostering a greater sense of empathy. However, despite the extensive expertise of the subjects interviewed for this research, primarily from the Indian state security forces, it is essential to acknowledge the potential for bias resulting from the one-sided selection process, which may influence the conclusions drawn from this study. Nevertheless, this is outweighed by the important, unpublished, insights they provide as these interviews were instrumental in gaining invaluable insights who are not only Kashmiri citizens but also experts of counterterrorism actively engaged with the ongoing transformations in the conflict. These professionals serve as the frontline responders to militant activities and bear the onus of dissecting the intricacies of militant motivations, backgrounds, and ideologies.

Consequently, conducting interviews with these experts was a necessary undertaking to unravel the specific characteristics associated with the insurgency's evolving imagery and to fathom the cognitive processes and rationales that underpin these actions. Most importantly, it is crucial to acknowledge a shortage in the number of comprehensive studies available on the changing nature of insurgency, therefore, it became more

important to get insights from expert interviews. Nevertheless, to cater to more objectivity, the interview analysis will involve situating the interviewee's comments within the existing literature on similar themes to identify commonalities and disparities. It is important to note that the themes used to support the interviewee's comments for greater objectivity are not necessarily the literature on the changing imagery of the Kashmiri insurgency due to its limitations as addressed above. However, these themes are selected based on similar patterns identified in the interviewee's comments.

Overall, a distinctive aspect of this research, contributing to its originality, is the emphasis on the combination of a multifaceted methodological approach that includes historical and secondary analysis, a person-centric and event-based case study, coupled with interviews of key experts. Moreover, the analysis of the two contemporary scenarios, colonial and post-colonial Kashmir while addressing the cultural, historical, theological, and socio-political themes facilitate an in-depth exploration to address the central research question, thus enhancing the depth and validity of the research findings. By embracing this comprehensive methodology, the research seeks to augment its credibility and authenticity. It aims to yield concrete, well-founded results to derive the rationales and motivations behind the youth and militants in the changing rhetoric, as opposed to relying on one-sided studies, speculation, or conjecture. Consequently, this heterogeneous approach is vital in systematically and sophisticatedly deducing an impartial and rigorous conclusion.

Chapter 1: History of Kashmir: The Advent of the Muslim Identity and the beginnings of the aspirations of a collective homeland.

INTRODUCTION

The investigation into the historical roots of the Kashmiri people and the bridging of the temporal gap between history and the present are paramount for unveiling the genesis of the intricate and contentious circumstances currently prevailing in Kashmir. In tracing the historical rhetoric of pre-colonial Kashmir, this chapter is dedicated to an exploration of two distinct characteristics. Firstly, it aims to comprehend the evolution of the syncretic identity of Kashmir during the pre-colonial era. Secondly, it seeks to understand the role of this identity wielded as a means of expressing the aspiration for an independent Kashmir in the face of various monarchs and their oppressive reigns. The primary aim of this research is to assert the thesis that the conceptualization vision of an inclusive, secular, and nationalist Kashmir stands in fundamental contradiction to the radical Islamist principles frequently linked with Pan-Islamism. In contrast, this vision underscores the shared pluralistic identities of Kashmir's denizens as they collectively strive for the emancipation of their homeland. This notion encapsulates an ideological conflict that is intrinsic to the ongoing transformation within the contemporary Kashmir scenario. Consequently, this analysis contributes to the argument that the recent shift in rhetoric among the youth and militants, from nationalism to Pan-Islamism, possesses a symbolic rather than substantial nature. A more detailed outline of this chapter's objectives is as follows:

This chapter embarks on an examination of the gradual emergence and evolution of the concept of Kashmiriyat within the cultural milieu of Kashmiri society across its historical timeline. This endeavour necessitates a concise exploration of the cultural evolution throughout the pre-colonial history of Kashmir, providing a contextual backdrop that sheds light on the constitution of Kashmiri society and its identity. To this end, firstly, the initial section of this chapter will introduce theoretical constructs such as civilization and culture, with a specific focus on their roles in the development of a nation. This will further set grounds for a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between two diverse cultures, Islamic

Sufism and mystical Shaivism that would further argue the amalgamation of syncretic values that epitomise an inclusive Kashmir and play a seminal role in shaping the Kashmiri identity, particularly the Kashmiri Muslim identity, that contradicts the radical pan-Islamist visions. This historical synergy will further envision a secular, inclusive Kashmir, contributing to the genesis of the concept of "Kashmiriyat." This multifaceted identity embodies the blend of diverse cultural influences, promoting virtues of harmony, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence, fostering openness and inclusivity among individuals from varied religious and cultural backgrounds. "Kashmiriyat" stands as a collective identity that has been nurtured and solidified within Kashmiri society throughout its historical trajectory, rendering it an indigenous and distinct characteristic unique to Kashmiri culture. This identity has been historically and contemporarily leveraged in Kashmir to articulate its yearning for regionalism and nationalism, advocating the concept of an independent, secular Kashmir.

Secondly, tracing back to pre-colonial epochs, the region of Kashmir has borne the weight of a protracted history marked by political oppression under the dominion of various monarchs. These enduring and pervasive historical patterns of subjugation serve as a profound backdrop against which the indigenous values of Kashmiriyat, cultivated through the prism of Sufi Islam, evolved, and intensified. This cultural blend further germinated a fervent yearning and ambition—a collective aspiration for an independent, secular, and all-encompassing Kashmir, emancipated from the shackles of religious affiliations, extraneous hegemony, intrusive forces, and subjugation. This collective desire for their homeland, Kashmir, vividly exemplified a profound sense of regional belonging and a quest for autonomy. Thus, in this context, through the lens of Kashmiriyat, the present chapter is dedicated to unravelling the intricate contemporary dynamics within the Kashmiri populace, inextricably tethered to the historical and cultural elements that have been instrumental in shaping their collective identity. Such an exploration provides invaluable insights into the evolution of their responses to religious, political tumult, and existential threats, rooted in their historical foundations. This historical trajectory effectively corroborates the existence of a sentiment reminiscent of nationalism, thereby suggesting the presence of the idea of an autonomous Kashmiri nation, the genesis of which extends into the oppression faced by Kashmiris in the pre-colonial era. Moreover, the research undertaken here seeks to establish the inclusive nature of Kashmiri nationalism and the expressions of resistance

against despotic rulers that span across diverse religious identities. These expressions of defiance coalesce under a non-religious banner, underscoring their shared aspiration for the betterment and freedom of their homeland, Kashmir.

Before delving into the examination of Kashmir's historical and cultural evolution, it is imperative to provide an analysis of the overarching concepts of civilisation and culture, along with their inherent influence on the development of national identity within the broader context of Kashmir.

CULTURE AND CIVILISATIONS

Presently, a notable group of scholarly historians are engaging in the commendable pursuit of embedding regional, supra-regional, and even continental historical narratives into the broader global context (Weber and Gommans, 2011; Gould, 2007; Wani and Wani, 2023, 1). This scholarly approach offers an alternative to the prevailing dominance of historiography centred around Western constructs such as "nation" and "civilization." (Dirlik, 2003; Wani and Wani, 2023, 1). Scholars like Hobsbawn (1996) have highlighted the limitations of identity-focused histories grounded in "nationalism surrounding culture." Moreover, within the discourse surrounding "cultures" and "civilizations," Pollock (2006), the prominent literary historian specialising in South Asia, adopts a confrontational rhetoric to underscore a fundamental argument. He contends that civilizations when scrutinised from historical perspectives, unveil their intrinsic nature as dynamic processes rather than static entities. This understanding leads to a critical proposition that civilizations inherently lack defined boundaries, as cultural products are perpetually transmitted and assimilated across various contexts. This insight renders the concept of a culture being entirely "indigenous" inherently untenable.

The sole categorization widely acknowledged, primarily that between distinct cultures, is grounded in the presumption that cultures stand as discrete entities, to the extent of being mutually unintelligible (Sapir, 1917, 441-448). Consequently, a culture might supplant or adopt characteristics from another, yet when considering their impregnation with "culture"

rather than "a culture," they share similarities, like the one between Buddhism and Hinduism. However, when addressing the transformation of interpersonal interactions, the core of social change, the concept of culture proves inadequate. Edward Sapir expounds further, stating,

> "Culture, then, may be briefly defined as a civilization in so far as it embodies national genius.. Civilization, as a whole, moves on, culture comes and goes." (1924, 405, 413).

Consequently, while some view civilization merely as another facet of "culture," lacking distinctiveness or singularity in itself, scholars such as Childe, White, historical evolutionists, Toynbee, and psychological interpreters like Heard, assert that civilization holds a tangible and perhaps absolute differentiation (Childe, 1936; Thompson, 1985, 401-409; Winetrout, 1975).

Delving into the paradigm of civilization, a discernible correlation emerges between the historical trajectory of Kashmir and the interplay of civilizationalism, nationalism, and regionalism. This intricate web of historical factors has wielded a substantial influence in shaping the ongoing conflict that pervades the region. Despite being geographically isolated and surrounded by imposing mountainous barriers, the Kashmir Valley has historically maintained a dynamic space for cultural interactions, serving as a significant hub for intercultural exchanges (Young, 1995; Papastergiadis, 1997, 257-281). This region embodies a microcosmic global culture that has emerged from its historical role as a junction of cultural flows, where diverse cultures, ethnicities, and identities intersect, fostering hybridity (Stein, 1979). Contrary to being an insular periphery, Kashmir has had historical integration into the political, economic, and cultural fabric of neighbouring regions. The historical narrative of the region is characterised by constant flux, driven by the migration and settlement of various groups (Basham, 1961, 57). This process has given rise to a complex mosaic of ethnicities and cultural identities. This intricate interplay of influences has led to a dynamic process of hybridization. A careful examination of the population reveals a diverse array of faces representing a range of ethnic and sub-ethnic origins, spanning regions from China to Europe, Eurasia to India (Wani and Wani, 2023, 5-7). This diversity dismantles the confines of territorial divisions. The inception of early Kashmir is intricately linked to the continuous circulation, reception, and transformation of diverse

influences from immediate and distant neighbours, driven by factors such as conquests, migrations, settlements, and socio-economic interactions. Given the deeply interlinked nature of Kashmir's culture, the objective of this work is to contextualise early Kashmir history within the broader global context. This intercultural perspective aligns with Clifford's (1997) assertion that discrete cultural centres, regions, and territories do not pre-exist but rather emerge through interactions and connections.

PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY OF KASHMIR

The historical significance of Kashmir spans for nearly 5000 years, tracing its rulership through various dynasties. The focus lies on the chronology of Hindu native rulers in the region, particularly 'Baharistan-i-Shahi,' an early work delving into Kashmir's mediaeval history. The establishment and expansion of Kashmir are attributed to Pravarasen of the Gonanda dynasty. Pravarasen's rule witnessed the establishment of the city, fostering infrastructure and spiritual significance (Pandit KN, 2022).

Moreover, Lalitaditya Muktapid's reign (724 CE–760 CE) stands out for founding Parihaspora, constructing temples with large idols, and thwarting Arab invasions. The prevalence of idol worship during Lalitaditya's reign indicates the dominant influence of Hindu mythology and culture among the people of Kashmir during this era thwarting the Arab invasion (Majumdar, 1951; Wink, 1990). He established Parihaspora (now Paraspora) as his capital in Kashmir and constructed the grand Martand Sun Temple, which is believed to be one of India's three sun temples and possibly the largest (Stein, 1900). His reign saw widespread idol worship, reflecting the dominance of Hindu culture as observed in the synthesis by Kroeber and Kluckhohn that culture continues to be a collective outcome, pertaining to societal inheritance and a structured framework (1952). He states:

> "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour
> acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements
> of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of
> culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and
> especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be

considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 181; cited in Spencer, H., 2012, 2).

Avantivarman from the Utpala dynasty (855 CE - 883 CE) and Adi Shankara also made significant contributions during their reigns. However, the oppressive rule of the Lohara dynasty (1003 CE - 1320 CE) led to unrest in Kashmir, with corruption and feudal lords making the kingdom susceptible to foreign invasions (Wink, 1990)

The introduction of Islam into the Kashmiri milieu from the predominant Hindu heritage as discussed above marks a pivotal juncture in the region's historical trajectory, bearing ramifications that persistently resonate within contemporary times. The inception of Islam, therefore, assumes the character of a momentous civilizational metamorphosis, signifying a shift from Hinduism to Islamism. This transformation carries profound implications, fundamentally contributing to the cultivation of distinct cultural, regional, religious, and national identities, thereby culminating in the crystallisation of the unique concept of a Kashmiri nation, distinct in essence from the larger Indian nation (Khan, M.I., 1994). Furthermore, it is imperative to delve deeply into the intricate complexities underpinning the transition of Kashmir towards Islamism, an exploration that unveils the region's intricate tapestry of harmony and intricacies that endure within the Kashmir Valley to this day.

In certain academic discourse, the diffusion of Islam in Kashmir has been ascribed to the contentious method of coerced conversions, characterising it as a period of civilizational dominance of Islam over the pre-existing Hindu civilisation of Kashmir. On this note, Ludden argues that the inclination toward "civilizationalism," "nationalism," or "regionalism" represents a form of "idolization of a phantom" that can inadvertently fuel conflicts (1994, 1-23; Wani and Wani, 2023, 1-4). It profoundly distorts the open and dynamic nature of the social and cultural landscape, resulting in the division of the world into seemingly immutable partitions. These divisions perpetuate enduring boundaries around assumed national cultures, delineating insiders and outsiders, natives and foreigners, consequently fragmenting history and immobilising its fluidity. This perspective can also be attributed to intellectual and political elites with vested interests in promoting divisions, separations, and oppositions among various communities and nations (Winetrout, 1975, 21). Furthermore,

adopting these fabricated and conceptual categories as foundations for historical reference can introduce biases and hinder the possibility of presenting a relatively unbiased historical account. Furthermore, these constructs are often presented not as products but as subjects of historical evolution, which can potentially give rise to xenophobia and cultural tension. Consequently, the contemporary trend within historiography, focusing on investigating history through the lens of intercultural networks, arises from a profound human concern. This trajectory aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly effort dedicated to addressing the challenges confronted by history and humanity. This contribution involves countering the inclination to isolate specific historical segments from their larger contextual fabric in order to construct artificial entities like "civilization," "nation," or identity (Winetrout, 1975; Wani and Wani, 2023, 1-4)

However, on the contrary, a substantial portion of the literature attributes the spread of Islam in the region to the influence of Sufi scholars originating from Central Asia and Persia. These scholars are believed to have drawn Kashmiris towards Islam, either through the demonstration of miracles or as a result of their fervent and peaceful missionary efforts (Khan, M.I., 1994, 28). In this light, Arnold (2014) has sought to depict the arrival of Islam in Kashmir during the 14th century as a peaceful proselytising religion, drawing parallels with the missionary activities of Christianity in the nineteenth century. His central argument posits that a significant proportion of Indian Muslims including Kashmiris are descendants of conversion that was primarily driven by the teachings and persuasive efforts of peaceful missionaries, notably the Sufis (Arnold, 2014). Tara Chand, on the other hand, characterises the process of conversion from Hinduism to Islamism as a non-violent phenomenon (1936). Implicitly, he attributes this conversion to the social interactions between Islam and Hinduism. He further explains that the Islamic outlook upon social life was democratic, it set little value upon birth and heredity, and its influence quickened in Hinduism the feeling of social equality and intended to break down social barriers (Chand, 1936). While the assertion holds some validity regarding the early phases of conversion, on the contrary, it is noteworthy mentioning that the process of conversion during the Mughal and Afghan dynasties in Kashmir was marked by a considerable degree of coercion and force. Nevertheless, the statement posed by Chand implies that the advent of Islam in Kashmir was a migration of culture and religion that settled and mixed with the local populace

spreading under the same fundamentals of Islamic Sufism and the indigenous Kashmiri mystical Shaivism making a mosaic of plural identities (Chand 1936; Zutshi, 2003). Moreover, to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon it is important to look at the roles played by Sufi scholars and their engagement with the indigenous Hindu Rishis in the local cultural context. This inquiry is imperative for unravelling the intricate processes that contributed to the development of the distinct Kashmiri identity or Kashmiriyat, which, as expounded in subsequent sections of this chapter, ultimately emerged as a cohesive indigenous force capable of resisting oppressive influences for the idea of their homeland.

In every Muslim society, there has been an existence of normative and orientalist Islam (Khan, 1994). On this note, scholar Ira Lapidus notes that

"Muslim communities commonly have two psychological orientations. One derives from the scripturalist form of Islam which stresses the importance of a complete knowledge of the law and the correct performance of ritual and social duties. The other orientation derives from what I shall call, for want of a better term, popular Sufi Islam. As the way of religious salvation, this form of Islam minimises the importance of knowledge and law, and stresses attachment to the Saint, who is the personal guide, the bearer of miraculous and magical powers (sic), the intercessor between ordinary men and God" (1988 cited in Khan, M.I, 1994, 25-26).

Moreover, Sheeraza Akhter describes that:

"Islamic Sufism is a path of spiritual advancement and an expansion of consciousness which leads to awareness of self and the universe. The practice of Islamic Sufism leads to the development of innate spiritual and intuitive abilities. Islamic Sufism is a sect within the Islamic jurisprudence which appeared as a softer version of Islam and promoted the concept of religious Humanism" (2017, 898).

Therefore, it can be argued that the role of the Sufi period rule in Kashmir is therefore a very significant event in the civilisational transformation that kept Islam as a fundamental religion but kept radical jurisprudence out of the Kashmiri identity (Khan, 1994). This further

implies that the introduction of Islam to the local populace in Kashmir and the nurturing of the Kashmiri Muslim identity was grounded in fundamental principles of liberalism and Sufism, which ran counter to the concepts of conservatism and Pan-Islamist ideologies. Moreover, the indigenous values of Kashmir were further cultivated during the period of Kashmir's conversion to Islam. The implication of this is further explored later in this chapter.

The widespread conversion of the Kashmir Valley to Islam transpired during the fourteenth century, notably catalysed by the influence of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Bulbul Shah, Persian Sufi scholars from Iran (Akhter, 2017). Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani came as a form of missionaries with numerous disciples, a sizable portion of whom chose to establish their presence in the Kashmir region. This collective migration of his disciples was instrumental in the propagation of Islam and the Kashmiri Muslim identity throughout the valley. Akhter notes:

> "His teachings, centred around the concepts of Tawheed (the oneness of God), Ikhlas (purity), Taqwa (God-fearing piety), and Unity, that gained widespread popularity and acceptance among both, the lower and upper classes" (Akhter, 2017, 899).

Moreover, as discussed earlier, both the Sufi presented by Bulbul Shah and Hamadani lack the adoption of force as a tool for converting to Islam. Moreover, these Sufi scholars possess in them a certain degree of liberty shaping the Muslim identity of Kashmir that separates them from the prudent Islamic jurisprudence based on stern Islamic values like the Sharia law (Islamic law) and Pan Islamist principles, and rather offers the population a way of reconciliation between God and oneself (Rafiq, 1972; Akhter, 2017). As Khan notes:

> "The mystical forms of religion yield immediate religious and emotional gratification, but the puritanical forms of religion, or generally, those forms which stress intellectual and emotional discipline, self and communal control of behaviour, inhibit ready emotional release" (Khan, M.I., 1994, 26).

The aforementioned statement justifies the liberal correlation between Islamic Sufism and Kashmir justifies the principles underlying the transition of Kashmir to Islam, which was primarily rooted in universal humanism. However, a notable disparity emerges when comparing the role of Sufi missionaries in the pre-colonial context with that of socio-political

religious organisations like Jamaat-e-Islami in modern-day Kashmiri society. The former emphasised a more secular and inclusive identity, while the latter focused on promoting a distinctly Muslim identity (Bose, 2021). However, this potential paradox will be explored in further chapters.

The cultural blend of Islamic Sufism and mystical Hindu Shaivism wielded a significant influence on the Kashmiri population living under the Brahmanical Hindu rule, a dominion characterised by its perceived tyranny and discrimination (Khan, M.I., 1994, 32). It can be argued that this prevailing socio-political environment created a context in which the local populace began to view Islam as an appealing alternative, providing solace and a more egalitarian treatment in contrast to the discriminatory practices experienced under the prevailing Brahmanical rule (Bose, 2021). In the early stages of the advent of Islam in Kashmir, Iranian 'Sufism' did not emphasise the Quran and its teachings but relied on intuition and personal experience to seek a profound connection between humanity and God (Khan, M.I., 1994; Aggarwal, 2008, 220-225). Notably, they embraced a worldview that regarded all of humanity as one, transcending religious divisions—a concept that aligns with the philosophy espoused in the Hindu Upanishads (Ancient Hindu texts), wherein every soul seeks to reunite with its divine origin (Akhter, 2017). Furthermore, this implies that the parallels observed between Iranian Islamic Sufism and the Hindu Upanishads facilitated a common ground for the convergence of these two philosophies. This convergence contributed to the growing harmony between the growing Muslim identity and the pre-existing Hindu identity, eventually culminating in what contemporary scholars refer to as "Kashmiriyat." Zutshi (2003) emphasises the fluidity of religious boundaries and the existence of a syncretic religious culture as integral components of Kashmiriyat. This unique inter-cultural tapestry, anchored by the Kashmiri language, unites the people of Kashmir, and underscores their shared heritage and collective identity, transcending religious distinctions. It serves as a foundational element in fostering a profound bond between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus. The inhabitants of Kashmir, united by their distinct Kashmiri language, commemorate their cohesive culture and shared sense of self, surpassing religious demarcations which gave birth to the indigenous identity of Kashmir (Akhter, 2017; Bose, 1997).

However, it is paramount to acknowledge that Sufis were not merely instrumental in facilitating religious conversions; they also functioned as a wellspring of inspiration for prominent Kashmiri figures, most notably Lal Ded. The profound impact of her teachings extended to individuals such as Sheikh Noorudin, both of whom assumed pivotal roles in moulding the collective indigenous Kashmiri identity. Consequently, this indigenous Kashmiri identity evolved to become more pluralistic in its composition, intertwined with a profound yearning for their native homeland of Kashmir (Zutshi, 2003). These intricate dynamics, and the profound influence exerted by Lal Ded and Noorudin, on developing the Kashmiri identity, are the subject of more detailed scrutiny in the ensuing sections of this chapter. It is crucial to recognize that the synthesis of diverse cultural elements in this context constituted a compelling and inclusive ideological framework for the Kashmiri population. This framework fostered a collective vision of Kashmir as their native land, anchored in a secular Kashmiri identity united in resistance against oppression (Bamzai, 1973; Zutshi, 2003). This collective identity stands in contrast to the constraints imposed by orthodox Islamic principles, as is evident in contemporary situations, a theme that will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

Conversely, for the argument to remain balanced it is equally important for this research to critically pose counterarguments in regard to Kashmiriyat. The pre-colonial socio-political society of Kashmir displayed a distinctive character defined by intricate ties across several ethnic groups of allegiance. In this period, the discussion on regional loyalty notably surpassed religious associations, instead suggesting that Kashmir was seen as a native homeland (Zutshi, 2018, 16-18). The public discussions in pre-colonial Kashmir demonstrated a peaceful coexistence between the unique characteristics of different regions and the overall commonality of religious identity (Koul, 1900, 6-8). The utilisation of the term composite religious culture implies the presence of a blended religious milieu that incorporates elements from diverse religious traditions. On the contrary, this not only obscures the potential existence of explicit religious differentiations but also begets additional dichotomies, including distinctions between elite and folk religion, as well as orthodox and mystical religious practices (Roy, 1983; Eaton, 1993). As a result, it relies upon normative conceptions of religion, particularly within the context of Islam, where it assesses the manifestations of religious identity based on their adherence to an unchanging body of

religious doctrine, often defined by the sharia or contemporary Pan-Islamism (Bayly, 1998; Eaton, 1993).

Within scholarly discourse on pre-colonial Kashmir, one encounters analogous limitations. Historians of the region commonly exhibit a pronounced proclivity to define this historical period in terms of fluid religious boundaries and the prevalence of a syncretic religious culture, both of which constitute integral facets of the concept of Kashmiriyat (Khan, M.I., 1994). Within this framework, academics have depicted the mystical legacy found in Kashmiri writings as a symbol of remarkable coexistence among various factions following different religious doctrines (Dhar, K.N., 1997, 44-45). Furthermore, they perceive it as an otherworldly experience seemingly distanced from everyday reality, characterising it as a transcendental pursuit of the spirit and the alignment of the self with the super-self (Dhar, 1997, 44). Nevertheless, it is imperative to emphasise that the influence propagated by the amalgamated culture of Kashmiriyat on the local populace, enriched by the contributions of Kashmiri luminaries such as Lal Ded and Nooruddin during that era, eclipses the criticisms presented in this context. Therefore, it can be argued that Lad Ded and Nooruddin occupy a very important place in nurturing the transitioning phase of the Kashmiri Muslim identity.

Lal Ded (Mother) or Lala Aria or Lalleshwari, occupies a seminal position in Kashmir's historical narrative as the first pioneering mystic who played a pivotal role in instilling and disseminating the syncretic values that underlie the concept of Kashmiriyat. Her impact was within the cultural heritage of successive generations of Kashmiris as noted by (Zutshi, 2003, 19; Accardi, 2018, 107). Born in a Hindu Shaivite family, Lal Ded later accepted Islam, under the guidance of the Sufi scholar Hamadani, as mentioned above, an event that can be argued as a contradiction of her transcending religious shackles. While her conversion to Islam coincided with a period of profound social and political turmoil in Kashmir, marked by the establishment of a new dynasty and the dissemination of a new religion, Islam, which necessitated a reconfiguration of the state, society, and their religious affiliations (Zutshi, 2003, 20; Khan, 1994). Nevertheless, Lal Ded and her followers introduced a syncretic form of Islamic Sufism and mystical Shaivism that transcended religious confines. Epitomised by one of her renowned writings she states:

"I said la ill il Allah (The verse of Allah)

I destroyed myself…. I went to look for Shiva (Hindu god)

I saw Shiva and devil together….

Shiva abides in all….

Then do not discriminate between a Hindu or a Musalman (Muslim).

…… knowledge of the Lord"

(Lal Ded, C. 14th Century, Koul, 1900, 61 cited in Zutshi, 2003, 22)

Evident through this work, it can be argued that the literary works of this period left a profound impact on the populace, cultivating a belief in the concept of Kashmiriyat, which emphasises the unique and inclusive nature of Kashmir's identity and insights into a society undergoing a nuanced process of redefining, both religious and regional affiliation (Accardi, 2014). Lala Aria, known as Lal Ded, exhibited a secular understanding that enabled her to transcend religious divisions and promote a sense of unity within the Kashmiri community (Louis, 2008). However, it is vital to recognize that her writings do not depict a vision of a society where religious affiliations are entirely irrelevant. Instead, they reflect a society in the process of redefinition. Zutshi further contends that identifying an "ethos of tolerance" in Lal Ded's poetry represents an archaic interpretation of the Kashmiri mystic tradition (2003, 22). Scholars like Zutshi (2003) have underscored the existence of religious differences during this period. However, it's essential to acknowledge that religion, during this era, played a significant role in shaping the foundations of Kashmiri culture and society, emphasising their liberal and inclusive character rather than exclusivity.

Sheikh Nooruddin, also known as Nund Rishi, heavily influenced by Lal Ded, is another significant character in the collective history and expression of Kashmiriyat. Born in 1378, he is considered a spiritual leader by both the religions, Pandits (Hindus) and the Muslims of the valley. The former reverently addresses him as Shazanand, signifying one who has achieved ultimate truth, while the latter attributes to his verses the title of the Koshur Quran [Kashmiri Quran] (Gauhar, 1988, 54-57). The phenomenon of dual religious communities laying claim to the same spiritual guide prompts this research to comprehensively examine the influence and significance of syncretic values in shaping

Kashmiri culture. This necessitates a comprehensive and in-depth exploration and analysis. Khan argues that Nooruddin had a significant impact on the Kashmiri people (Khan, M.I., 1994). According to Mohammed Ishaq Khan, Nooruddin played a crucial role in giving voice to the growing network of ideas and reactions, harmonising the collective awareness as a cultural symbol of their homeland. Mohammad Ishaq Khan confirms that by stating that Kashmir, in essence, represents the people's intellectual brilliance, symbolising "a way of life" (1994, 107). Whether viewed as a deliberate deviation from the previous global and trans-regional culture in favour of a regional alternative or not, Nooruddin or Nund Rishi's writings undeniably played a crucial role in the advancement of the expression of a self-aware Kashmiri culture.

Given his prominent role within the Islamic tradition, Sheikh Nooruddin has profoundly influenced the discourse surrounding Kashmiri Muslim identities. In the sole comprehensive English study of the Rishi movement, Mohammad Ishaq Khan highlights the inherent connection between the mystic's religious journey and the evolution of Kashmiri Muslim society. Mohammad Ishaq Khan aptly observes,

> "An understanding of Islam's historical manifestation in Kashmir, therefore, requires a prior understanding of the man who influenced the Kashmiri mind more than any other religious leader" (1994, 95).

Mohammad Ishaq Khan's argument seeks to symbolise Nooruddin as the "maker of the Kashmiri Muslim identity" (1994, 95). The proponents of Kashmiriyat attribute significance to Nooruddin due to his adherence to Islam and their belief that he lived a kind of Islam that went beyond religious limitations (1994, 107). He further explains that Nooruddin's writing effectively embodies the cultural aesthetics of Islamic civilization within a specific geographical context. Nooruddin skilfully connects religious theology with its geographical setting, making it a suitable channel for Kashmiri nationalists as Mohammad Ishaq Khan notes,

> "Kashmiri owes a great deal to Nuruddin since it was through his compositions that it articulated the expanding complex of impulses and responses and orchestrated the music of consciousness….Nuruddin's poetry expresses be cultural style of the Islamic civilization in a regional setting and the quality of human spirit that flourishes within it" (1994, 107).

It is important to argue that the Kashmiri Muslim identity has undergone significant transformations throughout its history, adapting to the cultural and political dynamics of the region. In contemporary contexts, Kashmiri Muslims have consistently articulated their collective identity in response to the perceived oppression of the Indian state or during periods of political turmoil, often expressing anti-India sentiments. It is essential to posit that the foundational element upon which the Kashmiri Muslim identity was initially nurtured during the pre-colonial era is "Kashmiriyat" which resonated with a liberal essence. This also suggests that the Kashmiri Muslim identity has demonstrated a degree of continuity throughout history, leading to the evolution of its defence mechanisms in response to external threats and forces (Khan, M.I., 1994; Bamzai, 1973; Zutshi, 2003). The Islamic faith introduced to Kashmir by prominent figures such as Shah Hamdani, Lal Ded, and Sheikh Noorani (Nund Rishi) has exhibited remarkable longevity and resilience. This particular interpretation of Islam continues to shape and underpin the foundations of the Kashmiri Muslim identity, exerting a profound influence on the daily practice of Islam in the region, even after six centuries (Bose, 1997). The outcome of this enduring influence is the development of an exceptionally distinctive ethnolinguistic identity, characterised by the fusion of religious faith, which is intrinsic to the nurtured Kashmiri Muslim identity, uniquely specific to the geographical expanse of the Kashmir Valley (Bose, 1997). Consequently, as polarisation between Hindus and Muslims has intensified in contemporary scenarios, the assertion of the Muslim identity has become more pronounced. It is noteworthy that this shift in dynamics does not align with the tenets of "Kashmiriyat." It does not imply a transformation of the Kashmiri Muslim identity into a more radical (or orthodox) Islamist orientation. Instead, it signifies a change in the manner in which Kashmiri society reacts to these evolving circumstances, particularly towards Pan-Islamism (further elaborated in Chapter 4).

Furthermore, to gain a deeper understanding of the societal influence of these two Kashmiri mystics, Lal Ded and Nooruddin, it is essential to examine them through the lens of "Vernacularisation," a paradigm developed by Sheldon Pollock (1998, 42-66). This phenomenon occurred in the early centuries of the second millennium in South Asia that

involved the steady substitution and addition of localised forms for the universalistic orders, institutions, and practices that existed in the previous millennium. According to Pollock, "Cultures and communities were ideationally and discursively invented," fostering the emergence of new regional realms (1998, 42). The ascendancy of regional languages as vehicles of literary culture played a pivotal role in nurturing these regional cultures (Pollock, 2003, 41). The activities of both Lal Ded and Nund Rishi closely align with Pollock's overarching theory. They engaged in textual compositions using a relatively localised language, which lacked the widespread influence of languages such as Sanskrit or Persian. Through this, they significantly contributed to the emergence of a regional ecumene in late mediaeval Kashmir.

Remarkably, in the vernacularisation process of Kashmir, the initial stimulus for the development of vernacular Kashmiri culture did not originate from the royal court, instead, religious leaders like Nooruddin took the lead. This implies that the populace adhered to the syncretic religious culture propagated by Nooruddin, which not only nurtured but also bound the Kashmiri Muslim identity closely with the Kashmiri Hindu identity. This inclusive culture starkly contrasted with orthodox Islamic principles and, instead, instilled sentiments of liberalism and humanism within Kashmiri society (Zutshi, 2003; Khan, M.I., 1994). Secondly, in Kashmir, the articulation of religious and regional cultures occurred concurrently, with the transition of Kashmir to Islam becoming intricately linked with the vernacularisation process in the region. Sheikh Nooruddin's writing played a pivotal role in shaping a regional culture within the context of a burgeoning religious culture (Pollock, 2006, 63-65). In the context of Kashmir, the literary contributions of Rishis indeed attained a sanctified status. However, it's crucial to recognize that Sheikh Nooruddin's primary objective was to propagate the message of Islam to the people of Kashmir, urging them to embrace the Islamic faith as delineated in the Quran and Hadith (Malik, 1992).

A particular writing authored by Nooruddin, which delves into the core attributes of being a Muslim, remains pertinent even in the early twentieth century when Kashmiri Muslims were actively redefining the dimensions of their community, as the ensuing sections will expound upon. Several verses from this poem effectively convey this notion:

"One who does not neglect one's daily duties, ... Who controls the bestial anger

of one's mind, ... May be truly called a Muslim…. Who shares meals with the

hungry… May truly be called a Muslim" (Nooruddin, C. 15th Century)

(Khan, M.I., 1994, 124).

Interestingly, unlike in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, especially southern India,

where proponents of local cultures deliberately distanced themselves from global cultural

influences, Kashmiri scholars who wrote in the local language paradoxically embraced a

sense of universal humanism, as demonstrated by the verse mentioned above. Notably, the

regional culture of the Kashmir Valley discovered its expression through the universal

language of Islam. While Nooruddin's interpretation of Islam was undoubtedly influenced by

the specific Kashmiri context, it remained an integral part of the broader Islamic faith,

reflecting both the universal and regional aspects. As observed by Zutshi,

"If Sheikh Nooruddin were asked, he would most certainly have refuted the notion

that the Islam he propagated was a unique variant confined solely to the Kashmir

Valley" (2003, 27).

The spiritual heritage has undeniably and significantly influenced the expressions of

Kashmiriyat. The mystics established the foundation for a local culture marked by the

development of a common language of Kashmiriyat. This cultural advancement occurred

simultaneously with the progression of a religious culture that is profoundly ingrained in a

widespread belief system. However, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the depiction of

Kashmir as a place where Islam and religious culture exhibit noticeable variations and

degrees of tolerance. During the mediaeval period, Kashmir found itself in a state of

transition, marked by significant redefinitions in its social, political, and religious affiliations.

Mystic poets, through their poetic compositions and active participation in religious

discourse, astutely captured this state of flux. Consequently, they furnished advocates of

Kashmiriyat with a valuable resource base to promote their ideals (Bazaz, 1954, 70-75;

Younghusband, 1911).

As the undercurrent of cultural, religious, and syncretic amalgamation that contributed to

the indigenous and distinctive identity known as Kashmiriyat persisted deeply in the pre-

colonial era, it is of paramount importance to analyse how this identity was mobilised across different historical epochs as a collective force, fostering resilience against the oppression imposed by rulers who sought to enforce their religious doctrines and dominion upon the Kashmiri populace. An examination of this historical trajectory is instrumental in elucidating the substantial connection between its utilisation in the past to counter external forces and threats and the enduring cultivation of the Kashmiriyat sentiment across generations, which ultimately becomes the basis for the growing concept of Kashmiri nationalism later. It is noted that this enduring sentiment has consistently served as a bulwark against the escalating contemporary challenges in Kashmir nowadays, which will be explored further in Chapter 4.

When the Mughals assumed authority over Kashmir between 1586 and 1758, the region grappled with the complexities of its cultural identity as culture was considered an integral component of Kashmir's identity. Simultaneously, the kingdom's endeavours to enforce religious divisions and undermine unity among the populace were met with resistance to their quest for their homeland by a strong sense of regional identity (Zutshi, 2003)

Bazaz, notes the decline of Kashmiri nationalism during this phase, characterising it as the "last flicker of dying Kashmiri Nationalism" (1954, 70). In this light, G.M.D. Sufi posits that the Mughals undermined the martial spirit of the Kashmiri people and weakened their independent resolve (1974, 675) while according to Bazaz (1954, 71), the Mughal governors were characterised as "tyrannical, barbaric, and uncultured," which contributed to the emergence of animosities between Shia and Sunni communities and between Hindus and Muslims. This marked a significant deviation from the Kashmiri society's reputation for tolerance and harmony. Contrary to the scholarly lamentations regarding the decline of Kashmiri cultural identity during the Mughal period (1586-1758), it was precisely this period that Kashmiri scholars started to deliberately convey a strong sense of regional affiliation via cultural manifestations. This was exemplified by the creation of the Mughal Gardens and the Pari Mahal in 1619 and 1640 (Bamzai, 1973). Such imagery contributed to a burgeoning sense of being a Kashmiri, a sentiment that continued to resonate in the nationalist writings of the 1940s, exemplified by Majhoor's renowned poem "My country is my Garden" (Zutshi, 2003, 31).

Despite deliberate endeavours aimed at eroding the mystic and syncretic elements that constitute the distinctive Kashmiri identity, these initiatives were predominantly focused on accentuating religious rifts between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Nonetheless, the resolute dedication of the Kashmiri populace to the preservation of their homeland and regional identity, profoundly influenced by the amalgamation of Kashmir's pluralistic heritage as nurtured by iconic figures such as Lal Ded and Nund Rishi, materialised as a unified plural identity that surpassed the confines of religious categorizations. Tikku's comprehensive research (1971, 100-104) furnishes explicit substantiation of this phenomenon through the oral history of Habibullah Ghanai, a local Sufi in Kashmir. In his historical accounts, Habibullah Ghanai embarked upon a profound investigation into the genesis of religious diversity. He accentuated the impracticality of setting one religious' tradition in opposition to another, underscoring the notion that religious distinctions were not inherently preordained. Furthermore, within the context of prevailing turmoil, polarisation, and Mughal oppression, the conception of Kashmir as a nation or homeland gained traction, growing stronger through the power of collective identity. Consequently, this phenomenon entailed a rejection of orthodox Sharia principles and conservatism that were associated with the Mughals (Tikku, 1971, 100-104).

In this light, it implies that while religious distinctions did indeed exist in the Valley, they did not undermine the prevalent notion of Kashmir as a region belonging to the Kashmiris characterised by inclusivity, secularism, and diversity. Accordingly, C.A. Bayly's proposition further underscores the robust Kashmiri identity as a counterforce to orthodoxy and exclusivism. He posits that regional patriotism, expressed in diverse forms and evolving at varying paces, functioned as a cohesive element and the primary opposition to exclusivist religious communities in pre-colonial Kashmir (1998, 45). This underscores the pivotal concept that Kashmiri patriotism is not limited solely to regional affiliations but also extends beyond religious identities, all in the pursuit of their aspiration for an independent Kashmir. It is also noteworthy to emphasise that this nationalist, independent narrative became more evident starting from the 1950s, with Kashmiri nationalists fervently advocating for self-determination and freedom. This attests to the coexistence of a comparable nationalist

sentiment that has persisted throughout the annals of history which will be later discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, according to Kashmiri historian, Chitralekha Zutshi, she believes that the Mughal era marked the beginning of the loss of Kashmiri independence, while the Afghan control is seen as the final end of it (2003, 35). In this light, it can be argued that the genesis of the Kashmiri collective identity cannot be exclusively attributed to the Mughal dynasty. Additionally, the reinforcement of religious unity and the entwinement of regionalism and nationalism also become notably discernible during the challenging epoch of Afghan administration from 1753 to 1819. During this time period, the idea of Kashmir serving as a homeland for its inhabitants, regardless of their religion or other associations, became highly prominent.

The Afghan governors in Kashmir, as described in historical chronicles, were universally recognized as extremely oppressive, subjecting all Kashmiris to severe mistreatment, regardless of their social status or religious affiliation (Bamzai, 1973, 423-424). The imposition of high taxes placed a significant financial strain on the peasants, jagirdars, nobles, and merchants of Kashmir, resulting in a severe economic crisis in the region. The "jazia", a tax imposed on Hindus, was reintroduced, causing many Kashmiri merchant families to flee to the flatlands (Lawrence, 1895, 196-199; Bamzai, 1973, 424-435). The period was marked by severe tyranny and misery, which played a significant role in fortifying their collective identity and intensifying their desire for a sovereign and autonomous homeland of Kashmir (Zutshi, 2003, 45). It is worth noting that elements of radical Islamic legal principles, such as the 'Jazia' (tax) mentioned earlier, were indeed present during the Mughal and Afghan periods. However, these puritanical Islamic principles faced substantial resistance from the collectively nurtured Kashmiri identity, encompassing both, Hindus, and Muslims within the valley. This resistance further underscores the historical validity of an inclusive and secular independent Kashmir as an integral part of the Kashmiri historical vision (Akbar, 2002, 152-155; Zutshi, 2003)

Significantly, it was under Afghan rule that Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus emerged as a crucial voice in articulating a deep yearning for, or attachment to, their Kashmiri homeland

(Kilam, 1955, 242-245). Both Pandit (Hindus) and Muslim individuals expressed a feeling of connection to Kashmir regional belonging while maintaining their loyalty to their respective religious associations, implying a deep sense of patriotism toward their homeland (Kilam, 1955). Numerous authors harnessed their religious identities, beseeching their respective deities to intercede and aid in the liberation of Kashmir. Their collective aim was to emancipate their homeland from what they perceived as oppressive invaders. It is crucial to clarify that, in this context, the term "invaders" does not refer to the Muslim populace that arrived in Kashmir during the 14th century. Rather, it pertains to the despotic Muslim rulers whose rule faced resistance from both Muslims and Hindus dwelling in the valley. These individuals drew from the syncretic values emanating from the traditions of Islamic Sufism and mystic Shaivism, uniting in pursuit of a free independent Kashmir. This attests to the notion that the Kashmiri people, during this period, did not espouse or advocate puritanical Islamic philosophies. Sanaullah Kriri, a writer and poet, penned the following words during the Afghan rule:

"Will you not go there,

… That the Kashmiris have fallen…. They are helpless, useless, and unskilled"

(Sanaullah Kiri, Naats (writing eulogising the Prophet Mohammed), 17th

Century)

(Munawwar and Shafi, 1992, 174 cited in Zutshi, 2003, 37).

The aforementioned verse is written by a Kashmiri who is begging Allah (Prophet) to safeguard their homeland from the foreign invasion and oppression. The utilisation of the term 'Kashmiris' in the preceding discourse serves to underscore how opposition to authoritarian governance was collectively articulated, not merely from a religious standpoint but as a united voice addressing the region of Kashmir as a whole. This usage further conveys the presence of a shared linguistic or patriotic sentiment as an expression of their yearning for their homeland, Kashmir. Bayly (1998) has identified the necessary conditions for establishing and cultivating ancient forms of patriotism in pre-colonial India. These conditions include the existence of vibrant social and ideological organisations that bring together individuals from a specific geographical area and utilise a shared language. Furthermore, the establishment of political authority at the local level is necessary to

cultivate a deliberate and enduring sense of shared identity, often influenced by clashes with external forces that imbue ideological significance, solidified through cultural discussions for future cohorts (Bayly, 1998, 21). However, in this light, it can be seen that Kashmir does not completely adhere to these prerequisites for pre-colonial patriotism in the region. Nevertheless, while using Bayly's framework to analyse Kashmir, it can be contended that the Kashmiri syncretic tradition serves as an intellectual and social movement that unifies individuals to pursue their homeland through the common use of the Kashmiri language, Koshur, with Persian also playing a crucial part in expressing local identity (Zutshi, 2003, 37-38). In addition, although the local political authority in Kashmir during the previous and forthcoming oppression does not prioritise the development of a shared identity among the population, it served as an external entity and a perceived threat that internally stimulated a sense of collective identity among Kashmiris, as previously mentioned. Therefore, it can be argued that during the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Kashmir demonstrated a clear example of a strong and coherent sense of belonging to a homeland, referred to as "Mulk" (Homeland) with a profound inheritance of patriotism (Zutshi, 2003, 38). This prevailing sense of belonging, although handled discreetly due to the apprehension of persecution, exhibited notable strength and clarity. It successfully unified individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, enabling them to vocalise their shared concerns regarding foreign rulers seeking to undermine their homeland, all without necessitating the abandonment of their religious affiliations.

Moreover, the longing for one's homeland also became a significant topic of discussion in Kashmir during the Sikh administration, which began in 1819 following the Afghan period (Bamzai, 1973, 601-603). The Sikh governors who chose to manage Kashmir on behalf of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were described as "hard and rough masters" (Younghusband, 1911, 159). Consistently, the Sikh regime policies in Kashmir were detrimental to the Muslim population, causing the bulk of the people in the Kashmir Valley to face substantial difficulties in practising their religion (Zutshi, 2003, 39). The second Sikh governor issued a directive to close the Jama Masjid mausoleum in Srinagar to the public for prayer. He also prohibited Muslims from conducting the azan, the call to prayer, from the mosques in the Valley. Additionally, he proclaimed cow-slaughter as a capital offence, punishable by death

(Sufi, 1974, 725-726). It is crucial to assert that although the Sikhs implemented policies with a clear "Hindu" nature during their reign, they did not devise these "Hindu" policies with the explicit aim of suppressing Kashmiri Muslims. Instead, these policies sought to express a Sikh identity that was clearly independent and different from the Mughals, as affirmed by Bayly (1990, 22). However, the statement made by Bayly exhibits a degree of bias and merits a closer examination. Although the Sikh regime aimed to establish a distinct identity separate from the Mughals, it inadvertently perpetuated a form of religious communalism akin to that of the Mughals and Afghans, oppressing individuals based on their religious beliefs and intensifying polarisation between the Hindu and Muslim communities, thereby challenging the principles of Kashmiriyat. In line with this perspective, Zutshi (2003) and Bamzai (1973) concur that the sentiment of regional belonging grew stronger in response to Sikh oppression, uniting Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and solidifying their Kashmiri identity as a means of resistance against the despotic Sikh rule.

Mulla Hamidullah Shahabadi (1783-1848), an eminent individual who experienced the Afghan and Sikh administrations in his lifetime, represents the strong regional affiliation profoundly ingrained in Kashmiri conversation throughout this period. His literary pursuits, marked by satire, covered a range of topics, consistently highlighting a recurring theme of dissatisfaction with the dismal condition of Kashmir and its residents during the Sikh regime (Zutshi, 2003, 40-42). His work "Babujnama '' (A History of injustice) offers a painful depiction of the moral degradation that had afflicted Kashmiri culture, where ethical norms and decorum appeared to have deteriorated (Tikku, 1971, 202-203). Notably, in Shahabadi's manuscript "Babujnama", the mention of Kashmiris regional identity was closely linked to their religious ties (Zutshi, 2003, 40-42). He saw the correlation between regional identity and the religious community. Nevertheless, Shahabadi strongly disapproved of the widespread focus on religious identification among the people, which he believed was intensified by the discriminatory policies against Muslims implemented by the Sikh governors. He expressed a prevailing topic of conversation among people, which is the governance of religion and the potential downfall of the nation. (Shahbadi cited in Zutshi, 2003, 43). According to Shahabadi, the unrest in Kashmir can be traced back to the religious leader's inability to cultivate a more inclusive concept of the nation and their goals, however, it is important to acknowledge that although religious membership was

important, it still did not override the sense of belonging to a certain location among Kashmiris in this era (7-9 cited in Zutshi, 2003, 44).

Similar motifs of unjust and tyranny during this period, nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the literary works of this era did not primarily centre with the collapse of Islam from a theological perspective. Instead, their primary worry was the current level of societal deterioration of their city, home, and their homeland (Jalal, 2000, 13). This indicates and furnishes substantial grounds for the resistance put forth by the local Kashmiri populace (Bamzai, 1994). It underscores that their focus was not primarily centred on religious factors that advocate puritanical solution; instead, the predominant emphasis was on regional identity and the pursuit of an autonomous, independent homeland, which held greater significance (Bamzai, 1973).

It can be seen from the analysis above that throughout the Sikh rule, religious affiliations, statecraft, and patronage were intricately interwoven with each other (Bazaz, 1954). Nevertheless, public discourse within Kashmir was not predominantly centred on delineating community identities along strict religious lines (Jha, 1996). Furthermore, the articulation of "Kashmiriyat" and the transcending of religious boundaries should not be solely attributed to either the Afghan or Sikh periods (Zutshi, 2003). Instead, the discourse concerning the sense of belonging to one's homeland, where one's religious identity could and should be harnessed, emerged as a pivotal element within the Kashmiri political milieu in the early 19th century (Zutshi, 2003).

This observation once again indicates a profound emotional attachment to the concept of a nation referred to as "Kashmir", which predates the contemporary understanding of nationhood or nationalism (Zutshi, 2003). Furthermore, this devotion embodies attributes of regional patriotism rather than strict religious orthodoxy. As elucidated previously, it signifies a more comprehensive, patriotic, cultural, and regional identity and provides an alternative lens through which to interpret the current situation in Kashmir (Bayly, 1998).

Besides the Afghan, Mughal and Sikh eras, the early Dogra rule (1846-1947) also holds significant importance in comprehending the evolution of Kashmiri identities in the Kashmir

Valley. According to Aitchison (1983), this served as the backdrop for a notable transformation in the region's public discourse, shifting from an emphasis on regional identities to a pronounced focus on religious components of identities. However, contrary to this statement, Zutshi (2003, 146) notes that the concept of "Kashmiriyat" emerges most prominently within the historical narrative of the Dogra era. She also adds that the historians of Kashmir contend that despite the Dogra regime's persistent efforts to divide Kashmiris along religious lines, much like their colonial counterparts in India, Kashmiriyat emerged victorious (Zutshi, 2003).

Kashmiris, regardless of their religious affiliations, collectively initiated a nationalist movement against the Dogras. However, this narrative carries a degree of bias as it insists on locating a unified, cohesive Kashmiri nationalist movement that transcends religious, regional, or class distinctions within the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Furthermore, it fails to acknowledge that the Kashmiri national movement of the 1930s and 1940s was preceded by a discourse on identities in Kashmir that primarily centred on defining religious communities rather than the Kashmiri nation (Zutshi, 2003). Lastly, the narrative surrounding Kashmiriyat overlooks the inherent contradiction that underpins the Kashmiri nationalist movement: this movement, which ostensibly saved Kashmiriyat from the clutches of the Dogra regime, based its demands primarily on the socio-economic disparities between the two main religious communities in Kashmir, namely the Pandits and Muslims (Zutshi, 2003). This contradiction finds its roots in the political, social, and economic transformations introduced into the Kashmiri landscape during the period under the Dogra rule.

Of utmost significance, both Gulab Singh and his successor, Ranbir Singh, bolstered their rule with a framework of legitimacy rooted in Hinduism. This was evidenced through various means, such as reinstating a ban on cow slaughter, which had been introduced and later revoked during the Sikh rule, the widespread construction of temples throughout the state, and the establishment of institutions like the Dharmarth, a trust in the name of Hindu deities (Zutshi, 2003; Bamzai, 1973, 665-667; Sufi, 1974, 790-795). This was further accompanied by a cultural resurgence, including temple construction, the creation of Hindu idols, and the translation of pre-colonial Arabic and Persian texts into Sanskrit, an ancient

Hindu language (Tikku, 1963). The resurgence of what was perceived as a rekindling of a culture that harked back to the era before Islamic influence can be interpreted within the broader context of Hindu cultural revivalism. This trend, as previously discussed in the context of the Sikh regime, may have been instrumental in forging an identity distinct from the preceding Muslim rule. It is important to note that this revivalist sentiment is not only restricted to the pre-colonial epoch, but it also finds resonance in the contemporary landscape, a subject that will be expounded upon in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, while the sense of religious affiliation and collective regional belonging was still the underlying response to this phenomenon in the pre-colonial time, in the contemporary scenario, the Muslim populace's response to this revival of Hindu culture exhibited nuanced variations, giving rise to the nurturing of a Muslim identity characterised by a greater degree of pluralism and collectivism than its antecedent. This intricate interplay will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 4.

In this regard, the discourse of regional belonging keeping aside religious affiliations became increasingly pronounced. This can be observed in the following writings, which argue that continued oppression during this time fuelled a stronger sense of collectiveness among the Kashmiri people who desired freedom from alien rule. This desire was not limited to any single religious identity, such as being Muslim, as these writings, composed by Kashmiris for Kashmiris, vividly convey:

> "How many oppressions of the time can I count?
> The authoritarian rulers have steeped the Homeland into chaos.
> … to rip the people apart" (Wahhab Parre, Darveshi, 17th century)
> (Munawwar and Shafi, 1992, 247 cited in Zutshi, 2003, 55).

On the other hand, it is crucial to highlight that while Kashmiri individuals strongly opposed the repressive activities of the governing authority, the religious aspect of identities started to assume more importance throughout the latter half of this time. During the 1880s, the Kashmir Valley experienced significant changes in its political, economic, and social structure. The revolution had a profound impact on every Kashmiri, resulting in the restructuring of social groups and the reconfiguration of the governmental structure under

the authority of the British Residency. During these turbulent transitions, the people of Kashmir were highly focused on their homeland, working persistently to establish their identities within the changing political economy and society of the time. Example as a result, while the persistent spectre of oppression, both in pre-colonial and post-colonial eras, has played a pivotal role in cementing the profound sense of regional identity among Kashmiris, who regard Kashmir as their ancestral homeland, the religious identity has been significantly nurtured to strengthen this pursuit. However, the change in social -political and cultural set up of Kashmir, notably, since India and Pakistan's independence, has afforded Kashmiris an opportunity to scrutinise and assert their Muslim identity and antipathy towards the tendency of radicalisation, conservatism, and Pan-Islamism, which completely differs from the fundamentals on which the Kashmiri Muslim identity was originally set up and nurtured the Kashmiri identity that was inclusive, liberal, and nationalistic.

In the contemporary context of Kashmir, there is a noticeable shift towards accentuating religious identities, exemplified by the emergence of socio-political religious ideologies such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Ahl-e-Hadith, which adhere to Islamic jurisprudence differing from the historically prevalent syncretic values in Kashmir (Bose, 1997). While it is undeniable that more than 95 per cent of the valley's population adheres to Islam, and religious identity exerts significant influence in Kashmir, it would be overly simplistic to interpret the intricacies of the insurgency in Kashmir and its evolving trends exclusively through a religious lens (Zutshi, 2003). Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize the role of religious foundations while also acknowledging the existence and prevalence of a shared identity that encompasses both Islamic and secular facets (Akbar, 2002). These two dimensions coexist and diverge simultaneously, in parallel and proportionate measures. This complex interplay will later contribute to the explication and analysis of the nature of the contemporary transformative trend in Kashmir, which will be presented in the forthcoming chapters.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated several valuable insights regarding the pre-colonial historical context of Kashmir, thereby establishing a robust foundation for the subsequent investigation into the contemporary socio-political landscape of the region.

This study explores diverse historical phases encompassing roughly five thousand years, during which Kashmir witnessed periods of dominance by Hindu dynasties. These periods were characterised by the profound influence of Hindu culture, idol worship, architectural developments, and religious significance brought about by various rulers. The arrival of Islam marked a significant turning point in Kashmir's history, leading to a transition from Hinduism to Islamism. This transformation gave rise to unique cultural, regional, religious, and national identities, eventually culminating in the concept of a distinctive Kashmiri nation. The spread of Islam in Kashmir was attributed to both peaceful missionary efforts and the influence of Sufi scholars. This conversion process was non-violent and evolved from social interactions between Islam and Hinduism. The amalgamation of these two diverse cultures and civilizations facilitated the development of a pluralistic and syncretic indigenous culture in Kashmir.

Moreover, this research asserts that influential Sufi scholars such as Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Bulbul Shah played pivotal roles in spreading Islam in fourteenth-century Kashmir. Their teachings, emphasising unity of God and spiritual purity, fostered harmony between Hinduism and Islam, giving rise to "Kashmiriyat," a shared heritage uniting the region. This form of Islam, based on liberal Sufi principles, contrasted with radical and puritanical pan-Islamist ideologies that is influencing the contemporary Kashmiri Muslim identity nowadays. Additionally, the societal influence of Kashmiri mystics like Lal Ded and Sheikh Nooruddin underscores how they contributed to the emergence of a regional culture in late mediaeval Kashmir. Their influence transcended religious divisions, fostering unity within the Kashmiri community, and served as a vehicle for a sense of Kashmiri nationalism infused with religious faith.

Notably, this ideology of Kashmiriyat has manifested consistently throughout various historical epochs, nurturing a collective, all-encompassing, and liberal identity among the Kashmiri populace, even in the face of adversity and subjugation. Throughout the Mughal, Afghan, Sikh, and Dogra ruling eras, there was a consistent promotion of a strong sense of regional identity through diverse cultural expressions, which served to bolster the overarching Kashmiri identity. This resilience against the imposition of religious communalism, socio-economic disparities, and oppressive governance highlights the unity and solidarity among Kashmiris in their quest for liberation from foreign rule, irrespective of their religious affiliations. Therefore, it can be seen that while the Kashmiri Muslim identity has evolved over time, it remains grounded in the foundational element of "Kashmiriyat," which encompasses peace, harmonisation, and reconciliation. This inclusive identity has adapted to contemporary challenges, such as religious polarisation and external threats, without compromising its core essence, differentiating it from radical or orthodox interpretations of Islam.

Furthermore, this research also noted that the latter half of the 19th century witnessed significant political, economic, and social transformations under British authority, consequently leading to a more prominent role for religious identities. It was during this period that there was a reconfiguration of social groups and the political landscape. While oppression in both pre-colonial and post-colonial eras undeniably played a pivotal role in consolidating a profound sense of regional identity among Kashmiris, the religious identity gained prominence as a means to reinforce this pursuit.

In contemporary Kashmir, a discernible shift is observable, emphasising religious identities inclined toward extremism and radicalization. These developments differ from the historically prevalent syncretic values as aforementioned. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize that interpreting the insurgency and evolving trends in Kashmir solely through a religious lens would be overly simplistic. It is essential to acknowledge the significance of religious foundations while simultaneously recognizing the coexistence of the deeply rooted "Kashmiriyat," a collective identity encompassing both Islamic and secular dimensions. This duality gives rise to intricate dynamics and a complex, conflict-laden nature of the changing trends, which will be subject to further exploration in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 2: The Question of Umma, nationhood and interplay of complex identities.

INTRODUCTION

The central objective of this chapter is to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses key themes crucial to the research question. In the process of transitioning from an exploration of nationalism to Pan-Islamism, the chapter introduces the historical background of the Kashmir conflict. This historical overview serves as a foundational exploration leading to the evolving scenario relevant to the research. Moreover, to conduct a thorough critical analysis of the concept of Pan-Islamism, the chapter meticulously examines the Umma, a universal faith-based system, contextualised within the predominantly Islamic society of Kashmir. This analysis aims to contribute to the argument asserting that the Kashmiri society inherently aligns with the concept of Umma, utilising it as a collective shared identity rather than adhering strictly to the core tenets of Umma as an exclusive faith-based societal structure. This analytical framework establishes a foundation for subsequent chapters. Additionally, in the pursuit of investigating nationalism, particularly in the context of Kashmir, this chapter critically examines the term nationalism. The objective is to present an argument highlighting nationalist characteristics deeply ingrained in Kashmiri society throughout its historical trajectory. This theoretical framework will play a pivotal role in subsequent chapters, advocating for the prominence of Kashmiri nationalism over Pan-Islamism. Furthermore, the chapter undertakes an analysis of the relationship between Umma and Nationalism, ostensibly contrasting terms. However, this chapter endeavours to demonstrate that these terms are not mutually exclusive but rather inclusive in shaping the conceptualization of a Kashmiri nation. This perspective posits that while Kashmir is Islamic in faith, it concurrently harbours nationalist aspirations. Ultimately, through an exploration of the concepts of Umma and nationalism, this chapter delves into the intricate identity politics of Kashmir, giving rise to various aspirations and multiple imaginations of the Kashmiri nation in competition. This established framework will be instrumental in subsequent chapters for a more critical analysis of the research questions. Historical background of the Kashmir conflict

HISTORY OF KASHMIR CONFLICT: POSTCOLONIAL

The Kashmir conflict remains a longstanding and unresolved border dispute between India and Pakistan, spanning over seven decades to what Sumatra Bose recalls the conflict as the "By-product of the partition of India in August 1947" (2021, 2). He further asserts that "on decolonisation, the 562 princely states had three options: to join India or Pakistan or become Independent states, however Lord Louis Mountbatten the last viceroy and the overseer of Great Britain's shambolic exit from the subcontinent was clear that the third option was purely notional" (2021, 4). However, the problem with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was such that a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh ruled over a population of a large majority (76-77 per cent) that were Muslims and (20-21 per cent) Hindus and the rest were Buddhists and Sikhs (Bose, 2021, 5 and Ganguly, 1997). Moreover, Bose argues about two conditions that made J&K closer to Pakistan. He asserts that first,

> "it's contiguity to Pakistan with Western Punjab and North-western frontier province was markedly more extensive than to India and second, there were ties of culture and kinship because a sizeable population of Kashmiri origin, descendants of nineteenth-century migrants from the princely state, lived in Western Punjab" (Bose, 2021, 5).

However, what Bose was trying to elucidate here was Kashmir's relations with Pakistan religiously and geographically. On the other hand, from Kashmir's perspective, the region had its border aligned with the three nuclear-powered sovereign nations, India, China, and Pakistan which add a strategic interest. Moreover, the region surrounding two major nuclear powers, China, and Pakistan, adds to growing apprehensions of insecurity it could pose to India in future years to come.

Ganguly (2002, 5-15) highlights the conflict as one of the most intractable disputes in modern Indian history since 1947, often characterised as a frozen conflict between the two countries. According to Asthana and Nirmal (2001) and Ganguly (1997), the idea of Kashmir's potential independence emerged in October 1947, when Muslim rebels from Jammu and Kashmir, along with the Pakistan army, initiated an uprising among the Muslim

population and took control of the territory now referred to as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). Asthana and Nirmal (2001) further contend that the uprising posed a threat to the rule of the Maharaja (the King) in Kashmir, particularly affecting the minority Hindu population. In response, the ruler sought support from the colonial ruler and the newly formed Indian government. The events of October 1947 marked a pivotal turning point in the history of Kashmir, leading to its integration into the broader geopolitical context of South Asia (Bose, 2003). The situation sparked tension and confrontation between India and Pakistan, resulting in the first Indo-Pakistani War over Kashmir. Since then, the dispute has remained unresolved, with both countries claiming ownership over the region and asserting their respective territorial rights (Bose, 2003).

Singh (1995) provides evidence that the Maharaja of Kashmir formally signed the accession on the 26th of October 1947, effectively making Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) a part of India. In contrast, Ganguly (1997) argues that the Prime Minister of India agreed that a mandate on Kashmir's future would occur once the situation was secure. However, Bose (2003), an expert on Kashmir, highlights that it is an issue of national and international importance recognised by the United Nations (United Nations Security Council Resolution 47, 1948) which established a commission of 5 members with representatives of Argentina, Colombia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, and The United States to go to the subcontinent and help the governments of India and Pakistan to restore peace and order and prepare for a plebiscite to decide the fate of Kashmir. On the other hand, Schofield (1996) contends that Pakistan initially refused to withdraw its troops from its occupied part of Kashmir, and later, India rejected the idea of a free vote, fearing that the Muslim majority would choose to join Pakistan. The Security Council resolution specifically recommended that:47:

> "The Government of Pakistan should undertake to use its best endeavours: Whereas (a) To secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purpose of fighting, and to prevent any intrusion into the State of such elements and any furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State" (1948, 4)

however, none of this ever happened, thus, eliminating the practical possibility of the plebiscite.

Bose (2003) further elaborates on the fragmentation of Kashmiri secessionists into two distinct groups. The first group seeks Kashmir's independence from both India and Pakistan and aims to establish an independent nation, which is represented by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) (Pelton, 2000). Nevertheless, the feasibility and viability of establishing an independent nation amidst three nuclear-powered nations, as noted earlier, without the necessity of a formal military and an adequate economy, remains a subject of contention. The second group as described by Santhanam (2003) is Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), one of the oldest and most active insurgent groups, with the goal of liberating Kashmir from India and integrating it with Pakistan. These divergent perspectives reflect the complex nature of the Kashmir conflict and the varying aspirations of different groups within the region. The historical events and political developments surrounding the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India, coupled with the involvement of the United Nations, have contributed to the protracted nature of the dispute. The existence of multiple secessionist groups, each with their distinct objectives, further complicates the efforts to find a resolution to the long-standing issue of Kashmir's status (Levy and Clark, 2012).

Furthermore, over the past two decades, the objectives of these insurgent groups have remained relatively fixed, either advocating for Kashmir's accession to Pakistan or advocating for an independent Kashmiri nation from the Indian occupied Kashmir (Bose, 2003). However, a noteworthy change has been observed recently in the image and rhetoric of the insurgency, transitioning from a focus on nationalism to discussions about making Kashmir part of a greater Caliphate as a fight for an Islamic State, akin to the rhetoric espoused by radical religious organisation like the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and Al Qaeda (Hussain, 16 March 2017). This transformation includes the use of flags and symbols similar to those employed by ISIS during burials and insurgent leaders delivering speeches asserting that Kashmir will not become part of Pakistan as democracy is deemed haram (forbidden) (Fayyaz, 21 November 2017).

The primary aim of this research is to investigate and comprehend this evolving image and rhetorical shift, which has not been previously explored in academic studies. By addressing this novel aspect, this research endeavours to provide a fresh perspective on the ongoing conflict in Kashmir. Understanding the underlying factors and implications of this shifting

phenomenon would contribute valuable insights to the discourse surrounding the conflict and potentially shed light on new dimensions of the Kashmir insurgency.

THE QUESTION OF 'UMMA'

The Islamic concept of Umma is profoundly intertwined with the development of a Pan-Islamic community centred around religious identity (Ahmad, 1975). This faith transcends distinctions of gender, colour, creed, ethnicity, language, and region—the fundamental elements typically shaping a nation-state (Ahmad, 1975). Simultaneously, it bears similarities to the idea of national belonging while inherently contradicting the Umma, which eschews nationalism and the concept of nations and boundaries. This duality underscores the inclusive nature of the Umma, delineated as a faith-based universal community or Pan-Islamism bounded by the vows of Kalima (Islamic initiation). However, Hassan (2018, 59) states that in stark contrast to the inclusive nature of the Muslim umma, the Ummah, as a community of believers, conveyed a sense of belonging to a group whose membership extended to all believers without qualification or restriction, except for matters related to faith that embodied the universalism inherent in Islam. Over time, this concept evolved into a mechanism for forging a cultural and religious identity distinct from that of the Muslim state, liberating spiritual growth and cohesion from the confines of transient territorial states and suggesting that individuals living within a nation-state paradoxically contradict the Umma by endorsing nationalism, characterized by its exclusivity. Thus, while individuals may embrace the concept of a nation-state's inclusiveness, the idea of Pan-Islamism persistently retains its exclusive nature (Denny, 1975).

Ahmed states that

> "Of all the Qur'anic usages of Umma, the expressions of Umma Wahida (a single faith), Umma Wasta (midmost community) and Umma Muslima (submissive community) represent the origin, ideological orientation, and character of the community… the theoretical foundation of Umma was provided by the Islamic theory of 'Tawhid' (Monotheism), the expression Umma Muslima and Umma Wahida imply that Islam (submission and surrender) and wahda (unity) are the two

most important foundations of the Umma and both concepts are interrelated theoretically" (1975, 27-28).

As a result, the concept of Umma raises a pivotal question concerning its democratic diversity and whether it accommodates the integration of manifold religions or remains inherently bound to the Muslim community exclusively. Delving into this inquiry facilitates the research in undertaking a critical analysis and constructing an argument regarding the inherent contradiction between the Kashmiri society's endorsement of nationalism and the concurrent support for a religious Muslim identity aligned with the Umma, which is subsequently discussed as undergoing a transformation towards a more extreme and fundamentalist concept, Pan-Islamism, both within the context of perceived oppression. This argument will be further developed in the next parts of this chapter.

Under the light of the contemporary inventions of nation state boundaries, Hassan (2018, 57-58) asserts that the influence of nationalism is discernible within the Islamic world, noting that in Muslim countries, the ideology of nationalism often incorporates the concept of the ummah. While nationalism exerts a pervasive impact on Muslim countries akin to its influence elsewhere, Islamic revivalist movements consistently incorporate the notion of the Muslim ummah as a significant component of their political platforms (Ahmad, 1975). This can partly be the reason that in regions where Islamic revivalism becomes a necessity the rhetoric of Pan-Islamism prevails over a nationalist discourse. These movements contend that allegiance to the Islamic ummah supersedes any other ethnic, linguistic, and geographical loyalties (Ahmad, 1975). Nevertheless, the political reality reveals a nuanced perspective, where, despite the considerable importance attributed to the idea of ummah by most Muslim communities as a source of collective identity, nationalism and nationalist movements constitute integral facets of the socio-political landscape in Muslim countries. Hence, one frequently navigates dual or multiple social identities encompassing national, ethnic, and Islamic affiliations (Ahmad, 1975). In a sociological context, the concept of ummah signifies an ideal state—a comprehensive unity of Muslims, a notion frequently invoked but rarely fully realised in practical terms (Bose, 2001; Ahmad, 1975). This discussion with respect to the modern-day Kashmir conflict will be subject to further chapters.

Furthermore, it can be argued that while Ummah has been posited as the fundamental underpinning of Pan-Islamism, it encapsulates diverse meanings that have fostered the development of Muslim communities and liberalism, diverging from an inherent alignment with Pan-Islamism (Moses, 2006). This divergence is underscored by the varied interpretations and essences that Ummah embodies within different Islamic communities globally (Moses, 2006, 491-507). Therefore, since the advent of Islam, the concept of "ummah" has captivated the intellectual discourse among the Muslim community. The Quran itself utilises the term "ummah" on more than sixty occasions, each time encompassing diverse and intricate meanings. These interpretations range from the followers of the Prophet, participants in a divine plan for salvation, a religious congregation, a subset of believers within a broader community, misguided individuals, to an order of being (Ruthven, 2000). This further coalesced to represent the very essence of an Islamic community, acquiring socio-legal and religious connotations (Ali, 2003). The Ummah underwent a transformation, evolving into a framework strategically crafted to uphold religious cohesion while concurrently accommodating the cultural diversity intrinsic to its adherents (Moses, 2006). This nuanced perspective implies that the concept of Ummah not only served to preserve religious unity but also facilitated inclusivity and hybridity in its expansive development (Donner, 1986). This phenomenon fostered a profound sense of solidarity that resonated throughout the Muslim nation states around the world, elevating significant ethnic and cultural distinctions to the status of the ideal (Donner, 1986, 288-295). As a result, the concept of ummah remains an indispensable component of contemporary discussions surrounding Islam, encompassing religious, political, and ideological dimensions (Doyle, 1986, 1151-1169). While this form of volitional orientation aligns closely with present-day trends in globalisation, it inherently contributes to political instability and unrest within the contemporary Muslim world. Various prominent Muslim social and political movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-i-Islami, actively espouse this ideology (Kahl, 1998, 99-107). According to Hassan:

> "As a sociological phenomenon, the ummah can be viewed as a collective identity.
> Collective identity is grounded in the socialisation process in human societies.
> Individuals develop it by first identifying with the values, goals, and purposes of their
> society and by internalising them. This process, besides constructing the individual

identity, also constructs the collective identity. Rituals and ritualised behaviours of the society further reinforce it and give the members a sense of similarity, especially against the 'Others' whose collective identities are different" (2018, 58).

Furthermore, symbolic frameworks that encompass shared elements such as religion, language, and culture function as boundary-defining mechanisms, playing a significant role in the establishment of collective identity (Hassan, 2018). From this perspective, the term "ummah" represents a shared identity among Muslims, indicating their connection to the sanctified realm of Islam and its integration into their consciousness. Viewing the ummah as a framework for the collective identity of Muslims implies that collective identity is a socially constructed phenomenon, where social structures and processes are integral (Anwar and Bakar, 1997). Consequently, any modifications to these framing devices will correspondingly impact the nature of collective identity. In other words, Muslims not only adhere to a singular religion but also navigate their daily lives within the frameworks of their respective societies. The transformations occurring within these societies due to processes like modernization and globalisation inevitably influence the collective identity of the Muslim faith (Eisenstadt and Giessen, 1995).

In the Kashmiri context, where Muslim-majority states are rooted in a pronounced nationalistic framework, as delineated Chapter 1, the necessity of a political revivalist movement becomes evident for both Muslim and Hindu societies (Jadoon, 2018). These movements assume a critical role in safeguarding their respective communities against threats posed to religious duties and customs, emphasising the preservation and perpetuation of their traditions (Luka, 2021). This imperative aligns with the principle of religious cohesion and solidarity espoused in the concept of Ummah. Within this intricate socio-political landscape, a multitude of identities and diverse conceptualizations of nationhood and community emerge, embodying both exclusivity and inclusivity (Hassan, 2018, 59). It is evident from the ancient history that Kashmir practises a form of nationalism that is exclusive of religious affiliations and inclusive of a secular identity known as "Kashmiriyat", a harmonious and indigenous characteristic of Kashmiri citizens, which is completely opposite to the fundamentalist idea of Pan-Islamism (Zutshi, 2003; Tremblay, 2018). This underscores that, from pre-colonial times, Kashmir has consistently resisted

succumbing to the influence of Pan-Islamic movements. Furthermore, the findings presented in Chapter 1 also indicate that, despite the shared collective identity in the Kashmir region, this collective identity predominantly aligns with the aspiration for a homeland based on the spirit of "Kashmiriyat" and the nationalistic idea rather than the establishment of a region exclusively grounded in Muslim identity known as Pan-Islamism. The former standpoint starkly contradicts the concept of ummah, while the latter aligns with what is referred to as the Muslim ummah—a concept seemingly not pervasive in the Kashmiri context. However, the Muslim identity inherently incorporated into Kashmiri society, which is associated with the concept of Umma, is justified to have emerged consistently as a strong response to external threats and oppression as well as asserting their religious identity in the face of hardships and challenges without indicating an endorsement of a Pan-Islamic vision. The evolution of the Muslim identity in Kashmir warrants further investigation in subsequent chapters.

In elucidating the Kashmiri perspectives on Pan-Islamism, a requisite undertaking involves a comprehensive examination of the pronounced discord characterising interactions among Muslim states (Akbar, 2002). It is contended that the conceptual viability of Pan-Islamism is inherently challenged by the evolving dynamics within the Muslim community (Adraoui, 2017). The conventional emphasis on the establishment of a singular Caliphate or a unified empire has gradually waned, primarily due to internal discourses and divergent perspectives within the Muslim populace (Adraoui, 2017). The complexity arises from the multiplicity of voices within the Muslim community, rendering the prospect of cohesive unity a formidable challenge, which suggests that the visions of Pan-Islamism within Muslim countries themselves are actually not prevalent (Sheikh, 2002, 51-61). Consequently, the primary impetus for solidarity among Muslims and their seek for the Pan-Islamic purpose tends to be predicated upon shared perceptions of external threats and dangers, fostering a collective commitment to safeguarding their Muslim identity (Sheikh, 2002, 48-59). For example, within the expansive framework of a collective Pan-Islamic Muslim identity, exemplified by movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation committed to addressing global oppression against Muslims within the purview of the Muslim Umma, various radical groups, including ISIS, Al-Qaeda, ISJK, and Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind, have emerged as consequential entities (Geelani, 2019). Despite their profound alignment with the principles

of the Umma, these organisations do not uniformly translate their shared consciousness into concerted Islamic action, either on the domestic or international stage (Geelani, 2019). It is noteworthy that, despite variations in their theological and jurisprudential orientations, these movements share a common rhetoric centred on perceived discrimination against Muslims and advocate for Islamic supremacy as a revivalist trend. This implies that Umma or Pan-Islamism assumes centrality during perceived instances of discrimination against Muslims by non-Muslim entities.

The fragmentation of the Islamic world into 49 Muslim-majority nations, often characterised by adversarial relationships, coupled with pervasive ethnic and sectarian violence in numerous Muslim societies, stands as a testament to the prevailing lack of unity (Mohammed and Jureideni, 2022). Furthermore, the limited public support for Islamic political parties across Muslim nations, coupled with discord between established political structures and radical Islamist organisations such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda, serves to underscore this inherent disunity (Hassan, 2018; Huntington, 2001). These factors collectively contribute to the formidable challenge these organisations face in realising their Pan-Islamic vision in practical terms.

However, Pakistan, as a Muslim nation concurrently adhering to democratic principles, constitutes a noteworthy case study illustrating a discernible manifestation of heightened Umma consciousness, which coalesces around a collective Islamic identity for the primary purpose of confronting external forces, threats, and adversaries. This orientation contrasts with a singular focus on Pan-Islamic objectives, as evidenced by Pakistan's simultaneous embrace of nationalistic and democratic ideologies, thereby introducing a contradiction vis-à-vis the conceptual framework of Pan-Islamism. To illustrate this argument more clearly, Riyaz Hassan's comprehensive survey in 2018, involving 1272 participants, delineates the contours of Umma consciousness in Pakistan, revealing a notable rate of 92 exemplifying that while the mentioned subjects had high profoundness of the fundamentals of umma, nevertheless, it believed in the existence of nation state (2018). This metric is derived from respondents expressing concurrence with tenets such as unwavering belief in the existence of Allah, steadfast faith in Quranic miracles, significance ascribed to the month of Ramadan, conviction in an afterlife, and recognition of individuals denying Allah's existence as a

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perceived threat. Moreover, scholars such as Hassan (2018) and Ahmad (1975) posit that this heightened consciousness profoundly shapes both self-perception and the perception of the "other," fostering solidarity among Muslims facing persecution, violence, or unjust treatment from external entities.

The prevailing anti-American sentiment in Muslim countries, particularly discernible in Pakistan, is notably intensified by perceived pro-Israeli Western policies, particularly those attributed to the United States, and conflicts in regions such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This sentiment, extensively reported by media outlets such as CNN in 2001, underscores the impact of Umma consciousness as a foundational element and the main driver shaping alleged Jihadist movements engaged in violent resistance across diverse Muslim-majority regions spanning Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East (Ali, 2003).

As delineated earlier, the notion of Umma exhibits a dual nature, concurrently inclusive and exclusive, rendering it amenable to both nationalistic ideologies and collective identity formation. It serves as a pivotal element in the repertoire of jihadist movements, wherein the influence of Pan-Islamism is harnessed to assert and safeguard Muslim identity against external perils, often without a concomitant emphasis on the tangible establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. This preservationist orientation towards religious identity finds historical underpinnings in the fervent advocacy for the ideology of Umma or Pan-Islamism, traceable to proponents of revivalism who ardently champion the narrative of Umma (Ahmad, 1975). This suggests that the resurgence of Islam is contingent upon the necessary condition of Umma, and Umma, in turn, strengthens the sentiment of revivalism.

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1922, a palpable sense of deprivation permeated Muslim societies, precipitating a discernible decline across multifarious domains, including politics, culture, civilization, and the economy. This context engendered the ascent and proliferation of revivalism (Denny, 1975). Syed Jamaluddin Afghani, an Islamic scholar of note, emerged as a proponent of Pan-Islamism, vehemently opposing European colonialism and imperialism in Muslim nations (Denny, 1975). His advocacy positioned Pan-Islamism as a potent counterforce to the prevailing trend of "territorial nationalism," defined as a form

of nationalism premised on the notion that all inhabitants of a specific territory should share a collective national identity, notwithstanding disparities in race, language, religion, culture, or other variables (Ahmad, 1975). Ahmad notes, that Afghani's reformist movement sought to reconnect Muslims with their historical glories through the promotion of adherence to the Quran and Sunna (the ways of the prophet) while it exhorted Muslims to confront and repel British Imperialism and its attendant systems, representing a distinct departure from the paradigm of territorial nationalism (1975). These endeavours laid the foundational groundwork for the inception of the revivalist movement, culminating in the establishment of movements like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Wickham, 2015). Consequently, it becomes evident that this revivalist movement constitutes the nascent underpinning of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the overarching concept of Muslim Umma. This ideological framework serves as a focal impetus compelling Muslims to actively resist the Western construct of "nationalism" and coalesce under a collective identity in the face of oppression (Wagemakers, 2022).

In the 21st century the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the United States have precipitated an augmented psychological impetus to shield Islam from Western influences and perceived crusader aggression. Analogously, a comparative analysis may be drawn with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India, a Hindu revivalist movement advocating for India as a Hindu nation (Sarkar, 2005, 288; Khan and Rifat, 2021). Since 1947, this movement has garnered prominence by employing defensive control mechanisms aimed at safeguarding the interests of the Hindu population vis-à-vis other religious groups (Geelani, 2019; Kunnummal, 2022, 30-43). Similarly, a global Muslim revivalist movement, epitomised by the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, also known as Al Ikhwan Ul Muslimeen, propounds the principles of the Umma and the concept of Pan-Islamic brotherhood encapsulated in the term "Ikhwan" (Devadas, 2018). The conviction that Muslims worldwide share a fraternal bond and bear a collective responsibility to safeguard one another's rights, obligations, and lives have been harnessed as a rallying cry, prompting Muslims to unite as a cohesive community and confront non-believers, often denoted as "Kaafirs" (Geelani, 2019; Khan and Rifat, 2021). This phenomenon assumes significance in the contemporary Kashmir scenario, where the resurgence of the Muslim Umma philosophy intersects with the foundations of Kashmiriyat, nationalism, and Kashmiri nationalism as expounded in Chapter 1. This

development can be interpreted, in part, as a manifestation of nationalist sentiments in Kashmir being eclipsed by Pan-Islamic narratives amid perceived oppression by Hindu-majority India. Consequently, in both the Muslim and Hindu realms, distinct notions of nationhood have engendered respective revivalist movements aimed at safeguarding and preserving their cultural, religious, and national identities. Consequently, it can be argued that the concept of revivalism assumes a defensive character, leveraging the inherent exclusivity and non-secular nature of religion as a mechanism to safeguard and perpetuate values and identity. The ramifications of this phenomenon will be subjected to further exploration in subsequent chapters.

In addition to the foundational impetus of revivalism rooted in the imperative to safeguard identity from external threats, one may contend that it also emanates from individual reactions. This is to project a purportedly "pure" Islamic form, echoing traditional Arabic and orthodox values, onto secular and diverse cultural frameworks. In the era predating modernization and globalisation, the consciousness of the Ummah was predominantly centred on the adherence to the 'five pillars' of Islam, encompassing the profession of faith, charitable contributions (zakat), pilgrimage (hajj), daily prayers, and fasting. Foundational convictions played a pivotal role in shaping this consciousness (Hassan, 2018; Rahman, 1984). Despite the widespread adoption of these beliefs and practices, empirical evidence demonstrated that Islamized cultures consistently superimposed Islamic layers onto diverse cultural strata, reflecting a nuanced assimilation of Islamic principles within diverse cultural frameworks (Razwy, 2004; Giannakis, 1983).

Applying this framework to the contemporary Kashmir scenario, ideologies such as Ahle-Hadith, representing the Islamic tenets of Salafism or Wahhabism, have permeated the cultural and jurisprudential fabric of the region. This incursion aims to recalibrate the culture and Islamic jurisprudence traditionally associated with Kashmir, with the intention of aligning practised Islam more closely with Arab norms. Consequently, this phenomenon contributes to the discernible rise in the influence of Saudi Islam in Kashmir, giving rise to a burgeoning form of Islamization. This situation, in turn, engenders a complex identity structure, culminating in an internal conflict within individuals as they grapple with the juxtaposition of their secular Kashmiri identity and the emergent Muslim identity. In this

context, the latter assumes significance as a tool of revivalism adopted by secular individuals who perceive a perceived threat to their religion and believe that the Islam, they follow is not inherently pure.

As delineated above, the initial consequence of this phenomenon serves to heighten awareness of the social and cultural diversity inherent within the Muslim Ummah. Conversely, the subsequent consequence begets a response characterised by the rejection of this amalgamation of cultural and social elements, coupled with a yearning to reinstate an authentic 'Islamic way' (Hassan, 2018). The conflict between the concepts of 'hybridity' and 'authenticity', 'inclusivity', and 'exclusivity', emerges as a formidable challenge for the Muslim Ummah within the context of globalisation. This conflict also constitutes a pivotal factor contributing to the ascendance of Islamic fundamentalist movements (Hodgson, 1977). Operating as a strategic approach employed by Islamic 'purists,' Islamic fundamentalism aims to re-establish their interpretation of religious identity and social structure as the exclusive foundation for a reconstructed political and social system (Hunter, 1986, 192-194). These purists perceive a threat to their identity, sensing a gradual diminution attributable to cultural and religious hybridization. In response, they endeavour to fortify their understanding of religious modes of existence by selectively drawing from teachings, beliefs, and practices originating from a revered historical period (Geelani, 2019, 72-75; Gupta and Rao, 2003, 29-45). Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider that contemporary militants embracing the discourse of puritanical pan-Islamism perceive themselves as adherents of a genuinely pure religious system. This adoption serves as a means to counter the perceived threat to their identity, albeit without a comprehensive understanding of the involved jurisprudence. This conceptualization of Ummah as a tool is not prevalent in Kashmir; however, it is depicted as an idealised representation of what Islam should resemble.

If substantiated, this perspective posits a future trajectory for the Islamic ummah marked by a diversified social reality, departing from a unitary conceptualization. Consequently, the prospect of the "decertification" of the Islamic ummah emerges as a subject warranting meticulous investigation (Hassan, 2018; Mohammed and Jureidini, 2022). In the Kashmir scenario, as explored in Chapter 1, it becomes apparent that the Kashmir region, while

influenced by the religious contours of the Muslim Ummah, has consistently manifested a pronounced nationalistic and secular orientation. Diverging from a puritanical belief structure, Kashmir embraced a pluralistic nature to articulate its political demands and rights. In contrast to numerous other Muslim nations such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran, Kashmir maintained adherence to the Islamic faith while eschewing the stringent Islamic jurisprudence associated with it (Bose, 2021; Zutshi, 2018). Tangible evidence of this nuanced stance is evident in the prevalence of Sufi Islamic principles in the pre-colonial era and the contemporary assertion of Kashmiri identity to advocate the narrative of an independent Kashmir transcending religious boundaries (Akbar, 2002). The juxtaposition of modernization and the Muslim ummah, characterised by cultural hybridity and diversity, begets the emergence of religious fundamentalism. The potency of this fundamentalism is contingent upon the intensity of attitudes toward cultural hybridity and diversity (Hassan, 2006; Crabtree, Husain, and Spalik, 2016). For example, within the South Asian context, Azra highlights that Islamic radicalism stems from the misguided perception that the native Islam of Indonesia represents a syncretic and hybridised faith. This belief prompts radical interpretations of sacred texts to purify and reshape them into an ostensibly "authentic" form of Islam (2004). Azra attributes the roots of radical Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia to this "literalist" interpretation, a phenomenon extending beyond Indonesia to encompass other Islamic nations (Azra, 2004). A more detailed analysis of this argument will be presented in the next chapters.

Moreover, in the context of the contemporary landscape, it can be asserted that disparities in the levels of modernity across diverse Muslim nations play a consequential role in the evolution, specialisation, and differentiation of institutions, as elucidated in the investigations conducted by Hassan (2018; Hassan, 2006) and Ruthven (2000). This dynamic is anticipated to engender a diminished sway of religious establishments within societal frameworks, thereby fostering an augmented emphasis on individual religiosity. Such developments possess the potential to exert influence on the trajectory of religious and political pluralism, thereby shaping their acceptance as societal and political norms. The contention posits that, analogous to other global regions, the political culture in Muslim countries is poised to evolve in tandem with national ambitions, deviating from the collective aspirations of the ummah and the emphasis on Pan-Islamism, a perspective

expounded upon by scholars such as Hassan (2018, 58-59), Ahmad (1997), and Alatas (1970, 269-277).

Drawing upon the scholarship of Alatas (1972), it is arguable that modernization not only undermines and complicates constructed or inherited cultural identities but also facilitates the formation and resurgence of specific identities as mechanisms for vying for influence and power within the global system. In this context, the particularistic identity affinity of a religion assumes a significant role. Religion, marginalised in the era of globalisation and modernization, employs innovative avenues and strategies to secure public influence and legitimacy. Two primary avenues through which religion can exert public influence in the context of globalisation are considered: one from a regional or sub-global standpoint and the other on the universal or global scale (Alatas, 1970, 265-294). Paradoxically, even the universal and global perspective assumes particularistic qualities. Contrary to prevailing assumptions, globalisation might lead to an augmentation in the public influence of religion. However, this influence will be mediated by a sub-global religious tradition, as it is better suited to accommodate and promote the practical function of religion compared to the globally inherited tradition (Hassan, 2018).

Applying the proposed analytical framework to scrutinise the deployment of pan-Islamic rhetoric by militants in the ongoing Kashmir conflict reveals discernible trends, including an elevated level of religiosity, particularly among the youth, and intensified endeavours to sway the populace. This is undertaken with the objective of establishing a global connection with the Ummah and Pan-Islamism to legitimise their cause. The influence of these efforts is further mediated through social-religious revival movements within Islam, effectively realising the objectives of religious and personal purification. An intriguing aspect emerges wherein the utilisation of such rhetoric is perceived as a strategic response to counter Hindu nationalism, ostensibly independent of considerations pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence on this matter. This supports the contention that the adoption of such rhetoric constitutes a reactive measure against the Hindu nationalist movement rather than an explicit endorsement of pan-Islamism. This will be further explored in the subsequent chapters.

NATIONALISM

Chitralekha Zutshi (2003, 2-5) and Gul Mohammad Wani (2010, 90-95) have advanced the proposition that Kashmir can be construed as an intricate mosaic of ethnicities and identities, intricately interwoven, and evolving in a multifaceted manner. Consequently, this research must attain a nuanced understanding of the concept of ethnic diversities and their interrelation within the frameworks of "nationalism" as it pertains to Kashmir, thereby making a substantive contribution to the exploration of the research question.

Liah Greenfeld (1992, 12, 65) defines ethnic diversity as the coexistence of multiple ethnicities within a society; a phenomenon acknowledged for its ubiquity and perceived harmlessness. Additionally, Schermerhorn delineates an ethnic group as a subset within a larger societal framework characterised by shared actual or perceived common ancestry, collective memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural emphasis on one or more symbolic elements representing the epitome of their peoplehood (1970). Moreover, Anthony Smith conceptualises an ethnic community as a named human population possessing a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, cultural elements, a connection to a historical territory or homeland, and a degree of solidarity (1991, 21). Underlining the dynamic nature of ethnicity, A.D. Smith contends "it is the attachments and associations, rather than residence in or possession of the land that matters for ethnic identification.. a sacred land of our forefathers, our kings, and saints" (1991, 23).

By contextualising these definitions within the Kashmiri milieu, one can argue that the region, throughout its historical trajectory, has showcased a spectrum of ethnic groups, including but not limited to the Kashmiris, the Dogras, and the Bakkarwals (a nomadic Muslim tribe). Each of these groups harbours distinctive conceptualizations of the nation, resulting in both converging and conflicting aspirations that contribute to a framework of competing identities. Nevertheless, the Kashmiri identity within the Kashmir valley, characterised by a persistent quest for a homeland as discussed in chapter 1, has fortified, and been nurtured vis-à-vis external affiliations, aligning with the aforementioned definitions (Smith, A.D., 1991).

Nevertheless, within the scope of this research, a thorough scrutiny of the Kashmiri Muslim identity becomes imperative. This identity is marked by internal conflicts as it embraces diverse notions of nationhood, including the pursuit of an independent secular nation, a majority Muslim state within a secular nation, and a secular Pakistani nation. Notably, none of these constructs of nationhood advocates for a Pan-Islamic Muslim state; rather, they collectively assert themselves in tandem with the non-Muslim identity in the pursuit of a nation. The Kashmiri Muslim identity champions a nation deeply entrenched in the myth of the Kashmir region, fostering a universal culture of Sufism and Kashmiriyat. It conceptualises a socio-economic and judicial system, acknowledging a shared commitment to Kashmir and its liberation from perceived oppression. All constituents of this envisioned nation actively engage in a shared legal framework, historical recollections, mythologies, a pervasive public culture, and a communal economy (Smith, A.D., 1991, 52).

Furthermore, a nation is defined by a collectively acknowledged historical territory. This perspective is fortified by Anthony Smith (1986), who posits that ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians and Assyrians, exhibited distinctive features resembling a prototype nation. These features encompassed a unified legal code, a recognized historical territory, collective memories, mass culture, and mythologies (Smith, A.D., 1991). As an illustration, he underscores that the inception of the earliest modern states, such as Britain and France, was underpinned by the dominance of a specific ethnic group (Smith, A.D., 1991). Operating as formidable colonial powers during that period, Britain and France subsequently extended their Anglo-French state-nation paradigm to influence their colonies and other communities (Smith, A.D., 1995).

Moreover, Gellner (1983) posits a nuanced relationship between nationalism and ethnicity within the context of societal foundations. He asserts that peripheral, low ethnic cultures, despite possessing territorial sovereignty and an active intellectual class, are not inherently causative factors for nationalism (Gellner, 1983). In contrast, A.D. Smith and J. Hutchinson explain ethnic nationalism as the mobilisation of ethnic communities through the deployment of cultural assets, religious beliefs, traditional practices, and linguistic distinctions (1996, 194). According to A.D. Smith (1991), national identity holds the potential to mobilise ethnic communities, compelling them to assert their inherent rights as nations

by rediscovering their ethnic past. He contends that a sense of ethnic group superiority arises from the desire to safeguard cultural heritage and tradition. A.D. Smith argues that ethnic identity, with its persuasive capacity, can serve as a wellspring of inspiration for nationalism. Individuals may be swayed if they perceive their homeland as sacred—a place where their forebears resided, heroes fought, saints prayed, and ancestors sacrificed their lives for territorial freedom. This belief in the exclusivity of "true faith," superior morality, and civilization, instigated by ethnic identity, may precipitate conflict (Smith, A.D., 1991). Anthony Smith and Hutchinson further substantiate this argument with historical instances, such as the Arab jihad against non-Muslims, the Armenian war in the Caucasus, and conflicts of "white civilization" involving Western nations against Asians and Africans (1996, 193-195). Furthermore, A.D. Smith (1991) contends that once an ethnic category has transformed into an ethnic community and proliferated within a specific region, ethnic intellectuals should apply the principles of self-determination to ethnicity. In essence, intellectuals are urged to mobilise the ethnic populace, facilitating the emergence of ethnic nationalism.

Guibernau (1996) supports Smith's proposition by suggesting that when confronted with internal resistance from ethnic groups, a nation confronts two alternatives: either eliminate them or accord a measure of autonomy. Guibernau (1996) posits that the failure to fulfil either of these obligations may propel ethnic groups toward ethnic nationalism, with aspirations to establish sovereign states (271-274). To elucidate, the fervour for Kashmiri nationalism and their aspiration for an independent and self-determined nation primarily stem from their internal conflict with Indian nationalism and their desire for collective identity assertion based on the values of Kashmiriyat—an indigenous and unique set of values defining Kashmiri citizens.

Hence, Kashmiri nationalism is a composite construct of a historical collective memory ingrained within its cultural heritage and the pursuit of an envisioned political entity representing its homeland. This construct is underpinned by a significant blend of mythology and shared history as elucidated in the analytical frameworks proposed by Anthony Smith (1991) and Anderson (1991). Moreover, this distinctive Kashmiri ethnic identity transforms into a cohesive community striving for

recognition as a nation with corresponding political aspirations. When this identity is perceived as threatened, it catalyses' a realization among Kashmiris to safeguard their culture and heritage. This endeavour is often facilitated through the assertion of ethnic superiority and moral values, leading to the emergence of ethnic nationalism and the pursuit of a degree of autonomy. This trajectory aligns with the theoretical analyses of Anthony Smith (1991), Guibernau (1996), and Gellner (1983).

In the context of religious and linguistic diversities and concentrations, Jammu and Kashmir can be delineated as an "ethnic triangle" (Sharma, 2000, 28 cited in Guler, 2017, 3). Despite the existence of this ethnic triangle, the historical unity and peaceful coexistence of the Kashmiri people remain a contentious issue. One could posit that the unity of Kashmiris emanates from an ethnic humanism-based on shared consciousness of the region's distinctive history and culture (Cockell, 2000, 327). Conversely, Sharma (2000) contends that discussing a shared culture, known as "Kashmiriyat," is akin to inhabiting a fictitious realm during the twentieth century. Unlike secular nationalists advocating for a secular Kashmir governed by India or those seeking an independent and secular Kashmir, religious nationalists in the region support the establishment of an Islamic Kashmir distinct from Pakistani rule. Consequently, religion ceased to serve as a unifying force fostering a shared Kashmiri identity and instead became a source of division among the Muslim population in the Kashmir region. Guler (2017, 4) notes that Naqash and Shah define "Kashmiriyat" as "Kashmiriyat is a sense of community of the people who have lived together for ages and developed and preserved its own distinct identity. It is beyond the religion" (1997, 10). It transcends religious boundaries. According to their argument, the Kashmiri identity in Kashmir has developed distinctive religious practices, symbols, and traditions that set them apart. This distinctiveness forms the basis of a shared Kashmiriyat in the Kashmir region. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Kashmiri populace would exclusively associate their Kashmiri identity with Islam (Puri, 1995; Guler, 2017, 4).

Bhat (2014, 32) posits that Kashmiriyat has evolved through the assimilation of various religious practices and cultural influences, encompassing Buddhism, Shaivism, Jainism, and Islam. Noting the shared cultural practices between Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits, Cockell (2000, 327 cited in Guler, 2017, 4) contends that all Kashmiris, irrespective of religious

affiliation, are bound by the term "ethnic humanism," indicating a collective understanding of the distinctive history and culture of Kashmir. Moreover, as elucidated in Chapter 1, this underscores the significant geographical determinant in the quest for a homeland, positioning Kashmir at the crossroads of proud and esteemed civilizations, thereby engendering cultural hybridity as a consequence. To delve deeper into the concepts of sociability and exclusivity, Mukherjee (2003) argues that nationalism provides a framework for individuals from diverse groups to assert their exclusive right to lead an independent and distinct life while concurrently embodying a spiritual and psychological sense of solidarity rooted in a shared history and literary heritage that binds people of varied identities. Given the intricate interplay between exclusivity and inclusivity inherent in nationalism, Mukherjee (2003) asserts that members of a community should recognize and respect the diversity in their fellow citizens' religions, ethnicities, lifestyles, and customs.

Nationalism in the contemporary world, as elucidated by Zutshi (2003), serves as the underpinning for the construction of national or distinctive identities among individuals. This implies that an individual's societal identity is shaped by cognitive awareness influenced by factors such as religious cultures, nationalism, and the societal order imposed by the government (Greenfeld, 1992). Furthermore, Festenstein and Kenny (2005) argue that nationalism is a phenomenon that unites individuals under a common nationality, leading to inherently stable communities, a collective resistance mentality against foreign powers, and engines of social mobilisation. In concurrence with Greenfeld (1992), Festenstein and Kenny (2005) posit that these components are fundamental to the concept of nationalism. However, they also assert that nationalism can swiftly transform a society into one characterised by xenophobia, racism, and militaristic self-interest. On this matter, an equal number of critics of nationalism argue that the concept has evolved into a potent global ideology prominent in the political landscapes of all regions and endowed with an enormous capacity to galvanise and undermine states (Festenstein and Kenny, 2005).

Within the framework of nationalistic principles, encompassing unity, affirmation, and solidarity, the Kashmiri identity represents a distinct collective identity that incorporates various religions, shaping the cognitive awareness of Kashmiri society under a common nationality—distinct from the notions of nations of India and Pakistan. The syncretic

Kashmiriyat identity functions as a potent engine for social mobilisation, fostering resistance against foreign and colonial powers within the overarching embrace of secularism, as Handman explicitly states,

> "What lies at the bottom of the nationalistic behaviour is not interests in the other members of the group but solidarity in repelling the common enemy. It is not so much sympathy with one's fellows as hostility towards the outsider that makes for nationalism" (Handman, 1921, 106).

However, despite its secular nature, this identity contends with the coexistence of diverse religious-based national imaginaries within the state. This framework of nationalism will undergo further scrutiny in Chapter 3, where the research delves into the historical movements of Kashmiri nationalism from 1931.

Furthermore, it is argued that gregariousness and exclusiveness constitute two psychological variables intricately linked to the concept of nationalism (Wood, 1988, 82; Nicgorski, 1993, 787). Understandably, individuals who share a common social heritage, artistic expressions, and literary preferences tend to forge a unified collective identity, recognizing shared attributes and aspiring to establish an independent sovereign state. Illustrating these two attributes through the escalating conflict in Kashmir underscores that a significant portion of the region's populace adheres to Islamism, sharing numerous commonalities in religion, culture, art, and literature. Conversely, another segment of the Kashmiri population follows an alternative religion and maintains a distinct artistic and literary milieu. Despite apparent diversity among these segments, they manage to achieve a measure of cohesion based on minor parallels, including customs, cuisine, and social behaviour (Zutshi, 2003; Bose, 2003). This dual existence of inclusiveness and exclusivity in Kashmir creates an exceptionally intricate situation marked by a significant degree of sociability and exclusivity. Given the heightened levels of both exclusiveness and sociability, which are prominent attributes of nationalism, it is reasonable to assert that the Kashmiri people would seek autonomy from countries such as India and Pakistan. This demand can be posited as a driving force behind the persistent conflict in Kashmir.

Additionally, Festenstein and Kenny (2005) present a cognitive interpretation of nationalism, defining it as a set of secular political ideologies and movements that evoke a sense of

affiliation and belonging. This inspiration motivates individuals to actively contribute to their national community and fosters pride in their cultural heritage. Hayes (1937) supports this notion, characterising nationalism as a mental state where allegiances are subordinated to the concept or reality of one's nation-state. Moreover, it denotes a strong belief among the populace in the inherent superiority and capabilities of their nation above any other conviction (Anderson, 1991). This forms a foundational principle guiding the functioning of political parties and serves as the basis for nation-building processes. Lloyd (1987), aligning with Festenstein and Kenny (2005) and Hayes (1937), posits that nationalism involves an ideological commitment to advancing the interests, unity, and autonomy of individuals who perceive themselves as a community. The Royal Institute of International Affairs (1939) concurs, defining nationalism as the awareness, by an individual or collective, of one's or another nation's membership status, coupled with the intent to promote the nation's strength, liberty, or prosperity. A recurring theme in these discussions among eminent scholars is the emphasis on terms such as "ideological commitment," "self-conceiving individuals," "a consciousness," and "condition of mind." This suggests that psychological factors and emotional attachments significantly shape individuals' perceptions of nationalism. Moreover, it suggests that an inherent characteristic of a nation is the sentiments individuals harbour for one another, defining a nation as a collective of individuals who perceive themselves as interconnected into a single nation as well as disconnected from others (Tagore, 2021).

A comprehensive understanding of the evolution of a state or nation into a political entity is crucial for a nuanced comprehension of the concepts of nationhood and statehood. According to Sandeford (2018), states can be concisely characterised as bureaucratically governed societies marked by social stratification and the existence of at least four settled hierarchical levels, encompassing a major capital, cities, villages, and hamlets. Given the profound connection between nationalism and an individual's perception and sense of attachment and affiliation (Sandeford, 2018), it is pertinent to explore the concept of "patriotism" as an inevitably linked consequence of this psychological phenomenon. Singh (1991) defines patriotism as a conscious assurance that an individual's well-being and the welfare of the significant group to which he belongs are contingent on the expansion and maintenance of the authority and culture of his society. The analysis delves into the parallel

origins of various historical events, such as the Irish Republican Army's pursuit of establishing the Republic of Ireland in opposition to Britain's imperialist notions, and the Catalonian independence movement's referendum against Spain. These instances were marked by conflicts where one nationalistic identity held more sway than the other.

The concept of Kashmiri separatism from India and Pakistan, as exemplified by the liberation struggle, underwent a significant transformation during the 1990s. This transformation prominently featured the narratives of self-determination and the upsurge of Kashmiri nationalism, reflecting the growing desire among the Kashmiri population to safeguard their ethnic identity and values (Haksar, 2015). This noteworthy period produced two primary outcomes. The first consequence was the initiation of the plebiscite front movement in Kashmir, aiming to empower Kashmiri citizens with the authority and right to determine their own future, encapsulated by the catchphrase "Hai Haq Hamara Rai Shumari" (our right to determine our own destiny). Additionally, it once again employed the "indigenous Kashmiri identity" or "Kashmiriyat identity" to mobilise society in favour of its homeland against extremist Islamism, reminiscent of the colonial era.

It is crucial to recognize that these significant events were propelled by the psychological disposition of the Kashmiris, which conspicuously manifested their sense of nationalistic identity. This motivation impelled them to seek independence and establish their own nation, demonstrating loyalty to their national state and a firm conviction in its superiority, as discussed by Hayes (1937) and Singh (1991). Furthermore, Singh (1991) asserts that the emotional, sociological, and ideological psychology of patriotism strongly underpins the common patterns observed in a segment of the population characterised by a bold nationalistic identity and a desire to establish a separate nation-state. Intending to serve the national community within the bounds of law and authority, he argues that patriotism, in relation to nationalism, can be characterised as a secular incitement to a sense of belonging. Hence, the sociological and political dimensions of nationalism revolve around the attributes of a nation-state or community, where each individual resides and is associated with a specific national identity. Moreover, one could argue that the objective of nationalism is to establish a unified demand embraced by the state. Internal rationalisation processes foster these sentiments and demands, persuading the populace to make particular sacrifices in

support of the goals and beliefs of their government, though the certainty of resulting in an appropriate course of action remains uncertain.

By applying Singh's (1991) logical reasoning, the Kashmir conflict and the Kashmiri people's struggle for independence from the oppression of India and Pakistan can be fundamentally elucidated through the lenses of patriotism and nationalism. The region of Kashmir exhibits an extraordinarily high degree of ethnic identity and diversity overlap, where "gregariousness and exclusiveness" persist as the two primary motivating factors of nationalism. Consequently, this dynamic remains potent and severe. As an endeavour to safeguard their distinct identities, the preservation of culture and power among various ethnic groups in the region has witnessed a substantial increase. Approximately 97 percent of the Kashmiri population adheres to Islam as a religion (Mir, 11 May 2021). Through projecting their beliefs, characteristics, and attitudes onto another group, they seek to absorb, practice, and perpetuate the same faith through the medium of their culture and traditions. Conversely, a lesser-known faction of Kashmiri Hindus in the area has also been engaged in religious ceremonies and practices to safeguard their culture, customs, and standards (Singh, 1991).

While certain aspects of identity, such as attire, cuisine, and clothing, may remain consistent, the fundamental nature of their existence, historical conflicts between the two ethnic groups, and their respective resentments, beliefs, and attitudes have driven each group to establish its own set of regulations and boundaries through a guardian sense of patriotism. This perception has frequently evolved into a manifestation of revivalist tendencies, typically surfacing during periods marked by the marginalisation of one ethnic group by another. This analysis will be constrained to subsequent chapters. Consequently, the maintenance of peace in the area proves challenging, and ethnic strife becomes an unavoidable consequence due to the immense cultural disparities, rendering the conflict seemingly unresolvable (Greenfeld, 1992). Moreover, it is imperative to recognize that, for a more exhaustive critical analysis, the previously delineated framework encompassing nationalism, patriotism, and ethnicity will be applied to the Kashmiri movements in Chapter 3. This application aims to establish a symbiotic relationship and illustrate the contemporary manifestation of Kashmiri nationalism, which contradicts the principles of Ummah and Pan-

Islamism. Consequently, the research endeavours to substantiate the central argument that Pan-Islamic movements do not prevail in Kashmir; rather, Kashmir is asserting itself on a national level.

In consideration of the aforementioned arguments encapsulating the paradigms of Umma and nationalism, it becomes pertinent to elucidate the interconnectedness of these foundational constructs. This represents a pivotal aspect in furthering the research objective, asserting that while Kashmir is inherently anchored in the religious values and principles of the Islamic umma, it concurrently manifests a woven strand of nationalism. As previously expounded, while Umma inherently opposes a nationalist societal structure, the Kashmiri society, despite being a constituent of the umma, embraces nationalism. This suggests that this intricate interplay has contributed significantly to the inclusivity, secularity, and diversity discernible within the predominant conceptualization of a Kashmiri nation. A more in-depth exploration of this thematic interplay constitutes a focal point in the subsequent analysis of this chapter.

KASHMIR'S UMMA

As expounded earlier, Umma is characterised by an unwavering commitment to the ideology of a universal faith, transcending constraints imposed by territorial boundaries, geographic regions, genders, colours, languages, and ethnicities (Denny, 1975). This implies, in turn, that the conceptual framework of Umma does not inherently encompass the notion of a "nation" or, in a broader sense, 'nationalism.' Such a perspective has engendered significant controversy and debate within the Muslim world.

The ideological framework of Umma and Pan-Islamism functions as a cohesive force aiming to unite Muslims globally, drawing on their historical roots and the cultural legacy (Ahmad, 1975). In contemporary contexts, Muslim states have exhibited a degree of liberalism and acceptance towards the concept of nation-states. The establishment of nation states like Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh are evidence of the same. However, Muslim majority nations demonstrate rejection and unity in response to perceived attacks on their religion and identity (Ahmad, 1975). Instances such as support for organisations like al-Qaeda and

ISIS, participation in the Arab Spring, and involvement in conflicts like Bosnia and Chechnya underscore situations where Muslims globally have rallied against perceived threats to their religion (Moses, 2006). This dynamic raises a pivotal question concerning the potential coexistence of nationalism and the concept of the political unity of the Umma.

Aligned with existing scholarship (Ahmad, 1975, 43), three distinct theories of nationalism, namely Islamist nationalism, territorial nationalism, and integral nationalism (based on shared language, traditions, history, and race), have been conceptualized as mechanisms for achieving unification. Advocates of Islamic nationalism contend that the Muslim nation is intricately linked to the concept of the Islamic Umma (Koseoglu, 2021), asserting that the foundation of the Islamic country primarily rests on faith rather than considerations of race, language, or territory. This aligns with the principles of Pan-Islamism and the political unity of the Umma. Within this conceptual framework, one may contend that Kashmir does not conform to Islamic nationalism, as it incorporates elements of integral nationalism that encompass a shared history, language, and traditions, but does not align with the notion of a nation grounded in faith. Instead, Kashmir emphasises an ethnic identity (Akbar, 2002). Consequently, it becomes evident that Kashmir did not evolve under the paradigm of the Islamic Umma. In contemporary times, with a substantial majority adhering to Islam, the region often deploys its religious identity as a means of resistance against what is now perceived as a foreign power.

Furthermore, Turkey serves as an exemplar of the initial nation that abolished Islamic law in favour of adopting democratic principles as a means of modernization and development (Altunisik, 2005, 48-57). Furthermore, the existence of nations such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, predominantly embrace their religious identity of Islam while concurrently functioning as democratic nations, exhibiting nationalistic characteristics within defined nation-state boundaries (Rizvi, 1994). This presents a notable incongruity with the ideology of Islamist Umma that has historically influenced the beliefs of the populations in these two countries. Therefore, one could argue that while a region like Kashmir may have a predominantly Muslim population, automatically aligning with the model of Islamic Umma, it still adheres to the practices of nationalism (Ali, 2003; Moses, 2006). This is evident from the arguments presented in Chapter 1, highlighting why Kashmir has consistently projected

a shared collectiveness transcending religious affiliations, striving for a shared identity in resistance against perceived foreign powers in their quest for homeland. In summary, it can be deduced that the concepts of Umma and nationalism are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, contingent upon diverse ideas and mindsets clashing within different schools of thought and various groups of people coexisting within the same community.

Furthermore, to rationalise the coexistence and complexities between nationalism and the Umma, it is imperative to consider diverse interpretations of nation-state concepts and the emergence of overlapping identities in three distinct regions: Pakistan, India, and Kashmir (Chowdhary, 2010). Pakistan defines itself as a Muslim state and a secular country, while India, predominantly Hindu, also identifies with a secular ethos. In contrast, Kashmir presents three concurrent notions of nationhood within the same geographical space, propagated by various individuals, militant groups, and organisations (Bose, 2003). Primarily, there is the idea of the majority Kashmiri people striving for an independent Kashmir grounded in nationalist ideology against the concept of Islamic Umma. Secondly, there is the proposition of the amalgamation of Kashmir and Pakistan into a Muslim state, constituting a hybrid narrative that fuses nationalist ideals with the Muslim Umma. This narrative represents a crucial step in amplifying the Pan-Islamic ideology beyond the confines of Islamic nationalism that still advocates secularity within a Muslim majority. Finally, there is the emergence of a puritanical Islamic ideology contributing to the establishment of unity among all Muslims and the realisation of a Pan-Islamic caliphate guided by stringent Islamic principles based on the Umma (Geelani, 2019).

Presently, these three ideological narratives persist and intersect in the region of Kashmir, resulting in a collision and interweaving of the notions of nationalism and the Umma within a shared territorial boundary. It is crucial to recognize that these overlapping identities derive their potency from diverse sources, whether religious, nationalist, or rooted in extreme Islamic ideologies. This discussion will be further analysed in subsequent chapters.

COMPETING IDENTITIES

According to John Paul Lederach (2005) all conflicts are identity conflicts where the essential source of discord can be identified in the disparity between identities. The interpretation of the term 'identity' is highly contingent on the user and the context of its application. The psychological and socio-psychological differences inherent in conflicting identities not only sustain the conflict but also provide a fertile ground for its exploitation. This consciousness aligns itself with group identities through the acknowledgement and adherence to social, cultural, and religious norms (Lederach, 2005). As conflicts unfold, these social and psychological disparities intensify uncontrollably, resulting in a complete breakdown of understanding and empathy among the involved identity groups. The core of the Kashmir conflict can be traced to the overlapping characteristics of diverse identities (Zutshi, 2003). While the origins and value systems of individual identities are well comprehended, the challenge posed by overlapping identities is intricate and crucial, demanding examination. In this context, Chowdhary contends that "there is neither a singular nor a homogeneous character of identities" (2010, 6-7). The issue with overlapping identities lies in their internal differentiation, and irrespective of the multitude and complexity of identities. There is a divergence of political aspirations which leads to multiple identity politics.

Kashmir's geopolitical situation is intricately characterised by an interwoven, overlapping identity framework, incorporating religious nationalism epitomised by Pakistan, secular nationalism represented by India, and indigenous ethnic Kashmiri nationalism encapsulated in the term "Kashmiriyat." The mobilisation of individuals based on their Muslim identity in the context of the Kashmir conflict is facilitated by the enduring presence of Indian occupation (Navlakha, 2009). Those who might otherwise have identified with linguistic or cultural affinities find themselves drawn into a religious community that transcends the geographical confines of the conflict. The discriminatory practices against Muslims by Hindu India further exacerbate feelings of anxiety, alienation, and desperation among the Kashmiri people, compelling them to seek solace in their Muslim identity (Chenoy, 2006, 25). Notably, the younger demographic turns to Islamic militancy as a means of articulating their political discontent when alternative channels for resolution appear elusive (Bhatt, 2003, 221).

In contrast, India's constitution is firmly rooted in a commitment to secularism. The government perceives Kashmir as a microcosm of Pakistan, leading to the belief that exerting control over the region will enhance the legitimacy of its secular principles (Bhatt, 2003, 2016-217). Varshney confirms

> "The voluntary decision of a Muslim-majority Kashmir to join India bolstered the secular argument. Once part of India, however, Kashmir's decision to break away, if taken or if successful, threatens to empower Hindu nationalism. Therefore, in order to maintain its secularism and keep Hindu nationalism at bay, Kashmir, according to the secularists, must stay in India - if necessary, by force. That is the contradiction." (2010, 31).

Besides, beyond encountering an ideological adversary in the Muslim national identity of Pakistan, the secular national identity of India has grappled with an intra-party rival in Hindu nationalism (Varshney, 2010). Hindu nationalism has recently undergone a conceptual transformation in its conception of the Indian nation. This transformation has given rise to overlapping identities, including a secular identity aligned with the origins of secular India, and a Hindu India identity that embodies religious nationalism akin to the religious Muslim nationalism in Pakistan. It is important to note that both identities are in opposition to the secular and nationalistic identities of Kashmiri Muslims. Therefore, the coexistence of these diverse identities not only generates competition but also fosters sentiments of alienation and mutual threat.

The intricacy of the Muslim identity in Kashmir is not solely confined to external identity competition; it extends to an internal struggle encompassing issues of secularism versus non-secularism, inclusiveness, and exclusivity (Khan, 1994; Zutshi, 2003). This internal conflict serves as the genesis of the ongoing conflict, arising from the interplay of internal dynamics surrounding the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of Kashmir's identity, and external influences exerted by Pakistan and India. The dilemma revolves around whether Kashmir aligns with Indian secular nationalism as well as the growing trend of Hindu revivalism to maintain its status within the nation, integrates with the Muslim identity of

Pakistan based on shared roots in the Ummah, or pursues an independent path, free from both external identities, grounded in its distinctive and indigenous Kashmiriyat values.

Consequently, Kashmir has become a contested territory for competing nations (Chenoy, 2006, 24). The Kashmir conflict, within the context of this thesis, is rooted in a complex identity framework shaped by competing nationalisms, religious affiliations, and cultural nuances (Navlakha, 2009). The protracted nature of the conflict emanates from the clash of these persistent identities, manifesting in tensions between Hindu and Muslim faiths, spiritual Islam and secularism, extremist interpretations of Islam and moderate Islam, and the struggle between central government control and aspirations for self-governance (Navlakha, 2009). Varshney confirms:

> "The Kashmir problem is a result of three forces: religious nationalism represented by Pakistan, secular nationalism epitomised by India, and ethnic Kashmiri nationalism embodied in what Kashmiris call Kashmiriyat (being a Kashmiri)". (2010, 29).

Moreover, an inherent paradox emerges from India's secular nationalism within the framework of a liberal democratic system that ostensibly champions inclusivity (Varshney, 2010). The liberal-secular identity promised to Kashmiris in 1947 as a conduit for provisional accession, notably involving the commitment to a plebiscite, stands in stark contrast to the essence of liberalism. Varshney (2010) and Whitehead (2018) contend that individuals are not abstract entities but intricately linked to a nation, its historical trajectory, and the sentiments of nationalism. Liberal democracies conventionally function effectively after the establishment of a nation-state. However, the case of Kashmir exposes the inefficacy of liberalism in the face of robust nationalism, where Indian nationalism supersedes the ethnic nationalism of Kashmir. The Indian offer to Kashmir, seemingly assuring autonomy and self-determination within the union, appears incongruent with the principles of Indian secular nationalism.

Scholars argue that while a secular democratic structure may incorporate elements of liberalism, it is not an inherent prerequisite for its realisation. This implies that, within the context of nationalism, liberalism may not seamlessly align with democratic secularism,

introducing the potential for contradictions between nationalist ideals and liberal principles. Granting Kashmir, the option to secede, challenges the essence and foundations of Indian Nationalism, thereby complicating the intricate interplay of democracy, liberalism, and secularism in the nation-building process. This complexity is accentuated by the emergence of sub-state nationalism in Kashmir, taking the form of Kashmiri nationalism, which fundamentally contradicts the liberal ideals of India's democratic secular framework. Such contradictions raise pertinent questions regarding the sustainability of India's secular structure and constrain Kashmir from asserting its narrative of Kashmiri nationalism. Consequently, this prompts a Kashmiri nationalist to reject the notion of an inclusive Kashmir within India, leading them to align with the Muslim identity of Pakistan, finding common ground in religion.

On the other hand, as posited by Varshney (1991, 2010), Whitehead (2018), and Chenoy (2006), the decision of Kashmir's leadership to align with India based on secularism, rather than opting for Pakistan despite the religious affinity of the majority Islamic community, implies that Kashmiri nationalism is a subset of Indian nationalism. Consequently, Kashmir, enjoying state-level autonomy, is perceived as an integral part of the Indian federation. However, this assertion warrants rigorous scrutiny due to the potential for Kashmiri nationalism to align with India's secular ethos while remaining distinct from the overarching concept of India itself. This nuanced situation further presents a departure from the religious connotations associated with Pakistan's national identity, suggesting that Kashmir aspires to be governed not by its religious policy as a Muslim state but rather by the predominant, inclusive Hindu nationalistic policy of the Indian nation, thereby posing a simultaneous challenge and opportunity for the region.

As a result, this intricate scenario suggests a nuanced hybridity in Kashmir, caught within the geopolitical embrace of India and Pakistan, negotiating its complex web of religious and secular nationalisms while asserting Indian secularism as the most efficacious pathway to attain autonomy—the ultimate political objective. Juergensmeyer (1996) delineates two distinct forms of religious national identity, providing a framework through which individuals and collectives express their religious affiliations. Firstly, ethnic religious nationalism intertwines religion with a specific group of people and a particular geographic

locale, forming a cohesive identity that binds individuals to a specific place. The second form, ideological religious nationalism, situates religious concerns within a political context. Here, ethnic religious nationalism utilises religion for political ends, while ideological religious nationalism employs politics to achieve religious objectives. Juergensmeyer (1996) introduces a third category—ethno-ideological religious nationalism—characterised by opposition to an 'out-ethnic' group and secular members within one's own ethnicity. These classifications illustrate the diverse ways in which religion can intersect with national identity, often aligning more closely with ethnic rather than civic nationalism.

In light of these distinctions, when the Kashmiri identity and specifically the identity of Kashmiri Muslims face challenges from a robust, militaristic Hindu Indian identity, arising from the competitive dynamics between Indian nationalism and Kashmiri nationalism, there is a collective call for Azadi (freedom) and an alignment with Pakistan grounded in religious nationalism. In other words, the nationalist discourse in the Kashmir Valley has undergone a progressive shift from advocating for plebiscites (raishumari) to embracing the idea of Azadi (independence), with Azadi currently being the predominant narrative (Tremblay, 1996, 480). Various irredentist and secessionist factions have effectively mobilised the Kashmiri population, promoting political alignment with Pakistan and the establishment of an independent state, respectively, articulated through the slogans "Azadi" and "raishumari" (self-determination) (Sharma, 2020, 162). On the other hand, secular nationalists in Kashmir advocate for either complete independence or continued governance within a secular Indian state based on Kashmiriyat (Arakotaram, 2009, 34-35). Both of these tendencies emerge as a strategy to safeguard the imperilled Kashmir and Kashmiri Muslim identities from the predominance of Indian nationalism and Hindu-majority nations. However, when both the identities of Pakistan's Muslim populace and India's Hindu populace pose threats to the distinct Kashmiri identity, the region opts to reject both trajectories, instead, it advocates for the establishment of an independent Muslim-majority nation while concurrently upholding a secular framework to protect its minority communities. This strategic response serves as a testament to the absence of pan-Islamism in Kashmir's aspirations. Instead, it relies on its religious identity, rooted in the collective Ummah, as a defensive mechanism to navigate the complex socio-political landscape. Hence, it is justifiable to assert that Kashmir exhibits a dynamic and unfixed identity structure,

undergoing shifts between religious and secular revivals influenced by prevailing forces asserting their claims to Kashmir's aspirations. When confronted with challenges to its Kashmiri Muslim identity, the region deviates from its usual secular inclusivity, opting for an exclusive stance as a defensive measure (Varshney, 1991; Chowdhary, 2010). It is imperative to underscore that such behaviour does not categorise Kashmir as adhering strictly to radical Pan-Islamism. Rather, it signifies a strategic approach for reconciliation and seeking solace in the face of dominant forces. Melucci (1995) contends that individuals may harbour a multitude of identities; however, in prolonged conflicts, a prevailing identity tends to crystallise as a defining characteristic, serving as a means to comprehend both the conflict and one's position within it.

Religion, often viewed as an integral and inseparable component, exerts a multifaceted influence on various aspects of society and politics (Brubaker, 2015; James and Ozdamar, 2005). In the context of this study, religion is conceptualised through its ability to either reinforce or undermine the legitimacy of governments (James and Ozdamar, 2005, 448). From a Marxist perspective, the relationship between state legitimacy and religion is acknowledged as a mechanism employed by both ruling and opposing social classes to further their respective political objectives (James and Ozdamar, 2005, 448-449). Similarly, the feminist view of religion often aligns with the functionalist and Marxist's view stating religion as a traditionalist and orthodox means of achieving status quo (Newman, 1994; Ruether, 1981; Anderson, 1998; Anderson and Clack, 2003). Additionally, religion plays a crucial role in establishing a secure identity, both at an individual and collective level (Birnir and Oversos, 2019). Moreover, the organisation of political activities and mobilisation is significantly influenced by religious factors. In alignment with this definition, religion is construed as a collective or personal identity possessing the potential to inspire political mobilisation and impact the legitimacy of governments and policies (Fox and Sandler, 2003, 559-588).

Ethnic conflicts often manifest a distinct religious dimension, where religion serves as a significant component of ethnicity, with certain ethnic groups primarily rooted in religious affiliations (Fox, 2002). The intricate relationship between religion and ethnicity is particularly salient in the context of Kashmir. The characterization of an ethnic group in this

region is established through a consensus of beliefs among its constituents, and the ensuing conflict often assumes an ethnic nature. When disputing factions adhere to fundamentally different faiths, such conflicts are termed "ethno-religious" by Fox (2002, 70), a categorization well exemplified by the situation in Kashmir. The strategic Islamic crescent in the region, posing a challenge to India, elevates the significance of the Kashmir issue and intensifies the influence of a robust Islamic ideology in shaping Indian foreign policy (James and Ozdamar, 2005). Religion, in this context, plays a substantial role in shaping ethnicity, with specific ethnic groups primarily tracing their origins to religious affiliations (Fox, 2002). The recent upsurge of Islam has heightened India's concerns about potential disintegration. Importantly, the influence of religion on a nation's foreign policy is not unidirectional; the interactions between foreign nations and domestic or subnational entities are equally pivotal in shaping foreign policy, with subnational forces exerting influence on the global stage (Chadda, 1997; Madan, 1997, 53-71; Prabha, 2000).

The Kashmiri ethnicity is deeply intertwined with profound religious implications, reflecting the imposition of a religious identity within the Kashmiri context through diverse manifestations. This encompasses the utilisation of a collective ethnic religious identity for nation-building endeavours and the promotion of modernization rooted in a conspicuously exclusive religious identity (James and Ozdamar, 2005). Religion, in this context, plays a substantial role in shaping ethnicity, with specific ethnic groups primarily tracing their origins to religious affiliations (Fox, 2002). When ethnic conflicts are predominantly fuelled by religious disparities, they acquire a distinct religious dimension, a classification denoted as "ethno-religious" conflicts by Fox (2002, 70). The conflict in Kashmir serves as a poignant exemplification of this category.

In this context, James and Ozdamar state that conflicts stemming from ethnicity-related factors hold comparable significance to issues that profoundly influence the trajectory of international relations, including political and economic globalisation, power dynamics, regionalization, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They emphasise that the Kashmir case possesses a noteworthy ethno-religious dimension within India, impacting interstate dynamics. The sources of domestic contention, rooted in both

ethnic and religious factors, interplay with state-level elements shaping the ethnic conflict, such as political leadership, and external factors contributing to its internationalisation (2005, 449).

In the context of Kashmir, the pursuit of Azadi (freedom) nationalism is a significant dimension, largely asserted by a specific segment of the Kashmiri population aspiring for an independent and self-determined Kashmir, characterised by a shared historical narrative, social and cultural identity (Cockell, 2000, 326). Madan (1998, 984-986) argues that the religious and inclusive diversity within the Kashmiri populace results in diverse perspectives, with Hindus perceived as unbelievers from the Muslim standpoint and Muslims considered immoral by Hindus. Thus, apart from religion, there exists no other significant symbol of collective identity capable of unifying support. Malik (1992, 203-214) emphasises the pivotal role of religion, positing that Kashmiri Muslims consider it a defining characteristic of their identity. Shah (2014, 2) underscores the centrality of Islam as the predominant cultural identity for the majority, asserting that Islam, along with local culture, has been instrumental in shaping various identities. However, Kashmiri Muslims exhibit heterogeneity due to their affiliation with either the Sunni or Shia sects and their support for either moderate or radical Islam (Varshney, 2010).

It is crucial to recognize the progressive political impact on the identity of the Muslim population in Kashmir. The Kashmiri Muslim identity draws mobilised support not only from religious considerations but also aligns with the Kashmiri identity, centred on Kashmiriyat as its cultural identity (Bamzai, 1973; Bazaz, 1954). Simultaneously, religious nationalism seeks to unite Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds into a unified Muslim community known as the "Muslim Ummah" (Akram, 2007, 385-410; Mitra, 2014). This suggests that in this case, the role of religion, specifically Kashmiri Muslim identity associated with Kashmiriyat, is asserted as the only identity that can create unifying support and solidarity among all Muslims, despite conflicts and diverse perspectives against external forces and threats such as Hindu India, Indian nationalism, or Pakistan's radical concept of Islam. This is where religion tends to exhibit tendencies of exclusivity and orthodoxy, which represents Muslims' synergy and solidarity, as Mitra (2014) and Lamb (1992) suggest that community aspirations toward nationalism or sub-nationalism determine identity. The transformation of national

liberation aspirations in Kashmir into a call for 'jihad' and 'Islam in danger,' and the subsequent emergence of internal security challenges for India can be seen as an outcome of this identity transformation, stemming from the transition from ethnic nationalism to a state-subverting form of ethnic nationalism (Mitra, 2014).

Development and Politicisation of the Muslim Identity

It is crucial to acknowledge that the evolution of Kashmiri Muslim identity has transformed concurrent with the conflict, progressing from pre-colonial Kashmir in the historical era to a contemporary political dispute and it continues to evolve (Chowdhary, 1998). The evolution aligns with the heightened political awareness of the region, initially under the banner of religion and subsequently in pursuit of secular objectives. It is important to note that the assertion of political identity based on religion doesn't inherently imply grounding politics in communal principles (Chowdhary, 1998, 2). The politicisation of the Hindu community in Kashmir sought to maintain their dominant position, while the politicisation of the Muslim community sought to address their state of powerlessness and deprivation (Chowdhary, 1998, 3).

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), representing Hindu nationalists in India, attributed the cause of Indian division to criticism of the Muslim question and perceived Muslim disloyalty to India (Varshney, 1991, 197). This stance intensified religious nationalism in Kashmir, creating a schism with secular nationalist Muslims. The perceived threat to Kashmiri identity is rooted in Indian policies, particularly the "systematic human rights violations by Indian security forces" (Cockell, 2000, 328). The occupation of Kashmir by a foreign army is the foremost concern from the perspective of the Kashmiri people (Dreze, 2000). According to Varshney (2010), individuals tend to conceal characteristics perceived as threatening to their identity by another group. However, concealing ethnic identity proves challenging due to the physical nature of certain ethnic indicators.

Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham (2016) propose that ethnic markers serve two functions: firstly, the potency of ethnic markers distinguishing members of one group from their rivals

facilitates discriminatory treatment; secondly, the strength of these markers hampers assimilation and heightens the likelihood of intergroup conflict. Beyond India's policies fostering religious nationalism in Kashmir, Pakistan's actions have also contributed to the schism between secular and religious nationalism in the region. This will be further explored in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the promotion of Muslim identity has historically been accompanied by external oppression and threats in pursuit of their homeland rather than the establishment of a nation founded on ethnic-religious identity that advocates Pan-Islamic Kashmir based on Islamic law. As a result, this assertion functions as a safeguard for religious and communal interests, aiming to distinguish themselves from the concept of India, India's oppression, and deprivation as well as Pakistan's domination based on the same root of religion. With regard to this, some scholars argue that the pure distinction between civic-national states and ethnic-national states does not exist and that elements of one are contained in the other (Smith, A.D., 1991; Yack, 1996). Given this view, it follows that citizens of any given state will maintain elements of both civic-national and ethnic-national identities. Nevertheless, some societies and national projects emphasise the civic component while others emphasise the ethnic-religious one.

Moreover, in addition to safeguarding their religious and political identity in resistance against the assimilative and integrative measures of the Indian state, the Kashmiri resistance is averse to being entangled in the tumultuous and ungoverned territories that may intermittently arise due to the oppositional endeavours of secessionist and nationalist groups (Tremblay, 2018, 223; Zutshi, 2018). Vinthagen and Johansson assert that ''accommodation is not necessarily the opposite of resistance", and that the usage of contradictory practices "utilising creative and complex combinations" amounts, in practice, to resistance acts on the part of common citizenry (2013, 57, 61). This suggests that the preservation of the majority Muslim religious identity in Kashmir under the secular umbrella of the predominant Hindu-Indian nationalism can create a paradox wherein the prevalent religious identity in Kashmir becomes a minority within the broader context of India. Consequently, this dynamic tends to elicit a political response from Kashmir, which leads to the process of politicisation of the Muslim community in Kashmir as a consequential response to their awareness of deprivation and powerlessness caused by the politicisation of the Hindu community and Indian nationalism (Chowdhary, 1998, 7).

It is noteworthy that for over six decades, Kashmiri Muslims have exhibited a spectrum of allegiances, involving resistance against state authority, support for secessionist and nationalist entities, and alignment with governmental institutions for material benefits and personal security (Tremblay, 2018, 223). This pattern signifies that during epochs wherein Kashmiri Muslims disassociate themselves from the authoritative Hindu identity of India, they engage in the mobilisation of their religious Muslim identity as a means to articulate and champion the cause of their homeland within a multifaceted political and cultural framework.

Since 1948, the Kashmiri public discourse has progressively evolved from the advocacy for raishumari (self-determination), subsequently advancing to autonomy, and ultimately culminating in the aspiration for Azadi (freedom). The term "Azadi" encapsulates diverse connotations, including raishumari itself (the right to self-determination affirmed by the UN Security Council Resolution in 1948), the preservation of Article 370 as initially stipulated in 1950-52, the reinstatement of Kashmir as a distinct nation rather than a mere 'riyasat' (state within India), and the safeguarding of the religious identity, dignity, and human rights of Kashmiri Muslims (Tremblay, 2018, 235; Devadas, 2019). In the protracted struggle for Azadi spanning multiple generations, each succeeding cohort introduces novel motivations and intentions to the discourse, reinterpreting it based on varied sets of memories and multi-layered experiences stemming from grievances (Greenfeld, 1992, 250).

Notably, the offspring of the 1989 conflict, having matured over the last two decades, have, among other influences, grown up amidst violence (both militant and state-sponsored), the imposition of control over the streets by security forces, and an absence of interaction with their Hindu neighbours that is the Kashmiri pandit refugees in India. For this generation, Kashmiriyat assumes the character of an ideological and idealised construct rather than a tangible lived experience. Eickelman and Anderson (2003, 2-5) posit that engagements with new technologies bring forth transformative manifestations in publicly shared notions of community, identity, and leadership, notwithstanding the users' assertions of an unaltered continuity with the past.

Consequently, the Kashmiri Muslim identity assumes the guise of the Muslim Umma in the face of Kashmiri nationalism and Kashmiriyat during these phases, acting as a unifying force fostering synergistic solidarity. Kaufman (2001) contends that when violence escalates to a point where ethnic communities can no longer rely on state protection, each community organises itself to assume responsibility for its security. This often results in the involvement of other states, typically supporting the ethnic group in need, leading to the internationalisation of the conflict. Furthermore, Van Evera argues that ethnic conflicts thrust neighbouring states and ethnic groups into precarious security situations, triggering external intervention, cascade effects, and international conflict (1994, 5-39). As a result, the Muslim identity predominantly leverages its religious essence to articulate demands and rights through a political avenue, deliberately dissociating itself from strict adherence to Islamic jurisprudence. While upholding the Muslim identity as its foundational impetus, it intentionally excludes notions of Islamic supremacy and the imposition of Islamic laws from its cultural framework. This proposition underscores the legitimacy of the Muslim identity in the pursuit of a homeland, Kashmir, and its nationalistic values, rather than framing it as a Pan-Islamic territory.

It is imperative to assert that the development of the Kashmiri Muslim identity has undergone diverse phases of evolution within the region. The initial assertion of the Muslim identity was profoundly influenced by the socioeconomic conditions prevailing during the Dogra rule in Kashmir, characterised by the dominance of the final Hindu dynasty, as expounded in Chapter 1. Subsequently, in the early stages of the politicisation of the Kashmiri Muslim identity, a connection was established between the widespread marginalisation of the Kashmiri Muslim community and their religious allegiance (Abdullah, 1993, Bamzai, 1973). Despite the communal nature of the politicised Muslim identity, its influence on the broader political landscape of Kashmir remained relatively constrained over an extended duration. Chowdhary in her article '*The Muslim Identity and the Politics of Fundamentalism in Kashmir,* states that this limitation was ascribed to the perception that "Such a politics, in their opinion, did not match with the traditional ethos of Kashmir and had the impact of shaking the roots of harmony existing between Hindus and Muslims."(Bamzai, 1973, 658 cited in Chowdhary, 1998, 14).

Furthermore, this phase in the dynamic political milieu of Kashmir contributed to the formulation of a political identity and response among the Kashmiri populace that transcended religious affiliations. It materialised as a secular and inclusive political consciousness, distinct from the frameworks of Pan-Islamism and Islamic law as Chowdhary (1998) argues that the characteristics of the political movement in this phase exhibited notable differences compared to the initial period, primarily in three dimensions: firstly, by transcending the limited scope of elite politics and expanding the mass base; secondly, through the radicalization and secularisation of the objectives driving the political movement; and thirdly, by establishing a specific ideological and normative framework.

In addition, the pivotal role played by the Kashmiri leadership and the evolution of political awareness were instrumental in the secularisation and politicisation of the Kashmiri Muslim identity, directing it beyond mere religious considerations toward a vision of a socialist and democratic society. This ideological shift, rooted in the concept of Kashmiriyat introduced in Chapter 1, aimed to strengthen the nationalist movement against the Hindu ruler (Chowdhary, 1998; Tremblay, 2018). Consequently, this transformation marginalised the concurrent nationalist discourse, which aspired for liberation from Hindu dominion to establish an Islamic society, in favour of endorsing an inclusive secular approach for Kashmir. The maxim "Sher-e-Kashmir ka kaya Irshad - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh Ittehaad" (What is the message of the Lion of Kashmir [Sheikh Abdullah] - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh Unity) encapsulated the essence of Kashmiri nationalism, encouraging Kashmiri Muslims to uphold their religious faith while simultaneously expressing allegiance to Kashmiriyat, the secular Kashmiri identity. Instrumentalist perspectives posit that leaders bear significant responsibility for accentuating identity divisions, defined as "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, 20 cited in Lee, 2014). Furthermore, institutionalists contend that political institutions play a pivotal role in the establishment and perpetuation of ethnic cleavages. The behaviours and lifestyles of individuals are substantially influenced by the prevailing social structures, a perspective that can be elucidated through the framework of complex adaptive systems theory (Maiese, 2003; Burton, 1990, 240-250; Lederach, 1997, 80-85).

Consequently, the tranquillity in Kashmir now remains in a precarious state, and the array of diverse and numerous forms of opposition present potential obstacles to any short-term resolution that might be sought through an enhanced governance approach (Spencer, 2013, 77). The subsequent scrutiny of the protracted Kashmir conflict underscores the dynamic and intricate nature of resistance patterns, involving the interplay between organized and grassroots resistance that is not inherently clandestine, covert, or muted (Gutmann, 1993, p. 86). The evolving circumstances and contexts further facilitate accommodation and resistance. Tremblay and Bhatia (2020, 224) posit that within the dynamic contexts of the Kashmir conflict, collective memories of subjugation have emerged as a significant factor since the annexation by India in 1947. This has led to the heightened awareness of hegemonic forces among Kashmiri Muslims, thereby expanding the potential for an ongoing and active resistance movement against the state. The interconnected subaltern Kashmiri consciousness (Cockell, 2000) engenders a dynamic and reciprocal process: firstly, a pursuit of Azadi, and secondly, a quest for efficient and effective local governance to secure the necessities for daily survival. According to Tremblay and Bhatia (2020, 224) and Zutshi (2017), the approach adopted by the Valley's Muslims is contingent upon the state's response to Kashmiri unrest. When the state assumes a dominant position, it formulates reconciliation strategies, influencing the response of Kashmiri resisters who may advocate for Azadi, good governance, or both, or align themselves with secessionists and nationalists in their collective public discourse stemming the desire of the Kashmiri opposition grounded in a sense to be different. Moreover, the nationalistic vision of this Muslim identity is a subject of discussion the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this chapter has delved into the intricate dynamics among Umma, Pan-Islamism, and nationalism, with a specific focus on the Kashmir context. It has been established that Umma serves as a universal faith-based community for Muslims, encompassing any Muslim individual or nation within its fold automatically. Furthermore, the principles of Pan-Islamism are steered by the precepts of the Muslim or Islamic Umma. However, both Umma and Pan-Islamism pose challenges to the idea of nationalism, contesting the delineation of nation-state boundaries and challenging Western

conceptualizations of nationalism. The arguments presented in this chapter posit that, notwithstanding the conceptual opposition between Umma, Pan-Islamism, and nationalism, Muslim nations exhibit a simultaneous embrace of nation-state boundaries, implying a measure of compatibility between these concepts. The relationship between Umma and nationalism is characterised as both exclusive and inclusive. Bangladesh and Pakistan serve as empirical instances wherein Muslim majority nation-states have embraced democracy as their governing framework rather than Islamic law, contrasting with Afghanistan, which stands as evidence of a nation adhering to the governance principles of Islamic law. Through an examination of the case of Kashmir, a region with a Muslim-majority population, it becomes apparent that Kashmir preserves the essence of Pan-Islamism ingrained in the Umma philosophy. However, it has sincerely nurtured itself within a nationalistic characteristic that diverges from the tenets of Pan-Islamism or establishment of an Islamic law system. The syncretic identity of Kashmiriyat, characterised by a fusion of multiple religions and beliefs, introduces a layer of intricacy to the identity of Kashmir. Moreover, the chapter underscores the heterogeneity of the Kashmir conflict, highlighting the simultaneous coexistence of liberal and extremist tendencies. It is apparent that the aftermath of the decline of the Ottoman Empire has imparted a lasting impact on the Muslim world, giving rise to a profound sense of destitution. This collective experience has served as a catalyst for a shared yearning for reformation and revivalism, constituting a collective identity in response to perceived oppression. Moreover, the pivotal aspect of this revivalism lies in its imperative to resist the Western construct of "nationalism," encouraging individuals to coalesce under a collective identity as a means of addressing external pressures. Concurrently, it propels individuals towards heightened levels of piety, fostering a more stringent adherence to Quranic principles and Sunna. The geopolitical events involving Western interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, alongside the recent escalation of Hindu nationalism in India, have amplified the appeal of this proposition within Muslim societies. In this milieu, sentiments of Pan-Islamism or governance under Islamic law have garnered increased prominence and popularity. Furthermore, recognition is given to the evolving nature of the Umma philosophy, influenced by globalization, resulting in varied notions of the Kashmiri nation. Divergent narratives emerge, one advocating for an independent identity and another aligning with an Islamist vision for Kashmir, occasionally inclusive and at other times exclusive of the notion of Kashmir as a secular nation. In the

contemporary milieu, the modern conceptualizations of state, nation, boundaries, nationalism, and patriotism, conflicting with the principles of Umma, have given rise to issues pertaining to identity. The research posits that the Kashmir conflict is intricate and multifaceted, reflecting a spectrum of aspirations and ideologies within the region.

Chapter 3: The evolution of Socio Kashmir post-1947: Competing visions of Kashmiri nationalism and Islamist Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the interconnected phenomena of Kashmiri nationalism and Islamist Kashmir, both of which have significantly shaped the socio-political landscape of the region. Comprehensively exploring these concepts and their historical evolution in Kashmir, lays a solid foundation for investigating the shifts in militant movements and their evolving ideologies.

To underscore the theme of kashmiri nationalism this chapter begins with an analysis of the nationalism concept within the Kashmiri context, examining its development across distinct historical periods from 1931 to 1947. This critical analysis further delves into the desire of an independent Kashmiri nation that stands in contrast to the radical idea of a Pan Islamic nation. In parallel, the chapter critically assesses the narrative of Islamist Kashmir, positioning it as a counterpoint to Kashmiri nationalism. This analysis encompasses the diverse theological Islamic schools of thought operative in the region, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Ahl-e-Hadith and Wahhabism. An integral aspect of this discussion is the exhaustive transformation in the political landscape of Kashmir since partition, transitioning from a relatively peaceful nature to one characterised by heightened religious radicalization, with Wahhabism assuming a prominent role. Nevertheless, the argument posed by this chapter helps the research understand the minor shift in the adherence towards the more puritanical approach towards Wahhabism and substantiates the more prominent role of Sufi islam in the kashmiri valley. Subsequently, through the use of event-based case studies spanning 2008-2010, the chapter delves into the prevalent sentiments of alienation and mistrust harboured by a segment of the Kashmiri population toward all political parties. This period acts as a significant catalyst in increasing radicalisation within the youth following the Indian state atrocities. This element also acts as driving purposes of joining insurgency toward more

radicalised and religious-based causes. This transformation is a crucial factor in understanding the evolving political and religious dynamics within Kashmir towards a lack of trust and the disillusionment with politics.

KASHMIRI NATIONALISM

The concept of Kashmiri nationalism centres around the Kashmiris' desires and aspirations towards the establishment of Kashmir as a separate identity and an independent nation based on a sense of belonging and a sense of pride towards their own culture of traditions. Furthermore, it leads to the psychology of committing to and pursuing the unity, independence and liberty of a national community as demonstrated by the definition of nationalism in Chapter 2. Goodman (2017) and Malešević (2013) note the prominence of nationalism and nationalist movements as pivotal agents of societal transformation. However, it is important to emphasise that nationalist movements, while sharing some commonalities with other social movements, exhibit distinctive characteristics that set them apart. Notably, they often invoke notions like rights and liberty, which are also fundamental to movements against racism and struggles for independence. Nevertheless, scholars of nationalism concur on a defining criterion that distinguishes nationalist movements from other social movements. According to these scholars (Breuilly, 1993, 9; Smith, 1971, 171), the key distinguishing feature of nationalist movements is their overarching aim to attain, establish, and subsequently safeguard state sovereignty.

The diversity of ethnicities and overlapping identities in the land of Kashmir had led to the emergence of multiple aspirations of Kashmiri citizens, which also resulted in various demands and the desire to fight for the rights of individuals in a democratic manner (Sohal, 2022, 997-1005). Moreover, the narrative of independent Kashmir evolved in the period between 1931 and 1971 due to a chain of important historical events that had incubated Kashmiris' growing motives and nurtured their entangled intentions in pursuit

of Kashmir's separatism from the Indian state (Jack, 1956, 454-456). The early Kashmiri independence movement, whose origins may be traced back to the revolt against the Dogra dynasty in the 1930s and after 1947, against Indian control, had viewed itself primarily as a nationalist battle in nature (Wani, M.G., 2010). From the 1930s to 1947, the Kashmiri movement, started by the dynamic Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, aimed at contesting the despotic rule of the Dogra and demanded a representative role for Kashmiri Muslims asserting the Kashmiri Muslim identity (Chowdhary, 2010). Eventually, after the Kashmiri Muslim identity secularised, the Kashmiri struggle adopted the character of a national liberation movement thereafter pushing for a referendum (Rai Shumaari) and the call for an independent democratic state or the right to self-rule (Balagopal, 1996; Akbar, 2002). To understand the essence of Kashmiri nationalism, it is imperative to understand the nature of the uprising of 1931 against the Maharaja King of Kashmir as well as understand the reasons behind the phenomenon. Furthermore, to get a better grasp of the nationalist sentiments involved, it is extremely important to understand the significant transformation of the Muslim Conference of Kashmir, an organisation that was set up to protect the rights of Muslim subjects into a National Conference that was secular, and nationalistic by nature.

Nationalistic Kashmir's 1931 revolt

The 1931 uprising against Maharaja Hari Singh can be better comprehended when examined within the context of the socio-economic and political conditions prevalent in Kashmir at the time (Zutshi, 2003; Akbar, 2002). Under the reign of Maharaja Hari Sign, the last princely ruler of Kashmir, nearly every aspect of the life of the citizens was subjected to taxation except for air and water, as documented by Walter Lawrence, the settlement officer (Akbar, 2002). Moreover, among the most oppressive facets in this era was the system of "Begar," a form of forced labour. In addition to this context, P.N. Kaul Bamzai (1973) depicted the ruling establishment isolated from the broader

populace, shielded by a select few favourites, and detached from direct interactions with the people. This isolation was further exacerbated by centuries of oppression and misrule, which had subjected the Kashmiri population to onerous taxation, poverty, and deprivation. Moreover, Lord Birdwood expressed that a wide range of vocations, "including carpenters, boatmen, butchers, bakers, and even prostitutes, were subject to taxation" (1956, cited in Akbar, 2002, 90) illustrating the oppressive fiscal policies that burdened the Kashmiri people. This resentment among the educated class reflected the broader disquiet among the Kashmiri populace, who had long endured the burdens of economic hardship and political neglect, setting the stage for the discontent that culminated in the 1931 uprising against the king (Akbar, 2002, 90; Bamzai, 1973).

Furthermore, Sir Albion Banerjee, the foreign and political minister of British India in 1939 characterised Jammu and Kashmir as a region grappling with multiple disadvantages, including a large illiterate Muslim population living in poverty and under dire economic conditions in the villages (cited in Akbar, 2002, 89). He also notes that these inhabitants were subject to a governance structure that treated them as passive subjects, without appropriate channels for voicing grievances and concerns (cited in Akbar, 2002, 89). This disconnection between the government and the people, alongside the prevailing economic hardships and absence of effective means for addressing grievances, set the stage for the 1931 uprising as a response to these deeply rooted socio-economic and political issues (cited in Akbar, 2002, 89). As a consequence, the hardships and mistreatment endured by the Kashmiri population during the era of oppression under Dogra rule, encompassing onerous taxes, economic deprivation, and multifaceted social, political, and cultural discrimination, have sown the seeds of a nationalistic spirit and a fervent aspiration for a more self-determined existence among the Kashmiri people (Zutshi, 2003; Bamzai, 1973; Akbar, 2002; Birdwood, 1956). However, this sentiment originated with the emergence of Muslim identity as a means to assert their rights, freedoms, and separatist aspirations against the Dogra rule (Chowdhary, 1998; Tremblay, 1996, 480-493). As Shiller in his article '*What's Behind a Rise in Ethnic Nationalism?*' notes "Global economic weakness and a rise in inequality

appear to be causing a disturbing growth in ethnic nationalism" (14 October 2016). Within this context, Lawson (1992) contends that instances of economic deprivation and inequality have frequently served as potent catalysts, sparking the flames of nationalist uprisings, and solidifying a collective sense of ethnic identity.

The 1931 uprising against the Dogra rule exemplifies this, wherein the denial of cultural and political rights, coupled with a lack of active power-sharing for Kashmiri citizens through constitutional arrangements, not only fails to bridge the poverty gap but, when combined with frustration and resentment over the sluggish development of democratic governance structures and a significant disconnection between government apparatus and the populace, fosters the gradual emergence of Kashmiri nationalism and ethnic resurgence. Pamir (1997) posits that the phenomenon, characterised as protest nationalism, can broadly be understood as a response to perceived social, political, cultural, or economic insecurities either directly induced or subsequently exploited by state policies.

Centuries of subjugation have left an indelible imprint on the collective psyche of the Kashmiri populace, fostering a fervent desire for self-governance and emancipation from the governance of the Maharaja. The early demonstrations, preceding the watershed events of 1931, distinguished themselves through a notable transition: they evolved from primarily addressing economic exploitation to demanding political rights as equal citizens of Kashmir. This transformation marked the onset of a political awakening and the rise of political consciousness among the Kashmiri people (Wani, 2010; Chowdhary, 1998). Barkun (1985) posits that revivals are characterised by an emotional resurgence of religious fervour, whereas awakenings entail a more profound and enduring shift in values and thought patterns. In this context, the revival of Muslim identity in Kashmir signifies an emotional outpouring in response to perceived infringements upon the rights of the Kashmiri Muslim populace and the mistreatment under Dogra rule. This emotional resurgence precipitates a reorientation of thoughts and values, manifesting in a determination to reclaim their rights and advocate for the equality of Kashmiri

Muslims, ultimately seeking separatism from the rule of the Maharaja. It is within this historical context that the inception of political awakening in the mindset of the Kashmiri people can be discerned.

It is imperative to underscore that the upheaval surrounding the confrontation between the Kashmiri Muslim identity and the oppressive Dogra rule was fundamentally grounded in a burgeoning nationalistic sentiment, wherein the religious element emerged as a salient factor utilised to assert the Kashmiriyat identity and reclaim the rights of the Kashmiri people. The interplay of ethnicity and religion played a pivotal role in the nascent stages of political consciousness and nationalism among the Kashmiri populace, acting as a catalyst for a unified and cohesive force in the early phases of the Kashmiri liberation movement (Sufi, 1974). Moreover, juxtaposed with the contemporary context, it becomes evident that the Kashmiri Muslim identity tends to assert itself with heightened vigour in response to perceived threats and injustices, whether emanating from historical figures such as Maharaja Hari Singh or the current Hindu nationalist administration. During such periods of adversity, the Kashmiri Muslim identity often derives resilience from its religious underpinnings. However, it is crucial to note that this assertion does not connote exclusivity or extremism; rather, it signifies an articulation of the collective consciousness of the Kashmiri populace (Geelani, 2019). Within this context, the politicisation of the Kashmiri Muslim identity began with the establishment of the 'All–Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference' in 1932 (Samad, 1995, 65-67). This organisation distinctly represented the political interests of the Muslim demographic within the state (Akbar, 2002). In its inception, there was a concerted effort to cultivate the notion of a united Muslim response from within the state, aligning itself with the foundational tenets of nationalism (Snedden, 2015). The Kashmiri nationalist movement, colloquially known as Tehreek-e-Azadi or the Freedom Movement, is conventionally acknowledged to have materialised in 1931 (Bazaz, 1954, 154), coinciding with overt challenges to the authority of the Dogra Government in Kashmir (Zutshi, 1986, 228). Moreover, instead of forging a united front to liberate Kashmir from Dogra rule, the political organisations active in Kashmir during this period

were predominantly preoccupied with consolidating their positions to assert exclusive representation of the populace (Rai, 2004, 279–280).

Notwithstanding the initial role of religion in safeguarding the rights of Kashmiri Muslims and mobilising forces for the nationalist cause, it is argued that the conflict surrounding the 1931 revolt transcended a mere religious dichotomy between Muslims and the Dogra rule (Chowdhary, 2010). Instead, it is posited that the uprising was fundamentally rooted in a class struggle, with the landed aristocracy and officialdom predominantly being controlled by the Pandits, constituting a mere 6% of the total population according to the Census of India in 1931 (Wani, 2010). Nationalism during this period actively sought to instil secular values and resisted the proliferation of communalism. In this vein, the slogan "Hindu Muslim Sikh Etihad" gained prominence within the Kashmir movement, reflecting the overarching Kashmiriyat identity that emphasised peaceful harmony among diverse religious communities in the region, thereby mitigating the predominant focus on a specific religion, such as Islam, at certain junctures in this historical epoch (Mushtaq and Dwivedi, 2022, 121).

As temporal progression unfolded, the political landscape underwent a discernible shift toward more secular orientations, wherein the secular dimension of the nationalistic movement, intertwined with enduring Kashmiriyat values, asserted a more dominant presence compared to the initial emphasis on religious identity (Sufi, 1974; Bazaz, 1954, 120-130; Cockell, 2000). This evolution, initially grounded in the disparate socioeconomic conditions of Hindu and Muslim communities, manifested in distinct trajectories of political mobilisation (Zutshi, 1986). By framing their political demands within a specific Muslim context, these communities laid the groundwork for the nascent political movement in Kashmir (Bamzai, 1973).

Consequently, the politicisation of Muslim identity within the broader demands for a nationalist, self-determined Kashmir characterises the 1931 revolt against the Maharaja as indicative of proto-nationalism (Taseer, 1973, 325–326). Proto nationalism is

conceptualised as the early manifestation of confrontations against political oppression by the state or external powers (Jacobson, 2004; Rotimi and Ogen, 2008; Ubaku, Emeh, and Anyikwa, 2014). Hobsbawn (1990) defines proto nationalism as a deliberately cultivated bond or identity reinforced through the instrumentalization of both myth and history to mobilise the collective sentiment of a particular people. In this regard, the utilisation of religion among Kashmiri Muslims during this phase serves as a unifying force, stimulating sentiments for a self-determined and democratic nation where the oppression and communal tendency imposed by the ruling government can be eradicated and an improved quality of life can be attained. Hobsbawn (1990) and Dreyfus (2005) further argue that proto nationalism represents the resurgence of pre-modern sentiments and the attachment to a collective imagined community. This implies that the community may not be bonded by blood or descent but could be linked through shared language, religion, culture, or a constructed vernacular embedded with historical narratives. The recollection of such history rekindles solidarity among the people.

Secularisation of the Muslim identity

As previously discussed, the prevailing circumstances in Kashmir, characterised by the autocratic rule of the Maharaja, initially triggered an uprising rooted in the Muslim identity. However, as the movement that initially emphasised the Muslim dimension began to evolve, it gradually transitioned into a broader, more inclusive Kashmiri character (Wani, 2010). While the discrimination perpetuated by the Maharaja could be construed as communal, the movement's response transformed its discourse into a more secular nature, aligning itself with the concept of Kashmiriyat and nationalist values (Punjabi, 1990). As posited by Bamzai (1973, 655-660), apprehensions surfaced among various political leaders regarding the communal nature of politics, leading to a concomitant escalation of communal tensions within the state. Such developments were perceived as incongruous with the historical traditions of harmonious coexistence that

had characterised intercommunal relations between Hindus and Muslims in the region, as elucidated in Chapter 1. Within this context, Sheikh Abdullah himself manifested notable discomfort with the communal nature of politics, particularly evident within the Muslim Conference. He contended that such communal tendencies were circumscribing the broader objectives of the political movement, which aspired toward the establishment of an independent secular Kashmir rather than the realisation of a Pan-Islamic Muslim nation (Akbar, 2002).

It is important to note that this transformative phase warrants acknowledgement for its discernible parallels with the precolonial era of Kashmir, wherein the deeply ingrained construct of Kashmiriyat, characterised by the harmonious coexistence of diverse religious identities, functioned as a cohesive force against external oppression and threats throughout the historical trajectory of the region. This observation underscores the persistent dominance of a profound nationalistic spirit intricately interwoven with the Kashmiri populace, transcending temporal and historical exigencies. A seminal articulation of this transformation is encapsulated in a 1932 speech by Sheikh Abdullah, wherein he underscored:

> "Our country's progress is impossible as long as we do not establish amicable relations between the different communities" (Akbar, 2002, 94).

The identification of the quest and imagination of a homeland by using the word 'country' and the reflection of the Kashmiri identity in his speech certified his attitude towards a nation that is secular and not Pan-Islamic. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon scholarly scrutiny to recognize that the contemporaneous labour movement surpassed the constraints of communalism, acting as a unifying force that operated beyond religious divisions (Akbar, 2002).

Puri, B. (1995) in his work *'The Kashmiriyat: The Vitality of Kashmiri Identity'* argued that this evolution within the socio-political and cultural milieu during Kashmir's nascent foray into the political arena serves as compelling evidence of the state's overarching vision and aspirations extending beyond religious confines, embracing a more secular

and inclusive paradigm. This vision aligns itself with the concept of a secular, independent nation, thereby diverging markedly from the ideological underpinnings of Pan-Islamic Umma, which prioritises Muslim identity over secular considerations (Chowdhary, 1998). For Rekha Chowdhary (1998) in *The Muslim Identity and the Politics of Fundamentalism in Kashmir*, the emergent political identity during this period transcended narrow religious boundaries, assuming a more politically sophisticated form. This nascent identity, deeply rooted in Kashmir's social and cultural ethos, emanated from a historical legacy of foreign subjugation, and aimed at liberating the population from oppressive socio-economic and political systems. Notably, this collective political identity did not singularly epitomise a Muslim collective; rather, it predominantly represented a broader Kashmiri collective, with its Muslim background (Chowdhary, 1998, 14-15). Consequently, this period laid the foundation for the emergence of a distinct and self-contained political entity (Chowdhary, 1998). Termed 'Kashmiri' nationalism, this unique form of nationalism, rooted in the regional context, was informed by historical and socio-political dynamics specific to Kashmir, differentiating it from broader religious or communal identities (Puri, B., 1995 cited in Chowdhary 1998, 17). As a result, the essence of Kashmiri nationalism and the conceptualization of an independent nation sought to cultivate a trans-religious cultural identity that transcended religious boundaries, thereby positioning itself against both Islamic extremists, as imposed by the current Pan-Islamic tendency existing in the region, and Hindu fundamentalism perpetuated by the Indian government (Chowdhary, 1998).

The secularisation of Muslim identity and its transition to nationalism was demonstrated conspicuously through the physical transformation of the Muslim Conference to the National Conference on March 26, 1948, led by Sheikh Abdullah (Akbar, 2002, 89). In his presidential address to the Muslim Conference during this session, Sheikh Abdullah articulated a pivotal shift in the prevailing political discourse. He stated,

> "We must end communalism by ceasing to think in terms of Muslims and
> non-Muslims when discussing our political problems….We must open our

doors to all Hindus and Sikhs who like ourselves believe in the freedom of their country" (Akbar, 2002, 101).

The aforementioned speech by Sheikh Abdullah is evidence of the underscored primary challenge before them, which was to unite and jointly confront the obstacles impeding the realisation of their shared objectives (ibid.). To achieve this, he proposed a reconfiguration of their organisation into a non-communal political body and the introduction of specific amendments to its constitution and rules (ibid.). In his address, he reiterated two crucial points: first, the necessity to move beyond communal divisions when addressing political issues, and second, the implementation of universal suffrage based on a joint electorate, as he believed that without these two elements, democracy would remain lifeless (Akbar, 2002). This transformation marked the formal embrace of a nationalist ideology by Sheikh Abdullah, as he steered the party toward active participation in the broader struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (Akbar, 2002). As expounded in Chapter 1, the address delivered by Sheikh Abdullah carries significant gravitas, embodying a profound sincerity in Kashmir's willingness to embrace a future characterised by a state devoid of communal differences and one that embraces diversity as a defining characteristic. Furthermore, this resonates with the historical portrayal of Kashmir as a national enclave, steadfastly shaping its destiny in the pursuit of a secular homeland grounded in a Kashmiri identity, rather than subscribing to an extreme Islamist identity or submerging completely within Indian nationalistic identity.

The establishment of the National Conference signifies the culmination of a trajectory characterised by a discernible shift from a conspicuous religious emphasis towards the consolidation of a national secular entity, concurrently affirming the Kashmiri identity by synthesising various religious affiliations (Wani, 2013). The principal objective of the National Conference was oriented towards the realisation of a homeland firmly anchored in secular principles, distinctly departing from the pursuit of inherently

religiously fundamental Pan-Islamic aspirations (Chowdhary, 2010; Wani, 2013). This epoch also marked the institutionalisation of a coherent ideological and normative framework, providing a structured basis for the movement's activities and objectives. The overarching aim of this reconfiguration was to unite all progressive forces in the region under a singular banner, collectively endeavouring to attain responsible governance. This transformative phase aligns notably with Anderson's (1991) work *"Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism"* and Anthony D. Smith's definition of a nation as

> "A named human community residing in a perceived homeland and having common myths and shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members" (2010, 13).

These theoretical perspectives underscore the adaptable nature of nationalism as a discursive framework, allowing for diverse interpretations and assertions of nationhood within the global community of nations, as explicated by Calhoun (2002, 4-5).

Idea of an independent Kashmir - "Kashmiri nationalism"

Sheikh Abdullah, the inaugural prime minister and prominent political figure in Kashmir, assumed leadership during a pivotal juncture when the region, for the first time, transitioned away from colonial rule, undergoing significant political and social transformations (Khandy, 2020). His discourses have provided substantive insights into a discernible socio-political vision concerning the conception of an independent Kashmir and the ideological underpinnings of Kashmiri nationalism (Khandy, 2020). Applying the Foucauldian framework, as expounded by Hall (1997, 44), a discourse is construed as an amalgamation of statements that furnishes a linguistic framework for the discussion and representation of knowledge about a specific subject within a distinct historical period. Furthermore, the scholarly contributions of Fairclough and Wodak (2009, 258) emphasise that discourse, functioning as a social practice, establishes a dialectical relationship between a given discursive event and the situational, institutional, and

social structures that contextualise it. In other words, discourses are intricately linked to the broader socio-political, cultural, and historical landscape within which they operate. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of the nationalistic sentiment and specific discourses in Kashmir since 1947, as articulated by Sheikh Abdullah, becomes paramount for discerning the consistent articulation of a rhetoric yearning for an independent nation and the underlying rationale for the desire for separatism from both India and Pakistan (khandy, 2020). This sentiment, fundamentally distinct from the concept of a Pan-Islamic religious nationalism, underscores the multifaceted dynamics shaping the socio-political trajectory of Kashmir.

The period from 1947 to 1953 witnessed a surge in Kashmiri nationalism, with a pronounced emphasis on the narrative of self-determination and independence for Kashmir. This era marked the genesis of a politically astute society and heightened political consciousness, laying the foundational groundwork for the ascendancy of Kashmiri nationalism (Haksar, 2015). In an interview with The Scotsman on April 14, 1949, Sheikh Abdullah expounded on his vision, suggesting that independence, guaranteed through the United Nations, could potentially serve as the sole viable solution for Kashmir (Devadas, 2019). He criticised the introduction of the partition discourse to Kashmir, contending that it fuelled communalism and applied the two-nation theory to the region. Sheikh Abdullah emphasised that the struggle he led was against such communalism, highlighting the cultural and social similarities between the Muslim and Brahmin Pandit communities in the Kashmir Valley and emphasising the absence of religious conflict in the region. His stance opposed a communal solution, advocating for the harmonious coexistence of diverse communities in Kashmir (Akbar, 2002; Haksar, 2015). Furthermore, he emphasised that before the Dogra regime, political activity was virtually non-existent in Kashmir, rendering it a political backwater (Geelani, 2019). The emergence of political movements such as the National Conference, the Plebiscite Front, and the student movement can be interpreted as instances of Kashmir asserting itself politically and transitioning from a monarchical system to a delicate democracy (Geelani, 2019).

This perspective aligns with the fundamental tenets of nationalism, emphasising the secularity of a nation and championing physical boundaries along with the diversity of races, ethnicities, and religions, as articulated by Mukherjee (2003). Mukherjee argues that nationalism provides a framework for individuals from diverse groups to assert their exclusive right to lead an independent and distinct life while concurrently embodying a spiritual and psychological sense of solidarity rooted in a shared history and literary heritage that binds people of varied identities. Festenstein and Kenny (2005) also support this framework, asserting that nationalism unites individuals under a common nationality, fostering inherently stable communities, a collective resistance mentality against foreign powers, and serving as engines of social mobilisation.

The notion of an independent, self-determined Kashmir, as illustrated in the political vision of Sheikh Abdullah, stands in contradiction with the tenet of Pan-Islamic Umma, which advocates transcending all religious boundaries and promotes the exclusivity and fundamentalism of Pan-Islamism (Ahmad, 1975, 32-51) as critically discussed in Chapter 2. Despite this contradiction, it is pertinent to acknowledge an Islamic dimension to Kashmiri nationalism, given that the majority of the Kashmiri population is Muslim, falling under the umbrella and framework of Muslim Umma. However, this Islamic dimension of Kashmir exhibits a level of inclusivity deeply associated with the common root of Kashmir's ethnic nationalism reflected by the unique, indigenous, harmonious Kashmiriyat characteristic of the Kashmiri people, as asserted by Hassan (2018, 57-58), who notes the discernible influence of nationalism within the Islamic world, particularly in Muslim countries where the ideology of nationalism often incorporates the concept of the ummah. In this sense, as discussed by Bose (1997, 80–88), the people of Kashmir utilise their Islamic identity and its institutional elements, particularly mosques, as instruments in their pursuit of self-determination, freedom, and nationalistic aspirations against external threats and oppression. Therefore, it is imperative to emphasise that the idiom of political Islam is intricately interwoven with the political landscape in Kashmir, particularly within the realm of nationalist politics, and not specifically aligned

with the strand of Islam advocating the establishment of a 'Caliphate' and fundamentalist Pan-Islamism (Geelani, 2019).

Furthermore, it is argued that the notion of an autonomous Kashmir finds itself entangled in a complex predicament shaped by intersecting nationalistic fervours, religious affiliations, and cultural intricacies (Navlakha, 2009). The conflict's essence emanates from the collision of interwoven identities within Kashmir, encompassing secular, nationalistic facets, the ethnic construct of "Kashmiriyat," and the religious Muslim identity anchored in the Umma paradigm. These identities undergo both discord and concord with the secular Indian nationalism aligned with Hindu India and the Islamic identity associated with Pakistan's extremist interpretations. Despite the multifaceted nationalism prevailing in Kashmir, the palpable expression of the yearning for autonomy, self-governance, and a self-determined nation based on the ethnic nationalism of Kashmiriyat persists conspicuously among its populace (Arakotaram, 2009, 27-38).

In 1948, Sheikh Abdullah articulated,

> "The convention strongly hopes that the Indian Government and the people of India will lend the people of Kashmir all material, moral, and political support in completing this task and achieving our goal of economic and political freedom" (Akbar, 2002, 179).

Abdullah's discourse on the "New Kashmir" further indicates an inclination to formulate a distinct constitution reflective of the idea of a separate Kashmiri nation, diverging from that of India and often challenging Indian nationalism at its core (Varshney, 1991). This conceptualised vision of an autonomous Kashmiri nation nurtured sentiments within the emerging political society and the Kashmiri people, signifying their aspiration to establish a third nation, i.e., Kashmir, distinctly emphasising nationalist sentiments in the region (Snedden, 2021). The formation of a sense of belonging within a nation intricately intertwines with the development of a national identity (Zutshi, 2003; Kolesovs, 2021; Greenfeld and Prevelakis, 2018). This identity is shaped through discursive practices—conversations, dialogues, and narratives—moulding the beliefs, convictions, and

attitudes of a community towards themselves and others within the context of their nation. These discourses gain prominence and perpetuate themselves as they become ingrained in the social fabric of the assumed nation (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999, 153).

In addition, as time progressed, the National Conference began to espouse rhetoric advocating for a referendum and the idea of an independent Kashmir, which were completely in discordance with the concept of Indian nationalism driving India as a state (Varshney, 1991; Guler, 2017, 2-6). This ideological clash led to a series of consequential events, including the imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 and 1958 on charges of conspiracy, the subsequent toppling of the governments, the passage of the Sixth Constitution of J&K Amendment Act in 1965 that took away Kashmir's constitutional powers, and the over militarisation made a Kashmiri believe in India's betrayal and its veto on not giving Kashmir its right to self-determination (Haksar, 2015). These abrupt changes in the Kashmiri government and the continuous modifications to the political system served as primary catalysts that instilled a realisation among the Kashmiri people that the Indian National Congress held absolute control, relegating India, or the new imperialist leaders to mere puppets of the regime (Haksar, 2015). Consequently, a sense of alienation toward political consciousness developed within Kashmir, accompanied by a growing awakening of Kashmiri aspirations, rights, and demands for deciding their fates as portrayed by their nationalistic spirits where the Kashmiri population perceived it as a betrayal and an attack on their identity stemming more nationalistic spirit in return (Akbar, 2002).

Keeping this in light to preserve Kashmir's autonomy, a new breed of Kashmiri nationalists emerged from the national conference disillusioned with what they saw as Abdullah's complicity with the Indian state (Sikand, 2001, 2018-226). The movement soon gathered a large amount of support and was led by young Kashmiris who had received modern education in the colleges established in the region after 1947 (Sikand, 2001). Their major demand was that India fulfils its commitments laid under the

instrument of accession, allow a plebiscite or referendum with the slogan of 'Hai Haq Hamara Rai Shumari' (it's our right to decide our fate) to be held in the territory and gives the right and authority to the people of Kashmir to decide their future: whether Kashmir would remain a part of India or it would merge into Pakistan or it would become an independent state (Bose, 2021; Khurshid, 2016, 110-118). Within this context, one can posit that a recurrent theme evident in current discussions and those previously examined in preceding chapters is the overarching aspiration for Kashmir to maintain a nationalistic standpoint, one that is incongruent with a radical Islamist perspective. Additionally, the characterization of the Kashmiri movement as Islamic rather than nationalistic would be counterproductive for Kashmiri society, jeopardising the previously nurtured harmony and religious diversity. Such a categorization could potentially furnish the Indian authorities with the requisite legitimacy to justify aggressive actions against Kashmir. Therefore, this demand for the right to self-determination and freedom as a political movement holds greater legitimacy and efficacy for Kashmir than an emphasis on religious causes to preserve their collective Kashmiriyat identity and heritage.

As Honneth (1995, 92-130) states, recognition in this context transcends mere political acknowledgement; it encompasses three interrelated dimensions of relational dynamics, namely affection, entitlements, and unity, collectively constituting the essence of mutual recognition. The 'quest for recognition' of a nationalist movement arises from its aspiration to be acknowledged as the agent of its own political, economic, and social destiny among its peers. Anderson's (2006, 7) remarks, 'nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so,' holds true only if this 'quest for recognition' is considered. Nevertheless, while nationalist movements seek recognition from the global community of nation-states at large, their nationalist character is not solely dependent on such recognition or support, although gaining such recognition may facilitate the path to statehood. For Breuilly (1993, 9), states are frequently confronted by nationalist movements, which, depending on their ultimate objectives, can be categorised as reformist, unifications, or separatist nationalist movements. Guibernau contends that

political communities engaged in separatist nationalist movements are more accurately described as 'nations without states' because they explicitly express a 'desire to govern themselves'. Members of these nations without states perceive their national territory as being under the control, administration, or occupation of a foreign or alien state (1999, 16). Taking Anderson's definition of a nation as "it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (2006, 6) into consideration, the goal-oriented nature of nationalist movements becomes a defining characteristic. Consistent with Anderson's perspective, a nationalist movement strives to establish the boundaries and sovereignty of the nation in a world where other similar, yet distinct, political communities coexist. While the ultimate objective of nationalist movements that challenge 'official nationalisms' (Anderson, 2006) is to attain statehood or a degree of political autonomy, their more immediate aim is to gain recognition, firstly from the state they contest or challenge, and secondly, from the international community of 'nation-states' (Guibernau, 1999, 25).

Therefore, it is in Sheikh Abdullah's best interest to bargain for autonomy, which was demonstrated through the Kashmir pact on November 13, 1974, signed between Mohammed Afzal Beg, representing Sheikh Abdullah, and G. Parthasarthy, the vice chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University (Haksar, 2015). This agreement, commonly known as the Indira-Sheikh accord, had acknowledged Kashmir as a constituent part of India (Akbar, 2002). As a result, the Plebiscite Front was dissolved in 1975 after 20 years of advocating for an independent Kashmir, and Sheikh Abdullah was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir on February 25, 1975 (Bose, 1997). The accord and its effects on the society symbolised a hurtful betrayal of not only the Indian government but also Sheikh Abdullah, the respectable figure that had represented all of the characteristics of Kashmiri nationalism and patriotism for Kashmiri nationalists who had fought their whole life for the ideology of Kashmiri as an independent nation (Haksar, 2015). This event can be regarded as the second time since the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 that the fate of Kashmir was decided without the Kashmiri populace's opinions being considered, thus the level of their emotional suffering and hostility

became even more severe accordingly, leaving an unending wound in their identity as Kashmiris (Zutshi, 2003).

The conception of Kashmir as an independent nation, juxtaposed against the narratives of India and Pakistan, signifies the emergence of a political Kashmiri society grounded in the values of a distinct identity. This identity is nationalistic, secular, and inclusive, driven by the pursuit of a homeland, Kashmir, in direct competition with the concept of secular Indian nationalism. M Bhat (2017, 117-124) in his work *"The changing language roles and linguistic identities of the Kashmiri speech community"* noted that India's identity is deeply entrenched in its commitment to secularism, perceiving Kashmir as a microcosm of Pakistan and exerting control over the region to fortify the legitimacy of its secular principles. Notably, the idea that a secular Kashmir nationalism aligns with secular Indian nationalism, which, according to proponents of secularism, necessitates its retention within India. However, in practice, the promised liberal-secular identity for Kashmiris in 1947 by the secular Indian government, contradicts its own secular principles. As indicated in Chapter 2, Varshney (2010) and Whitehead (2018) argue that individuals are intricately linked to a nation and its nationalism, revealing the inefficacy of liberalism in the face of robust nationalism, and liberalism may not seamlessly align with democratic secularism, introducing potential contradictions between nationalist ideals and liberal principles.

Consequently, the emergence of Kashmiri nationalism contradicts India's democratic secular framework, raising questions about the sustainability of India's secular structure and constraining Kashmir from asserting its narrative (Varshney, 1991). Moreover, the notion of a nationalist Kashmir stands out prominently in the face of Indian nationalism as it aligns with the colours of a pre-colonial, indigenous, unique Kashmiri identity aspiring to establish a nation based on its ethnicity, "Kashmiriyat," as noted by Zutshi (2003), Festenstein and Kenny (2005), and Greenfeld (1996). Akhter asserts the harmonious nature of the "Kashmiriyat" concept, representing a collective identity founded on the ideals of religious tolerance. In this period, this ideology of Kashmiriyat

and the narratives of Kashmir's separatism from India stemmed from the urge to create a unique, separate, and indigenous identity that could dictate and demonstrate their rights and values for their community and citizens (2017). Moreover, the evolving Kashmiri identity faced a threat from the assertive post-colonial Indian nationalism, which sought to assimilate it within the broader Indian identity.

In addition to the clash between secular Kashmiri nationalism and Indian nationalism, the Muslim identity of Kashmir is also in contention with the emerging identity of Hindu India, creating a contradiction in religious identities. The rise of Hindu organisations, the promotion of Hindi in schools, the revocation of specific minority privileges, and the push for complete integration of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian union raised concerns about increasing communalism in India (Akbar, 2002, 182). This collective phenomenon is commonly denoted as the revivalism of Hinduism, a topic that will be comprehensively examined in Chapter 4. The revivalism of Hindu India posed a threat to the Muslim identity in Kashmir, instigating insecurity due to the religious majority in India (Akbar, 2002, p.182). These developments reinforced the different religious sentiments of Kashmir, transforming the discourse into a nationalistic movement rooted in apprehensions about communalism and the preservation of a distinctive cultural identity. Concurrently, Kashmiri society envisioned itself within the context of a predominantly Hindu India, intensifying the need to safeguard the identity and rights of Muslim-majority Kashmir in the face of escalating religious intolerance (Akbar, 2002). In this context, Sheikh Abdullah further examines the option of an Independent Kashmir in a speech, stating:

> "I would like to remind you that from August 15 to October 22, 1947, our State was independent, and the result was that our weakness was exploited by the neighbour with invasion. What is the guarantee that in the future too we may not be victims of similar aggression? certain tendencies have been asserting themselves in India that may in the future convert it into a religious state wherein the interests of the Muslims will be jeopardized" (Akbar, 2002, 180).

This speech underscores Sheikh Abdullah's state of confusion wherein the option of acceding to India was taken into consideration keeping in mind the secular vision of Kashmir, thus acceding with a secular India. The speech also makes efforts to protect the identity of a Muslim-majority Kashmir from potential subjugation under the broader identity of Hindu India. The demand for special status represented the first political objective of Kashmiri politics and illustrated the region's aspiration to assert its political rights and manage its affairs as a distinct political entity, expressing a desire for an independent Kashmir (Akbar, 2002; Varshney, 2010). In other words, the nationalist discourse in the Kashmir Valley has undergone a progressive shift from advocating for plebiscites (raishumari) to embracing the idea of Azadi (independence), with Azadi currently being the predominant narrative (Tremblay, 1996, 480). This tendency emerges as a strategy to safeguard the imperilled Kashmiri and Kashmiri Muslim identities from the predominance of Indian nationalism, Hindu-majority nation, and communalism (Varshney, 2010), as when confronted with challenges to its Kashmiri Muslim identity, the region deviates from its usual secular inclusivity, opting for an exclusive stance (religious identity) as a defensive measure (Varshney, 1991, 1002-1071; Chowdhary, 2010). In this context, as explained theoretically in Chapter 2, religion plays a crucial role in establishing a secure identity, both at an individual and collective level (Birnir and Oversos, 2019). Furthermore, according to Fox and Sandler (2003), religion is construed as a collective or personal identity possessing the potential to inspire political mobilisation and impact the legitimacy of governments and policies (Fox and Sandler, 2003, 559-588).

Consequently, their identity as Kashmiri Muslims, while sharing a common foundation with Pan-Islamism in the Umma model, is primarily stimulated by the nationalistic desire and the inclusive Kashmiriyat identity. This motivation aims to safeguard the human rights and equality of the Kashmiri people, rather than seeking the establishment of an extreme form of Pan-Islamism or the amplification of Pan-Islamic Umma. Hence, it is justifiable to assert that Kashmir exhibits a dynamic and unfixed identity structure, undergoing shifts between religious and secular revivals influenced by prevailing forces

asserting their claims to Kashmir's aspirations, as Melucci (1995) contends in his work *'The process of collective identity'* that in the face of dominant forces, individuals may harbour a multitude of identities; however, in prolonged conflicts, a prevailing identity tends to consolidate as a defining characteristic, serving as a means to comprehend both the conflict and one's position within it.

Regarding the Muslim Pakistan identity merely supporting the religious sentiments of Kashmir, the socio-cultural politics of Kashmir are also marked by a dichotomy between ethnic nationalism and religious nationalism, the former rooted in a distinct Kashmiri identity contradicting with Muslim Pakistan, and the latter advocating the integration of Muslim Kashmir with Muslim Pakistan based on the common root of religion and the Umma concept. This dual contestation not only unfolds within the broader national frameworks of India, Pakistan, and the imagined nation of Kashmir but is also intrinsic to the internal dynamics of Kashmir itself. While Schermerhorn delineates an ethnic group as a subset within a larger societal framework characterised by shared actual or perceived common ancestry and collective memories of a shared historical past, (1970), Smith A.D. conceptualises ethnic community as a named human population possessing a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, cultural elements, a connection to a historical territory or homeland, and a degree of solidarity (1996, 447). Moreover, Ethnic Kashmiri nationalism, propelled by a narrative of shared history, language, and culture is asserted by Schermerhorn (1970) and Smith E.J. (1991) in *"'Ethnic identity development: Toward the development of a theory within the context of majority/minority status"*, constitutes a mobilisation engine as the ethnic kashmiri community based its historic Kashmiri identity encapsulated in the concept of Kashmiriyat.

This type of nationalism conflicts with individuals in Kashmir who advocate for Muslim religious nationalism and alignment with Pakistan. While it is undeniable that ethnic nationalism often includes a distinct religious dimension, where religion plays a crucial role in ethnicity, especially with certain ethnic groups deeply rooted in religious affiliations (Fox, 2002), this religious dimension is understood in terms of its potential to

either strengthen or undermine the legitimacy of governments (James and Ozdamar, 2005, 448). This implies that the religious dimension attributed to ethnic nationalism is not driven solely by a religious motive for a Pan-Islamic movement or the establishment of a Muslim state. Instead, it originates from a political and nationalistic motive to safeguard the unique, indigenous identity of Kashmir from the extreme Islamic form promoted by Pakistan and other outside threats posed by the ruling government. In this case, the syncretic Kashmiriyat identity functions as a potent engine for social mobilisation, fostering resistance against foreign and colonial powers within the overarching embrace of secularism, as Handman explicitly states,

> "What lies at the bottom of the nationalistic behaviour is not interest in the other members of the group but solidarity in repelling the common enemy. It is not so much sympathy with one's fellows as hostility towards the outsider that makes for nationalism" (Handman, 1921, 106).

It is important to note that historical antecedents, as expounded in Chapters 1 and 2, underscore the greater historical influence of ethnic nationalism within Kashmir over religious identity. Contemporary manifestations of this influence are evidenced through the assertion of political rights, particularly the right to self-determination, and calls for an independent nation under the collective banner of the Kashmiri identity. This prevailing ethnic identity and nationalism have, therefore, eclipsed the ascendancy of religious nationalism seeking the formation of a nation solely based on religious affiliations.

THE NARRATIVE OF ISLAMIST KASHMIR AND THE CHANGING TRENDS

The Kashmiri landscape has been pervaded by a prevailing nationalistic paradigm—a Kashmiri identity that surpasses the religious dimensions inherent to the region. Concurrently, amidst the historical surge of nationalism dating back to the pre-colonial era and the awakening of political consciousness since 1931, as previously explained, an underlying Islamic sentiment has endured in Kashmir, consistently intertwined with the

religious Muslim identity of its residents. Despite the prevalence of Pan-Islamic ideals, the governance under Islamic law, and a Kashmiri Muslim identity grounded in Islamic tenets, fostered by prominent Islamic reformist movements and organisations such as Jamaat-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) and Ahle-Hadith, the region still aligns with a nationalist orientation tied to its ethnic roots—Kashmiriyat. Moreover, it is imperative to underscore that notwithstanding the perpetual augmentation of Islamic jurisprudence and religious consciousness within Kashmir, JIJK itself adopts political strategies affiliated with nationalist and democratic principles, pursuing objectives aimed at integrating Kashmir with Pakistan to establish an Islamic state, inherently embodying a nationalistic character. Hence, it becomes evident that ethnic nationalism continues to wield considerable influence, shaping the prevailing spirit among the majority of the Kashmiri population, even including a religious entity like JIJK. However, it is noteworthy that there has been a discernible shift towards a more fervent adherence to the Ahl-e-Hadith and Wahhabism schools of thought among a specific segment of the Kashmiri populace and militants in the contemporary context. This transformation is the culmination of a nuanced interplay of both external and internal factors.

Within the sphere of Islamic jurisprudence, it is imperative to discern the intricate landscape of religious sects, with specific attention to the two predominant branches—Shia and Sunni (Khan, M.I., 1994). Within the Sunni tradition, a complex fabric unfolds, marked by the presence of four major schools of thought. Among these significant Sunni schools is the Hanafi school, a nuanced jurisprudential institution that further diverges into three sub-schools, one of which is identified as Jamaat-e-Islami (Khan, 1994). Collectively, these schools of thought furnish a distinctive perspective challenging prevailing Western imperial paradigms, particularly those related to the delineation of nation-states by borders. Kashmiri Journalist ████████ (2022) explained in an interview that:

> "Jamaat shares a fundamental belief in the supremacy of Allah as the ultimate authority, grounding their solutions in the teachings of the Quran while

displaying notably rigorous interpretations of Islamic principles. Contrary, Jamaat
also uses political Islam as its model, different from the Pan-Islamism model."

(Jameel, 2022)

Furthermore, a significant development within the religious milieu of Kashmir is the
ascendance of the Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought, an Islamist reformative ideology
characterised by exclusivity and fundamentalism rooted in violent interpretations of
Wahhabism. It adheres rigorously to its religious principles, considering them the most
authentic (Pandya, 2019).

The rise of Wahhabism or Salafism in Kashmir, is characterised by Sheikh Sameer as
'insidious,' as documented by Pandya (2019, 133), manifests in the increased adoption
of practices among the youth, such as donning Arabic-style burqas and adopting
religious symbols such as skull caps, beards, and high ankle pyjamas. This trend aligns
with the attribution of religion theory proposed by Proudfoot and Shaver (1975, 326).
They state that many religious communities urge prospective converts to engage in
ritual action or discipline before they acquaint themselves with the beliefs of the
religion. This suggests that the beliefs eventually enhance the existing religious identity
inherently attached to an individual as they make sense of an activity to which they have
already committed themselves, and for which they as yet have insufficient justification.
This prevailing theological orientation, stemming from the insurgence of Arabia and the
post-colonial Muslim world, introduces heightened orthodoxy and separatism within the
same religious spectrum (Pandya, 2019). However, it is imperative to avoid a simplistic
demarcation between "normative" or "official" Islam and "popular" Islam.

Contemporary observations point to a more nuanced reality where Islam manifests in
diverse forms. These range from expressions deeply rooted in popular sentiment and
devotion, exemplified by the reverence for Sufi shrines and Muslim Rishis, to
manifestations represented by influential organisations such as the Ahl-e-Hadith and the
Jamaat-e-Islami (Pandya, 2019). Moreover, as articulated by Wani and Wani (2023), it is
crucial to discern the marked disparity between two distinct belief systems, each

delineated by its unique social and cultural orientations, not only within the context of Islam in Kashmir but also in broader Islamic landscapes. Both aforementioned jurisprudential frameworks align with Sunni Islamic thought, yet they diverge significantly in their modes of practising Islam. While the Jamaat school of thought emphasises a sense of liberalism at its core, the emerging Wahhabi thought tends to foster religious fundamentalism and extremism, positioning itself as the official and prevalent Islam in the region. The latter engenders a perceived necessity for a stringent revivalist approach to counter what it perceives as a threat to its religious tenets. This distinction adds complexity to the identity structure within these two Islamic schools of thought and among their respective followers (Wani and Wani, 2023).

It is important to acknowledge that the origin of the Islamist emergence is rooted in the reformist initiatives of the Ahl-e-Hadith, which were established in Kashmir in 1925 (Sikand, 2001, 218), actively challenging Sufism, the predominant form of Islamic expression in Kashmir. Nevertheless, the Ahl-e-Hadith movement failed to gain a widespread following (Sikand, 2001, 218-220) highlighting the profound Sufi tradition embedded in Kashmir, which stands in stark contrast to the radical Pan-Islamic movements it refrained from embracing. Moreover, the reformist stance adopted by the Ahl-i-Hadith during this period laid the groundwork for the emergence of various other Islamist trends, commencing in the 1930s (Bhat and Wani, 2017; Sikand, 2001,). One notable offshoot of this trend was the establishment of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) in 1941, which subsequently evolved into Jamaat-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) (Bhat, 2017; Sikand, 2001). Thus, within the societal context, Jamaat-e-Islami espouses a set of conservatives, fundamentalist, exclusive, and orthodox principles (Sikand, 2001; Bhat and Wani, 2017) which aligns with the principles of Ahl-e-Hadith jurisprudence concerning exclusivism and a strict adherence to the Quran. However, it significantly distances itself from the Ahl-e-Hadith organisation in terms of level of extremism and the endorsement of unjustified violence against non-Muslims, as well as the imposition of Islam by force.

The Jamaat-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) is a religious reformist movement that started in the 1950s and gradually became involved in socio-political issues while conferring itself to political Islam (Bhat and Wani, 2017; Sikand, 2001). It emphasised the use of democratic and peaceful means to achieve its objectives, as stated in its Constitution ratified in 1953, Article 2 (b) which stressed the avoidance of unethical and dishonest methods that could contribute to conflict (Sikand, 2001, 219-220). This indicates that under the doctrinal framework espoused by Jamaat-e-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK), the organisation adopts a comparatively peaceful and democratic approach in its pursuit of religious objectives, as evidenced by its participation in the 1987 elections in Kashmir. Furthermore, JIJK adheres to a strategy of political Islam as a means to realise its aspirations of establishing a majoritarian Islamic order, diverging from the theology of an Islamic caliphate guided by radical exclusivity (Sikand, 2001). The Jamaat-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) consistently challenges the accession of Kashmir to India, advocating for the resolution of the region's future status through a plebiscite. It envisions the prospective trajectory of Kashmir either as an integral component of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan or as an independent state with Islam as the majoritarian religion. In addition to this, the JIJK posits that within such a political framework, individuals of diverse faiths can coexist harmoniously, and it asserts that such a system is conducive to preserving religious and cultural autonomy for minority communities. The developmental trajectory of the JIJK's role in Kashmiri politics has traversed multiple phases, transitioning from a predominantly revivalist movement to a political party, and subsequently evolving into a separatist organisation (Sikand, 2002).

In this regard, it is imperative to subject the aforementioned analysis to scrutiny within the framework of the relevant theoretical paradigms to discern whether the characterization of the JIJK as a traditionalist organisation as opposed to a fundamentalist one is substantiated. In alignment with the overarching research question seeking to analyse the shift in Kashmiri visions of nationalism towards a fundamentalist Pan-Islamic vision and to evaluate the authenticity of such a transformation, it is crucial to assert that the JIJK wields a discernible influence within

Kashmir's socio-political and cultural milieu. Unlike the fundamentalist tendency, it propounds a traditionalist interpretation of Islam, advocating a nationalistic comportment rather than espousing a radical pan-Islamic ideology. While it asserts the concept of Umma, it concurrently aligns itself with the contours of the contemporary societal landscape, which combines the deep-rooted religious foundation with modern political approaches. In accordance with Cheryl Benard (2003, 28-30), traditionalists serve as a counterbalance to fundamentalists, deriving their influence from widespread public legitimacy within Muslim populations. Characteristically positioned as more centrist and moderate, traditionalists embody a stabilising force. They exhibit a propensity for open-mindedness and frequently engage in proactive interfaith dialogue. Typically, eschewing endorsement of violence, although some may express sympathy for fundamentalists who opt for such methods, traditionalists occasionally extend support by sheltering, resourcing, and facilitating the activities of the latter (Benard, 2003).

Unlike fundamentalist groups, which often comprise predominantly young male adherents, traditionalists represent a broader cross-section of society, including families, older individuals, women, and schoolchildren. Notably, they possess organisational structures, institutional frameworks, leaders, and requisite elements of public self-presentation such as books, speeches, public events, conferences, and associations, rendering them visible and easily identifiable. As elucidated by Benard (2003, 29), orthodox Islam harbours elements supportive of democratic, participatory, and egalitarian values, which can be selectively extracted to justify reforms. Given these considerations, there is a perceptible inclination to designate traditionalists as the principal agents for fostering democratic Islam, a trajectory seemingly favoured by the Western perspective. However, formidable challenges militate against prioritising traditionalists as the primary architects of modern democratic Islam. Fundamentalists, in this case, represented by Ahl-e-Hadith and the transition to Wahhabism, vehemently repudiate democratic values and contemporary Western cultural norms, espousing instead an authoritarian, puritanical state that aligns with their extreme interpretation

of Islamic law and morality. Remarkably, they evince a willingness to leverage innovation and modern technology to advance this overarching objective.

Besides, the traditionalist orientation of JIJK is majorly demonstrated through its own definition and scope of "Jihad". This assertion is substantiated by three salient factors: firstly, the conceptualization of jihad is articulated as being directed specifically against the Indian state and its representatives, rather than encompassing Hindus or the entire Indian populace; secondly, the scope of jihad is delimited to the liberation of Kashmir from Indian control; and thirdly, the mujahideen (holy warriors) explicitly disavow any inclination to interfere in Indian domestic affairs subsequent to the hypothetical liberation of Kashmir (Swami, 2007; Sikand, 2010). In this regard, it is imperative for this research to systematically comprehend and elucidate the ideological framework of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a prominent ideologue and advocate for Jamaat-e-Islami. A comprehensive analysis of Geelani's ideology is essential for unravelling the manner in which this organisation permeated the socio-political landscape of Kashmir, and, correspondingly, discerning the distinctions between this ideological paradigm and that of a fundamentalist Pan-Islamic vision.

In accordance with JIJK's interpretation of Jihad as analysed earlier, which is primarily oriented towards expressing the discontent of the Kashmiri populace towards the Indian state and government, symbolising a response to perceived oppression, Geelani's articulation of Jihad also delineates three pivotal characteristics. Firstly, the focal point of Jihad, as articulated by Geelani, is specifically directed against the Indian state and its representatives, rather than targeting Hindus or the broader Indian populace He differentiates between the Indian state, which is the target of the jihad, the "kufr" (non-believers), and not ordinary Hindus and Indians in general (Sikand, 2001; Gilani, 1992). This nuanced distinction underscores the inherently political nature of the struggle, with a distinct emphasis on opposition geared towards liberating Kashmir from Indian domination. This overarching objective accentuates the yearning for an independent Kashmir, emancipated from Indian authority, thereby encapsulating the fundamental

goal of the armed resistance movement prevalent in the region instead of stressing its vision of a radical, extremist Pan-Islamism (Sikand, 2001). Secondly, Geelani posits Kashmir as a sanctuary for safeguarding the rights of its Muslim majority population against the backdrop of a predominantly Hindu India. During these periods, Geelani invoked the concept of the Muslim Umma, contending that it was the collective responsibility of all Muslim nations to utilise religion as a means of protection against what is perceived as Hindu chauvinism in India. Moreover, Gilani has called for communal unity between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, highlighting the historically amicable Hindu-Muslim relations in the region (Sikand, 2001) This perspective is significantly different from the lens of pure Pan-Islamic Umma due to the incorporation of non-Muslims in safeguarding the interests of Kashmiris and the long-standing historical essence of Kashmiriyat, which precludes any religious animosity towards the non-Muslims of Kashmir (Gilani, 1984). This perspective challenges the notions of forced conversions and the endangerment of the identity of non-Muslims, thereby diverging from the tenets of radical Pan-Islamism typically demonstrated by fundamentalist groups (Gilani, 1998).

Consequently, it can be proven that Geelani's iteration of Pan-Islamism leans more towards the protection of religious sentiments, utilising them as a strategic tool against Indian authorities in the pursuit of a nationalistic homeland based on a Muslim identity contrary to the establishment of the dominance of Islamic law governance based on a radical Islamist identity (Sikand, 2002; Islam, 2015; Ganguly, 1996). Upon achieving this objective, the vision entails transforming Kashmir into a secular Muslim-majority state, characterised by harmonious coexistence with non-Muslims and a commitment to abstain from imposing coercive Islamic laws in the region—a departure from the principles of a radical Pan-Islamic vision. Therefore, Gilani advocates directing the struggle towards acquiring inalienable rights rather than espousing a radical exclusive Pan Islamic agenda (Moten, 2003, 385-396).

Beyond the purview of Jihad, the JIJK also manifests itself within a traditionalist framework by its methodology in disseminating religious principles among the Kashmiri populace. While the JIJK adheres to a devout interpretation of what it deems authentic Islam, it markedly falls short of endorsing the stringent puritanical principles associated with the enforcement of Islamic doctrine (Jackson, 2011). This departure is evident in its approach to processes of democratisation and political Islam as potential solutions. Notably, the JIJK advocates for religious education as a means of nurturing religiosity among its constituents, thereby diverging from the tenets of radical pan-Islamism or the imperative for exclusive Islamic governance upheld by other fundamentalist factions by force. It is imperative to underscore that the strategic positioning of the JIJK within the domains of education and social services has enabled it to accumulate substantial influence (Bhat and Wani, 2017). Historically, prior to the late 1960s, the JIJK concentrated on the publication and dissemination of literature, the establishment of an educational network comprising institutions, reading rooms, discussion groups, and the orchestration of public lectures. However, cognizant of the futility of abstaining from electoral politics, the JIJK made a strategic decision to participate in provincial elections in 1969 (Sikand, 2001; Gilani, 1984; Gilani, 1998). This decision underscores its amalgamation of traditionalist and modernist tendencies, aligning itself with a democratised process rather than a fundamentalist one that advocates for the imposition of Islamic law governance. Moreover, traditionalists within the JIJK exhibit comparative advantages, being both vocal and conspicuous. They leverage a 'captive audience' through an intricate infrastructure of organisations, mosques, and committees (Benard, 2003, 35-50). Additionally, Benard (2003) suggests that in nations where there is a palpable sense of deprivation and marginalisation of a minority Muslim identity, both traditionalists and fundamentalists tend to emerge, seeking to reform and revitalise their rights and religion. In such contexts, a palpable threat is posed to modernist Sufism.

Furthermore, several educational institutions operating under the Falah-e-Aam (FA) trust, an organisation affiliated with Jamaat-e-Islami, have demonstrated superior

performance in comparison to government-run schools. It is essential to note that these institutions currently face a ban imposed by the Government of India (Ashiq, 12 July 2022). This situation raises concerns, particularly when the associated population contemplates issues related to suppression and disillusionment (Hussain and Naik, 20 June 2022). In this regard, these schools affiliated with JeI adopt a curriculum that intentionally inculcates religious tenets within the minds of the youth. According to Hussain and Naik:

> "According to the government order, the FAT has its roots in the "radical body",
> the JeI, which is proscribed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) under
> provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)" (20 June 2022).

On the other hand, the Indian government has ordered the government schools in Kashmir to sing Indian national anthems and Hindu hymns (The Hindu, 20 September 2022). This endeavour aims to foster a collective sense of patriotism and amalgamate the Kashmiri populace, inculcating in them the Hindu identity that they oppose and reject (Khan, 23 December 2023). Furthermore, the imposition of Indian revivalism, compelling Kashmiris to embrace the Hindu identity, fuels the base for competing Indian and Kashmiri ideologies necessary for Islamic revivalism, thereby exacerbating radicalization tendencies. In contrast, government-operated schools are often perceived negatively by local communities as the presence of non-religious private educational institutions is insufficient to address the educational landscape (Khan, 2007, 133-157). Drawing from Remmers' research (1938, 197) on 'Propaganda in Schools' it is evident that schools have historically played a pivotal role in instilling what those in positions of educational authority consider as socially desirable attitudes. The process of teaching can sometimes be directly oriented toward influencing attitudes. In other instances, changes in attitudes might emerge as by-products of instructional methods, and in certain cases, these changes may even occur as unconscious reactions. Moreover, as argued by Chen (1951, 136-137), education in its various forms serves as a tool of the state, aimed at garnering support and cooperation for state policies. Consequently, education cannot be detached from the realm of politics. Broadly speaking, the primary

objectives of education encompass the production of qualified personnel, the cultivation of preparedness, and the instillation of desired attitudes. These educational endeavours serve to facilitate the economic and material development of the respective state while concurrently working to eliminate reactionary ideologies. Education also serves as a means of indoctrinating individuals with a new ideology that aligns with the principles and perspectives upheld by the educators themselves. Therefore, in this context, where the state, private sector, and secular non-profit organisations lack a robust presence in the realm of school education, Jamaat-e-Islami representing the traditionalist and democratic perspective of religion has effectively filled the void, thereby earning social legitimacy (Pandya, 2019).

Re-emergence of the Muslim identity in the 1980s

By the end of the 1980s, the trajectory of Kashmiri nationalist aspirations underwent a transformation from seeking autonomy to asserting sovereignty and emancipation from the Indian state (Haksar, 2015). Secular nationalists within the Kashmir region advocate for either remaining under the governance of a secular Indian administration or advocating for an independent and secular Kashmir. As previously examined, the inherent conflict between Indian nationalism and Kashmiri nationalism has contributed to the imposition of oppression and militarization by the Indian government in Kashmir, aimed at preserving Kashmir's status as a dependent territory of India. This suppression has intensified the fervour of Kashmiri nationalist sentiment coupled with the forces of religious identity, which was utilised by Kashmiris as an approach to assert their unique heritage and achieve their desire for an independent Kashmir.

In this context, the negation of the prospect of an autonomous Kashmiri state, combined with the denial of the right to self-determination for Kashmiris, and the perceived oppression perpetrated by the Indian state, including the alteration of the constitutional status of Kashmir, posed a tangible threat to the Kashmiri identity. Moreover, the

Kashmiri Muslim identity faces encroachment from the predominant Hindu identity, as Guler (2017, 3) observes that: "The reason for this uncertainty is the failure of holding a plebiscite in the region of Kashmir." As a result, it was within this situation that the Kashmiri Muslim population found solace and inspiration from events like the Islamic revolution in Iran as the movement helped enhance the Islamist undercurrent nurturing Kashmiri Muslims' identity in the region. This identity functions as a reactive mechanism against the prevailing Hindu identity and the oppression of the Indian government, seeking to safeguard religious interests collectively under the banner of religious nationalism. As noted by Guler, "Indian mismanagement of political institutions played a role in the alienation of Kashmiri identity" (2017, 6). The Kashmiri populace perceives their religious identity to be under threat due to Indian policies, with this threat perception exacerbated by the "systematic human rights violations by Indian security forces" (Cockell, 2000, 328 cited in Guler, 2017, 6). From the Kashmiri perspective, the primary concern revolves around the occupation of Kashmir by a foreign army (Dreze, 2000). According to Ysseldyk et al. (2014), discrimination serves as a stressor commonly faced by individuals and groups across various group memberships, such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and nationality. From a social identity perspective, group membership is viewed as integral to the self-concept, as posited by Tajfel and Turner (1979).

Consequently, when individuals confront instances of discrimination, various responses may ensue, including emotional reactions, seeking ingroup support, or engaging in civic action to address the perceived injustice at both individual and collective levels (Van Zomeren et al., 2004). These responses are particularly likely to manifest when individuals strongly identify with the targeted group (Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). Paradoxically, the rejection of a group through discriminatory actions often leads to a heightened identification with the group itself (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Consequently, as the perception of one's group being the target of discrimination intensifies, a more pronounced political consciousness is likely to develop (Foster, 2000). Such theoretical considerations align with the concept of politicised

collective identity, which underlies group members' explicit motivations to engage in a power struggle within the broader societal context (Simon & Klandermans, 2001, 323).

Ahl-e-Hadith and the Transition to Wahhabism

Having elucidated the impact and role of Jamaat-e-Islami in comprehending the evolution of the Islamist narrative in Kashmir, it can be argued that while the organisation, with its distinct ideology, does not endorse a purely nationalist paradigm, advocating instead for an Islamic majoritarian state through the conduit of political and democratic Islam, it nevertheless represents a traditionalist perspective, which maintains a discernible departure from the doctrinaire stance of a Pan-Islamic nation. However, a noteworthy phenomenon has been observed wherein a minority segment of the Kashmiri populace has shifted allegiance towards a more orthodox ideological framework, specifically Salafism and Wahhabism. These ideologies underscore exclusivity and markedly differ from the syncretic Sufi practices and traditions that Kashmir has historically adhered to. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of Kashmir's transition towards Wahhabism or Ahle-e-Hadith ideology becomes imperative to discern the influence of this trend on the general socio-political landscape of Kashmir and to ascertain the underlying reasons for this ideological shift.

 Ahl-e-Hadith is a Salafi or Wahhabi reformative movement that adheres in following the strict version of the hadith document as the sole source of religious authority and opposes everything that is not mentioned in the same. It is worth considering whether the early advocates against superstitions in the region found a common cause with the religious scholars ('Ulama) (Khan, 2007). However, it is evident that not until the emergence of the Ahl-e Hadith movement in the late nineteenth century did the debate surrounding the social practices of individuals undergoing Islamic acculturation reach its zenith (Khan, 2007). While the Ahl-e-Hadith criticised the Sufi-Islamic customs associated with shrine visits in Kashmir, their movement brought forth a set of pivotal issues in regard to the practice of Islam with this being one of them that makes this

jurisprudence more exclusive and extreme in nature (Mathur, 1972). In the global collective consciousness, Wahhabism is widely perceived as synonymous with extremism and is commonly regarded as a primary catalyst for jihadist terrorism on an international scale and notably, in 2013, the European Parliament recognized Wahhabism as the principal wellspring of worldwide terrorism (Telegraph, 19 May 2017). Wahhabism finds its origins in the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92), who conceived of it as an innovative and reformative movement within the framework of Islam. Central to his doctrine was the assertion that there existed no necessity for intermediaries or intercessors between the devotee and Allah (Allen, 2010). Ahl-e-Hadith has successfully captured the attention of the younger generation due to its profound global Islamic connections and its portrayal as an intellectually and logically oriented movement (Geelani, 2019). According to the retired ex- secretary of Indian external intelligence wing, he explained:

> "The Islamic jurisprudence of the Ahl-e Hadith is notably aligned with the Wahhabi/Salafi school of thought, a theological stance shared by various entities, including but not limited to ISIS, Al-Qaeda (AQ), Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, therefore, when we talk about Kashmir, it does not belong to this cradle of thought" (Dullat, 2022).

The predominant population of the Kashmir Valley, despite adhering to the Islamic faith, often required a process of re-conversion due to the schism between normative Islam and the Islam practised by Kashmiris, as well as by various other ethnic groups across the Indian subcontinent (Khan, 2007). This suggests that the perception of Islam being under threat from the Indian state, coupled with the discernment of discriminatory practices against Kashmiri Muslims, has created avenues for the radicalization of individuals, leading to a transformation in their allegiance and ideological orientation towards the extremist tenets of Wahhabism, often associated with a propensity for violence. For the Ahl-e-Hadith, the Islamization process entailed rigorous adherence to the Quran and Hadith, coupled with a complete disavowal of

what they perceived as extraneous elements originating from Hinduism and Buddhism that had become appended to Islam (Khan, 2007).

In the past decade, the region of Kashmir has witnessed a notable surge in religious radicalization and accompanying fundamentalism and the impact of a more Wahhabi based culture in the form of the Ahl-e-Hadith among the youth. Besides, the rapid proliferation of Sunni fundamentalist ideologies over the past decade has led to a notable surge in the endorsement of concepts like the caliphate and a society governed by Sharia law (Mir, S., 25 May 2019). This phenomenon is significantly attributed to the influence of Arabic Islamic culture that has had a significant impact in Kashmir (Sameer, 1 August 2022). As SSP ██████ pointed out:

> "The adoption of Arabic terms like 'Allah' and 'Ramadan' in place of local terms like 'Khuda' and 'Ramzan' could be attributed to a perceived superiority complex, believing that Arabic Muslims are more pious compared to other religions" (2022).

When an organisation with Arabic roots advocates the concept of a 'Caliphate,' it resonates with Muslim reformists, regardless of their geographic origin (Pandya, 2019). This notion of Muslim unity transcending national boundaries and downplaying the importance of nationality and nationhood becomes a significant rhetoric and ideology for such individuals (Pandya, 2019). The shift towards fundamentalism nowadays in Kashmir is manifested encompassing multiple facets such as militancy, sociocultural attitudes, behavioural paradigms, and the collective psychological disposition of the Kashmiri populace. Moreover, this shift poses a significant challenge to the local strain of Islam, Kashmiriyat, which is deeply rooted in syncretism and characterised by a liberal ethos that historically allowed for coexistence with diverse faiths (Sahay and Pandya, 2019). Pandya notes "Out of the six million Sunni Muslims in Kashmir Valley, approximately 1.6 million are Wahhabis" (2020, 14). Moreover, it is important to note that these proponents of Wahhabism and the Ahl-e-Hadith Islamic sect concurrently endorse the exclusivist and extremist tenets, employing this doctrine as a means to

cleanse the indigenous Islam of Kashmir from syncretic and perceived pagan elements (Sameer, 1 August 2022). Consequently, within the broader public consciousness, the traditional Sufi Islam that has characterised the region for centuries has, over the past three decades, been increasingly stigmatised as a form of apostasy influenced by Hindu practices, thereby ostensibly divesting Muslims of the martial attributes traditionally associated with the concept of jihad (██████, 2022). As a result, Salafist doctrine, adhered to by the Ahl-e Hadith, categorically rejects the veneration of Sufi shrines, tomb worship, and other syncretic rituals and practices that they perceive as pernicious influences originating from Hindu and Greek mythologies (Martin, 2008). In recent times, Kashmir has witnessed the unfortunate destruction of its Sufi shrines, which serves as a poignant symbol of the waning influence of Sufi ideology and the concurrent rise of a more radicalised form of belief within the region. This shift underscores a notable transformation in the religious landscape of Kashmir, marked by a departure from the traditionally moderate and syncretic Sufi traditions associated with the indigenous Kashmiriyat towards a more extremist interpretation of religious principles among a certain disillusioned part of the population (see Figure 1).

Fig:1: 'Blaze at Sufi shrine triggers violence in Kashmir' (Reuters, 26 June 2012)

Furthermore, it is extremely important to note that the Salafis have garnered a substantial following among the youth, particularly the generation born in the early 1990s, which came of age amidst an environment marked by violence, religious radicalization, and political turbulence rooted in the inherent conflict amongst identities and ideologies amongst various parts of the population as well as between Kashmiris and the Indian state (Pandya, 2019). Under these complicated circumstances, it is understandable that this particular generation has no recollections of the syncretic social culture shared between Pandits and Muslims in Kashmir, which has been nurtured around the concept of Kashmiriyat during the long-standing history of Kashmir, along with the ideology of Sufi-Islam (Pandya, 2019). Consequently, as the external and environmental forces have escalated quickly, these individuals belonging to this age group and era have gradually developed a somewhat radicalised mindset Pandya, 2019). In this light, Borum explains that

"The core elements in a "cognitive theory" of aggression derive from an area of study called "social cognition." The basic notion is that people interact with their environment based on how they perceive and interpret it. That is, people form an internal (cognitive) map of their external (social) environment, and these perceptions – rather than an objective external reality – determine their behaviour" (2004, 13).

At its core, this theory posits that individuals engage with their surrounding environment predicated upon the cognitive lens through which they perceive and interpret it. In essence, individuals construct an internal cognitive schema of their external social milieu, and it is these subjective cognitive constructions, rather than an objective external reality, that fundamentally govern their behavioural responses.

Empirical investigations within this theoretical framework affirm that how individuals perceive the intent of others profoundly influences their propensity for aggressive conduct (Oots, Kent and Weiegele, 1985, 10-13). In this regard, it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of both internal and external factors capable of modulating an individual's perceptions of provocation or intent. Among individuals characterised by heightened proclivities for aggression (Borum, 2004), two prevalent cognitive and information-processing deficits have been identified. Firstly, they often exhibit a limited capacity to generate non-aggressive resolutions to conflicts and concurrently lack confidence in their ability to effectively employ such alternatives. Secondly, individuals with heightened aggression tendencies frequently display heightened perceptual sensitivity to hostile or aggressive cues within their environment, with a particular emphasis on interpersonal cues (Dodge and Schwartz, 1997).

Furthermore, in research conducted by Abhinav Pandya (2019) on the ground, students from the University of Kashmir conveyed to the author that the protracted conflict experienced over the last three decades has cast their society into a state of what can be characterised as "collective depression." The considerable loss of young lives and the violations committed by security forces (SFs) and militant groups have, in the perception

of many, rendered worldly existence bereft of meaning. A profound psychological crisis afflicts a significant portion, if not the entirety, of the younger generation, compounded by a dearth of opportunities for the development of their talents (Dixit, 2020). Meha Dixit in her work states that

> "Wars may leave lasting scars within the minds of children and youth…Wars destroy the social fabric often leading to separation from families and communities. Key areas of concern include physical safety, disruption of education, militarisation of young minds and the psychological impact of the conflict…This may manifest in their active involvement in conflict as combatants or the militarisation of young minds even though they are not active combatants" (2020, 145, 146).

In this context, Islam assumes a paramount role as a refuge and solace for those seeking tranquillity, offering a source of anchorage, spiritual fortitude, and solace through prayer as Dixit in her research explains in the sense of uncertainty, one seeks comfort in a higher power, simply because these are troubles not ordinarily solved. Irrespective of scientific logic, prayers inspire faith in the overall goodness of the universe, in fairness not accorded to Kashmiris by some force, somewhere, looking out for them (2020). For individuals in search of identity and empowerment, political Islam presents itself as a robust platform replete with a mobilising narrative. In this milieu, susceptible young minds become susceptible targets for extremist clerics who provide them with religious justifications for engaging in violent jihad. Furthermore, it was discerned that in situations where conventional democratic governance falters, a prevailing inclination emerges towards political Islam, perceived as harbouring "divine" solutions for the governance of both state and society (Geelani, 2019). Within the context of Kashmir, the resentment towards India's violence and disillusionment with perceived corrupt, haughty, elitist mainstream political figures, bureaucrats, and security force coupled with poor governance and perceived manipulations of democratic processes, has collectively prompted a substantial segment of the populace to gravitate towards this extreme exclusive sphere of Islamism (Geelani, 2019).

In order to further explain the rationale behind this phenomenon, within the contemporary context, the post-1990s generation perceives the domination of the Indian military in Kashmir and the rising Hindu India identity as affronts to their Islamic identity (Geelani, 2019). In search of an anchor and a belief system that bestows upon them an empowering Islamic identity, they turn away from the dominant narrative of militancy, conflict, and violence (Devadas, 2019). The tranquil and meditative aspects of Sufism do not resonate with the sentiments of this youth, who instead view Sufism as having engendered meekness, pacifism, and tolerance, which they believe, facilitated foreign invasions in the past instead of assisting Kashmiris in escaping the conflict (Devadas, 2019). During these tumultuous periods, the adoption of a fundamentalist and puritanical belief system offers the younger generation a perceived sense of stability, resilience, and assurance in which they get a source to showcase their anger, frustration, and resentment towards the Indian state and corrupt political figures, demonstrated by the case of Burhan Wani, Zakir Musa and other militants (Devadas, 2018). As a senior police official from South Kashmir claimed:

> "To channelize and express the prevailing sentiments of anger and frustration, religion, particularly Islam, emerges as a salient instrument for such purposes" (Aijaz, 2023).

It serves as a purported ultimate solution and a source of hope for safeguarding their distinctive Kashmiri identity and, in their view, a means to extricate themselves from the prevailing circumstances (Puri, 2004). As a result, the prevailing scenario of conflict and unrest since 2010 has significantly contributed to the growing popularity of Ahl-e-Hadith among the youth, resulting in a notable increase in its adherents. This perspective of disillusionment and mistrust among the youth and militants will be further explained in the following part of this chapter.

In addition to the vulnerability of the youth engendered by a tumultuous socio-political milieu that allows the growth of fundamentalist ideologies, communication technologies, particularly the internet and social media, serve as channels that

substantiate the spread of the Salafist movement. These technological channels function as instrumental means to enhance the Salafis' influence with greater efficiency among the public, as asserted by Pandya (2020). The role of the Internet and media in disseminating extremist ideologies and nurturing the tendency of radicalisation in the region will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. As a result, there has been a two-fold increase in the proliferation of Ahl-e-Hadith mosques and seminaries over the last 27 years, signifying its extensive and firmly established influence within the populace Pandya, 2019). In this light, Crenshaw (1988) posits that the precepts of social cognition are applicable not only to individual terrorists but also extend to the organisations to which they belong. She underscores the idea that "the actions of terrorists are predicated upon subjective interpretations of the world, rather than a reliance on objective reality. Perceptions pertaining to the political and social milieu undergo a filtration process mediated by individual beliefs and attitudes, which in turn are informed by experiential encounters and recollections". Moreover, The Salafis, notably, have outpaced other groups in establishing a substantial non-religious social presence (Dehlvi, 2016). They operate orphanages, clinics, colleges, schools, and madrasas, significantly contributing to their societal influence. Moreover, an extensive distribution of Salafi literature has been in Kashmir during the past three decades (Pandya, 2019), which fosters an environment conducive to fundamentalism, exclusivism, and violence Pandya, 2019).
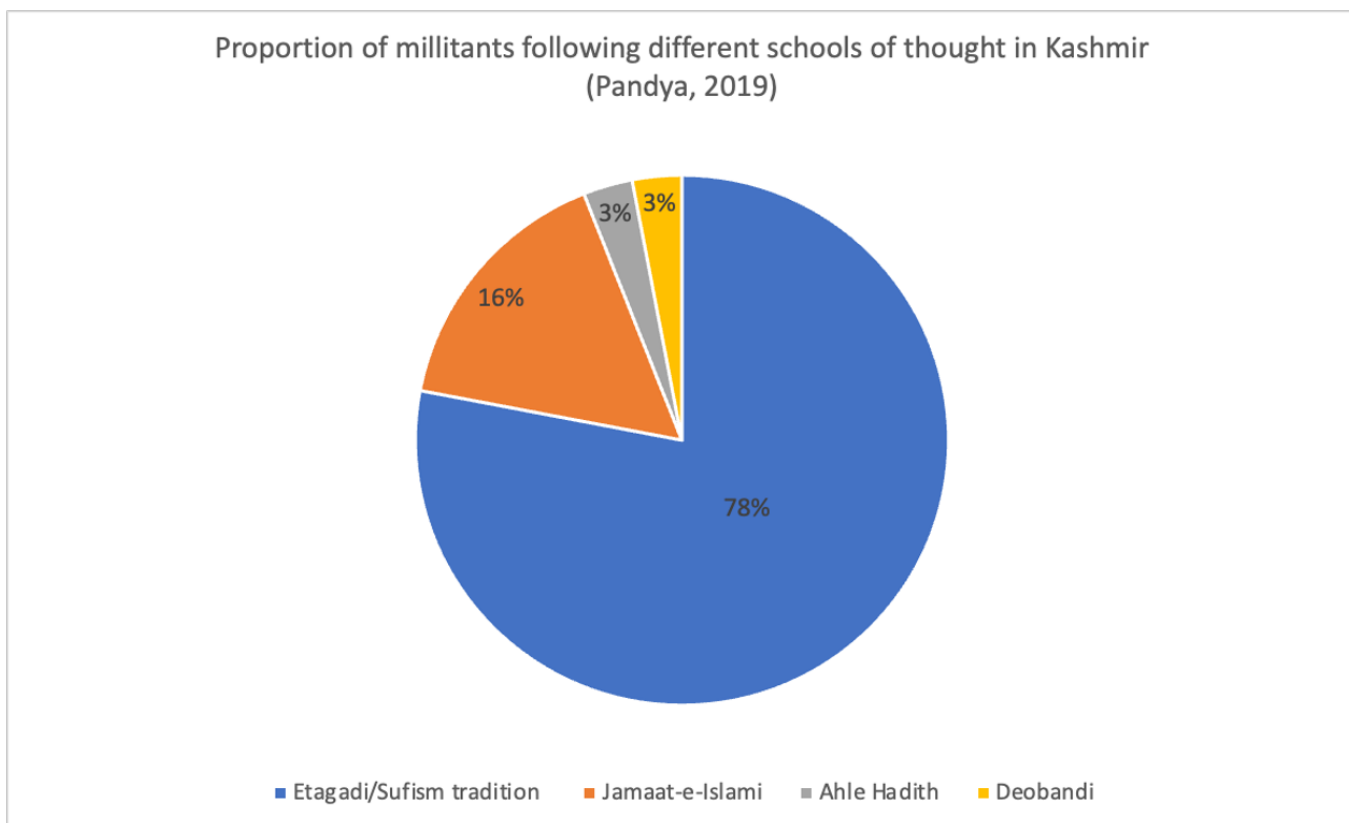
Figure 2: Data taken from *Radicalisation in India, an exploration* (Pandya, 2019)

In this context, a thorough examination of the trajectory of the transition towards Ahl-e-Hadith jurisprudence compared to other doctrinal orientations in the region is paramount to assess its impact. A pertinent dataset sourced from Pandya (2019) delineates the distribution of militants adhering to various jurisprudences in Kashmir, revealing the coexistence of four principal schools of thought within the milieu of militant insurgencies. While there exists a discernible trend towards the adoption of more fundamentalist and extremist ideologies among a subset of the Kashmiri populace, it is noteworthy that Sufism maintains its pre-eminence as the predominant doctrinal framework, encompassing 78% of militants, followed by JeI at 16%. As analysed earlier in this chapter, it is essential to underscore that while Sufism epitomises a conciliatory, pacifist manifestation of Islam, fostering syncretism and interfaith harmony, JeI is also seen to operate as a traditionalist entity, pursuing religious objectives through a political and democratic apparatus rather than coercive means. This underscores the nationalist inclinations inherent in both ideologies, affirming the enduring prevalence of an

inclusive nationalistic ethos within the population. On the other hand, the marginal representation of Wahhabism and Salafi orientations, constituting a mere 3% of the militant cohort, underscores the comparatively limited extent of the transition compared to other doctrinal paradigms in spite of the facilitative role of social media in spreading Wahhabism ideologies. Consequently, despite the emergent trend towards embracing more radical religious narratives and ideologies, particularly among the youth demographic, its overarching influence across the region remains modest and circumscribed, persistently overshadowed by the overarching nationalist ideology associated with Sufism and Kashmiriyat. It is imperative to recognize that these statistical findings encapsulate a snapshot of the prevailing dynamics and do not purport to proffer conclusive forecasts regarding future developments.

THE SENSE OF ALIENATION AND MISTRUST

As critically analysed earlier in this chapter, Kashmir has been marked by two concurrent and predominant ideological undercurrents—the aspiration for an independent Kashmir characterised by a nationalistic, secular framework, and the narrative of an Islamist Kashmir rooted in the model of Pan-Islamic Umma. Consequently, these ideologies serve as primary drivers of the competing nationalisms evident in the region elucidated through the conflict between multiple overlapping identities: Kashmiri nationalism, Pakistani nationalism, Indian nationalism, and Islamic nationalism. However, in recent decades, there has been a discernible prevalence of Indian nationalism associated with the identity of Hindu India, exerting dominance over other identities in Kashmir and implying an intention of maintaining Kashmir as an inseparable part of the Indian nation (Bose, 2021; Malji, 2018). This dominance is evidenced by the revivalism of Hindutva throughout India, the rise of Hindu organisations, the promotion of Hindi in schools, the rescindment of specific minority privileges in Kashmir, and notably, the over-militarization of Indian armed forces in the region, indicative of a recourse to violent approaches in addressing issues (Dixit, 2020). A report published by Human Rights Watch in 2006 documented that approximately 20,000 civilians lost their lives in Kashmir

between the years 1990 and 2017. Moreover, Haidar (2015) and Ali, A.S. (4 November 2022) reported that Indian forces have killed more than 100,000 Kashmiri civilians, of which 7,200 died from custodial torture. Decades of human right abuses and deprivation thus have given rise to concerns regarding escalating communalism in India, posing a direct threat to the concept of an independent, self-determined Kashmir, and challenging its Muslim identity as a Muslim-majority state (George, 2016). Consequently, the chauvinistic influence of India as a Hindu nation fosters an environment conducive to nurturing sentiments of disillusionment, resentment, anger, and antipathy towards the Indian government among a specific segment of Kashmiri citizens (Vaishnav, 2019).

Besides, deliberate, and strategic portrayals of Muslims by media establishments and governmental bodies have constructed a narrative depicting Muslims as adversaries and threats not only to the identity of Hindu India but also to the global community, contributing to heightened frustration among Kashmiri Muslims. The rhetoric of the 'Global War on terror', initiated by the US, specifically targeted Muslim communities (Allen, 2010), while the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks tarnished the global perception of Islam, portraying the religion as inherently extremist and fanatical (Allen, 2010). Furthermore, Chris Allen (2010), underscores the frequent utilisation of symbolic terminology such as 'fundamentalist,' 'extremist,' 'fanatic,' and 'radical.' He emphasised the contemporary phenomenon described by academics as the 'culturalization of terror' (Freedman and Thussu, 2011) that has entered popular discourse. In this light, Arun Kundnani (2008) points out that the aforementioned tactics depicting Muslims as inherently violent, regressive, and totalitarian exacerbate feelings of alienation and marginalisation among individuals who perceive themselves as targeted threats within society (2008, 40-45). Consequently, these individuals resorted to radicalised behaviours as a means of self-defence against societal discrimination, pressure, and prejudice.
In light of these circumstances, it can be contended that the primary catalyst driving the increasing adoption of more extreme forms of Islam and the growing influence of Wahhabism thought in Kashmir as aforementioned in the previous section can be attributed to a variety of environmental drivers, causing the escalating negative

emotions experienced by both Kashmiri citizens and militants (Devadas, 2019). This disillusionment and resentment have been exacerbated by perceived betrayals from various political parties and entities operating in the region over decades, coupled with the absence of effective governance in protecting the rights of Kashmiris and addressing the underlying conflicts (Geelani, 2019). Simultaneously, as previously expounded, the negative portrayal of Islam as a global threat to humanity, the denial of the right to self-determination, and the authoritative control over Kashmiri Muslim identity by the burgeoning Hindu identity has ultimately precipitated a reactionary response among Kashmiri youth and militants, termed by scholars as reactionary Islam, an important phenomenon that will be critically examined in the forthcoming chapter.

Along with the rise of Wahhabism in the region, it is important to note that the evolution of the Kashmir insurgency has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from the militant gun culture prevalent in the 1990s to a phase characterised by peaceful protests with stone pelting in the early 2000s (Bose, 2011; Devadas, 2019). This transition is reflective of Kashmir's proclivity to synchronise with global developments, drawing motivation and inspiration from external events and promptly adapting its strategies and behaviours accordingly (Bose, 2021). This adaptive nature is exemplified by the resonance of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which underscored the need for a revival of fundamental Islamic practices in Kashmir. Similarly, the Arab Spring catalysed altering the insurgency's modus operandi towards a non-violent approach (Wani and Wani, 2023; Ali, S., 2022). Furthermore, it is at these times, when the expectation of the population is not met, an intolerable gap appears which makes the Kashmiri expression revolt a proposition supported by Davies who states as illustrated in Figure 3:

> "It is the dissatisfied state of mind rather than the tangible provision of "adequate" or "inadequate "supplies of food, equality, or liberty which produces the revolution" (1962, 6).
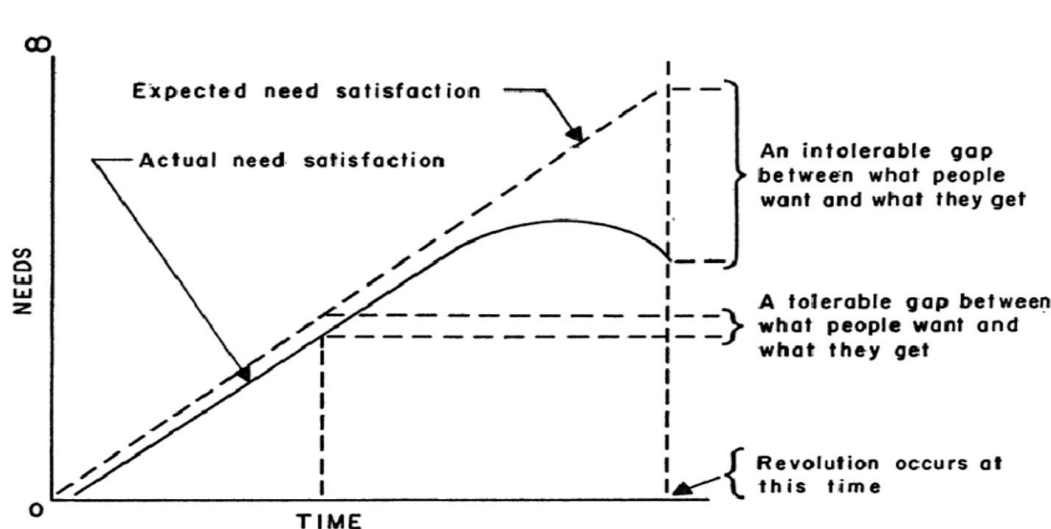
Figure 3 (Davies, 1962, 6)

Moreover, it is imperative to contend that the initial phase of militancy in Kashmir bore a profound impact from the influx of foreign fighters from various corners of the Islamic world who joined the struggle in Kashmir (Devadas, 2018). This phase witnessed the loss of numerous lives, leading the Kashmiri populace to recognize the impracticality of violence as a viable means to achieve their goals. In light of their enduring aspiration for "Azadi" (freedom) and the right to self-determination, the people of Kashmir subsequently shifted their tactical approach from armed conflict to a new era characterised by anti-government protests and stone pelting to what David Devadas recalls in his research *'Rage and Reason'* as the year of endings to the mass violence and beginning to anti-government mass protests (2018, 1). The advocates of 'hartals'(protests) claim this form of political protest is an exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

To exemplify the prevailing sentiment behind Kashmiri protests, the expressions of anguish, suffering, and unwavering determination for liberation from Indian dominion are poignantly encapsulated in the creative work of a young Kashmiri rapper known as MC Kash. In 2010, at the age of 19, MC Kash released a highly acclaimed YouTube video that served as a powerful articulation of these sentiments:

I protest

Against the things you've done

I protest

For a mother who lost her son

I protest

I'll throw stones and never run

I protest

Until my freedom has come

(Rap released in a YouTube video in 2010 by a youth, MC Kash cited in Ganie 2020, 5)

The sense of alienation and marginalisation suffered by the Kashmiri populace will be further scrutinised through the analysis of three pivotal events: the 2008 Amarnath land agitation, the 2009 double murder rape case, and the 2010 Tufail Mattoo encounter, all of which have given rise to the phenomenon of mass protests in Kashmir to safeguard their rights and identity as a Kashmiri. It is noteworthy that the impact of the 2008-2010 period served as a precursor for the phenomenon of reactionary Islam, subsequently leading to the adoption of radicalised Islamic ideologies nowadays in the region.

In June 2008, a contentious proposal emerged, seeking to transfer 100 acres of land to the Shrine Board in the Amarnath issue, thereby intensifying tensions in Kashmir. This proposal, perceived as an endeavour to inject religious dynamics into the Kashmir conflict, garnered support from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and Hindu militant Shiv Sena (Chatterji, 2008). In response, widespread protests ensued including a mix of demographics of young and middle-aged Kashmir Muslims who were retaliated by the security apparatus including the army and police. Navlakha states:

> "According to chronological data collected by the Srinagar-based Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, between 22 June and 12 September, 57 persons were killed and at least 1,500 injured (of whom nearly 600 suffered bullet injuries)" (2008, 43).

Nevertheless, the government revoked its decision giving Kashmiris a sense of winning and a realisation that protests can serve as an effective means of expression.

Figure 4: (New York Times, 28 June 2008) "Land Transfer to Hindu Site Inflames Kashmir's Muslims"

On May 29, 2009, Asiya Jan, and Neelofar Jan, two Muslim girls in Kashmir, aged 17 and 22 were purported to acts of sexual violence and homicide by multiple assailants. Subsequently, a wave of non-violent protests erupted for forty-seven consecutive days to seek justice. During these demonstrations, members of Kashmiri civil society, encompassing youth, men, and women, employed nonviolent means to express dissent against the alleged involvement of military and paramilitary forces, as well as the perceived inadequacies of security forces and state institutions in responding to the incidents. As a result, according to Amnesty International:

> "Police and paramilitary forces have resorted to firing at protesters in several places, including Shopian, Baramulla and Srinagar…One civilian was killed, and 150 civilians injured…These protests are about the ongoing failure of the Indian government to bring members of the security forces to justice for serious human rights violations" (10 June 2009).

Participants in these protests underscored their conviction that civil disobedience constituted the sole viable recourse for pursuing justice in the aftermath of the

aforementioned events. As a result, 4 police officers were arrested, and one was suspended following the agitation (Hussain, 1 June 2009)

(BBC, 16 July 2009)   figure 5   (Hussain, 1 June 2009) figure 6

Two pivotal events in 2010 marked a turning point, characterised by a staged encounter involving security forces who falsely depicted three civilians as foreign terrorists, and the tragic death of a civilian teenager, who was struck by a teargas shell while returning from his tuition centre during a protest. These incidents ignited a substantial uprising in the region, including of a mixed age of Kashmiri population, men and women sparking violent confrontations with security forces and yielding a substantial loss of life, with death of 120 civilians, as documented by Parvez Khurram, the director of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society. Furthermore, the year 2010 resulted in the Killing of 167 civilians, maximum between 2008-2018 and 102 armed forces and police, that enhances further chances for more radicalisation (JKCCS, 2010).

Figure 7: ("Kashmir protests erupt into violence after government troops kill four" The Guardian, 13 August 2010)

Since 2008, the act of pelting stones has become a recurring element within the context of anti-India political demonstrations in Kashmir. Initially, this phenomenon surfaced in specific areas of Srinagar city, notably in Maisuma and the historic downtown district and it notably gained momentum during the widespread street protests of 2010. Over the period spanning from 2009 to 2019, Kashmir experienced approximately 13,000 incidents of stone-throwing (Ganie, 2020).

The question, why young individuals are particularly inclined toward engagement in protest activities can be examined through the lens of McAdam's (1986) theory. McAdam posits that familial and professional responsibilities and constraints often deter certain individuals from participating in protests, even if they hold sympathies or align with a given movement or cause. In contrast, young people tend to exhibit a greater propensity to join protests due to their comparatively lower burden of adult obligations. McAdam characterises this phenomenon as 'biographical availability' (1968, 69). Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that moral shock emerges as a central motivating factor for many young men who engaged in stone-throwing protests in the post-2008 period. These individuals were shaped by the insurrectionary fervour that pervaded the 2008 mass uprising. This uprising played a pivotal role in reinforcing a pro-

Tehreek (pro-freedom movement) political consciousness among Kashmiri youth. The formative years of these young individuals were indelibly marked by the pervasive influence of the protracted armed conflict, widespread human rights violations, and the adjacent trauma induced by the ongoing war. Consequently, they grew up harbouring deep-seated anti-India sentiments, rooted in their first-hand experiences of the Indian state's tactics of violent suppression. These experiences have coalesced to form 'various new phases of experience,' giving rise to a clearly distinguishable new impulse' within contemporary youth (Mannheim, 1952, 309).

The act of stone-throwing operates within the framework of a test of courage and aligns with a code of honour that is interconnected with youth subculture (Ganie, 2020). Within this context, significant value is attributed to the willingness to confront law enforcement, including engaging with, and causing damage to their armoured vehicles. This participation takes on the character of a masculine game, determined by a fusion of political grievances against the state and the adrenaline rush associated with such confrontations (Pressman, 2017). For instance, in the case of Shahid, an individual who was part of the interviews conducted by Ganie (2020), his decision to engage in stone-throwing activities directed at the police and paramilitary forces can be attributed to what can be described as a moral shock. Jasper characterises moral shock 'As an unexpected event' which 'raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action' (1997, 106 cited in Ganie, 2020, 5) . Notably, the individuals who lost their lives during the police firing on August 1, 2010, were not directly related to Shahid. However, he explained that witnessing the lifeless bodies of those individuals fuelled an intense surge of anger within him, compelling him to participate in subsequent protests (Ganie, 2020). This particularly has an impact as Ganie explains that stone-pelting is a gendered protest form, mostly used by young men. In April 2017, when Kashmiri students started wide-scale anti-India protests, female students also threw stones at Indian police and paramilitary at different locations across Kashmir. Since 2010, thousands of Kashmiri youth have been detained for their participation in street protests. Approximately, 11,000 protestors were arrested during the 2016 and 2017 uprisings. Some youths were detained under the Public Safety Act (PSA), which allows the

state to detain a person for up to two years without trial. Some of the detained youths later became militants, after facing harassment and torture in jails (2020, 3). Furthermore, they draw inspiration from the Palestinian protests involving the act of hurling stones at security forces, viewing it as a symbolic gesture of expressing their defiance against the state. This approach reflects a notable departure from radical Pan-Islamism and instead emphasises the adoption of civil disobedience strategies to manifest their grievances, serving as a means to channel their frustration and anger (Arnoldy, 2010).

The prevailing anger during these periods was also closely linked to the ongoing and perceived humiliating militarization of Kashmir, where military force was frequently employed as a means to address the issues faced by the Kashmiri people. The process of militarization executed by the Indian Army within the confines of the Kashmir Valley has exerted a profound and multifaceted impact on the collective psyche of its youthful populace (Dixit, 2020). This influence has manifested itself notably within the domains of education and social freedom, further exacerbated by a heightened incidence of atrocities and human rights violations perpetrated by state actors. As documented in a comprehensive report presented by the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS, 2015), the combined strength of army personnel, police, and paramilitary forces stationed within Jammu and Kashmir is estimated to range between 650,000 and 750,000. Khurram Parvez, a prominent human rights activist from the region, underscores the considerable presence of security forces, stating that

"If you take the Army's total strength, half of it is here. The ratio of police to people is the highest here among all States. You can't have a prison-like reality in Kashmir and expect its people to be silent." (Ashraf, 21 July 2016)

Parvez further accentuates the unsettling implications of the prevailing security apparatus, particularly with regard to human rights abuses. Instances of alleged fake encounters falsely identified as involving foreign terrorists, alongside approximately 7,000 registered cases related to gender-based and sexual violence, have contributed to an escalating atmosphere of apprehension, antipathy towards the Indian administration,

and notably, a discernible impact on the younger generation (JKCCS, 2015; Ashraf, 21 July 2016).

The phenomenon of militarisation and the use of violent approaches to suppress protests have profoundly reshaped the cognitive paradigms of Kashmiri youth. Geyer's (1989) conceptualization of militarisation as a contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organises itself for the production of violence, underscores the complex societal shifts associated with the growing militaristic presence in Kashmir. This transformation is further articulated by Dixit (2020), which as discussed above has led to the "militarisation of young minds," imprinting them with a discourse centred around violence. The overwhelming security presence, involving approximately 600,000 to 700,000 personnel, has notably intensified the feeling of being besieged among Kashmiris. As a result, a collective response emerges, particularly around the common religious identity of Islam, shared by around 97 per cent of the population as noted by in his article 'Gov't website declares 97% Muslim Kashmir 'predominantly Hindu' (11 May 2021). This collective response aligns with Summerfield's observation that "when conflict routinely involves the destruction or terrorising of whole communities, even survivors of individual acts of brutality are likely to register their wounds as social rather than psychological" (1996, 6).

In line with this, Bassiouni et al. (1986) assert that when the pillars of social justice, ethical values, and human rights appear imperilled, acts of violence against the state can assume a moral veneer, eroding conventional delineations between right and wrong. The convergence of these intricate dynamics engendered an environment conducive to the proliferation of anti-India sentiments and the quest for alternative narratives that contested the dominion of the state while championing the principles of human rights and equality of citizenship, laying the groundwork for a resurgence of violent inclinations against the state. This resurgence, notably underpinned by religious ideologies and causes, assumes a distinctively moral guise as an alternative mode of resistance and identity reassertion (Zutshi, 2003). This discourse is also elucidated by Bose (2021), as he

contends that the recurring instances of human rights violations in the valley engender a perception among the youth of Kashmir that India embodies an occupying power, further exacerbating their detachment and disinclination towards joining the militant ranks. Bell et al. (2013) also agrees that various forms of human rights violations and the presence of marginalised social groups, coupled with adverse horizontal inequalities within societies, autonomously contribute to a heightened likelihood of both the emergence and intensification of various forms of internal violent conflicts. This condition not only bolsters the clamour for azadi (freedom) but also intertwines it with the preservation of human life and dignity - core elements that were intrinsic to earlier discussions on Kashmiri freedom.

David Devadas (2018) identifies a parallel between the expressions of anger among the youth and the general population of Kashmir during the period spanning from 2008 to 2010. This period of collective anger was fuelled by the perceived failure of the state and its security apparatus to recognize that the insurgency, which had initially manifested with armed violence in 1988, had evolved into a non-violent movement and peaceful approach. Additionally, despite the shift towards a non-violent approach in the protest movement, all of the incidents in 2008, 2009, and 2010 witnessed similar outcomes, including loss of life and injuries sustained by the Kashmiri population. This led to an important realisation among Kashmiri insurgents regarding the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of the non-violent strategies they had been employing. In other words, irrespective of the approach they employ to regain their freedom and exercise self-determination, their struggle and endeavours are likely to culminate in similar outcomes—namely, continued repression and maltreatment by the Indian government, inevitably leading to bloodshed and heightened violence (Seghal, 2011). On these notes, Staniland (2013) characterises this as the 'paradox of normalcy.' He explains that this paradox centres on the Indian state's desire to maintain the status quo in Kashmir while simultaneously promising democratic governance to the region. However, whenever Kashmiris attempt to employ political avenues to assert their right to self-determination, the state undermines democratic processes and its associated institutions to preserve

the existing state of affairs. This paradox signifies the government's failure to formulate an efficacious and comprehensive resolution to address the situation, as well as the youth's incapacity to effectuate change within the prevailing circumstances (Staniland, 2013). Consequently, it implies the necessity of embracing a more stringent and radical approach to combat the injustices perpetrated by the Indian administration, thereby propelling individuals towards a heightened level of spiritual and religious radicalization afterwards (Staniland, 2013).

Geelani in his work *'Rage and Reason'* states that

> "The fifth generation of Kashmir believes that Delhi is in a denial that Kashmir dispute needs a political solution That's why some also make a decision to pick up guns knowing fully well that their symbolic defiance may not be enough to defeat India" (2019, 41).

Moreover, in an interview with ███████████████ Police ██████████ (2022) and senior academic ████████████ (2022), both align with Geelani (2019) and explain that there exists a romanticised ideal associated with this act of resistance, wherein it is perceived that these individuals, by choosing to confront oppression rather than remaining silent, engage in a form of struggle that is not solely rooted in animosity but also fuelled by a fervent belief in their ability to morally challenge the authority of the Indian state. Besides, it is crucial to emphasise that militant leaders like Burhan Wani and Zakir Musa were adolescents during these uprisings, and their exposure to such events played a significant role in shaping their later inclinations towards violence (Devadas, 2019). They lack a substantial recollection of the historical significance of Sufi Kashmiriyat, which has traditionally served as the cornerstone of Kashmir's cultural identity. Instead, their focus is primarily directed towards perceived acts of brutality perpetrated by the state. Consequently, there exists a heightened propensity for radicalization within this demographic cohort. This would be later explored in this thesis.

It is important to emphasise the media's role in this period as it provided a platform for these narratives of militarisation and human rights abuse to spread and resonate with

even more disillusioned and aggrieved youth. Consequently, it can be seen that the slogans and rhetoric echoed during this time often championed the cause of Islam and waved the flags of Pakistan. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the construction of an anti-India narrative during these periods does not necessarily imply the presence of a Pakistan-based or Islamist narrative. Instead, it reflects the deep-seated resentment and hostility of Kashmiris towards the Indian state apparatus (Geelani, 2019).

YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT WITH POLITICS

The erosion of credibility within Kashmir extends beyond militant groups to encompass mainstream political parties and politicians also referred to as political alienation amongst Kashmiris (Chowdhary, 2001). This loss of faith in political institutions results from a range of factors, including corruption, perceived disloyalty to both Pakistan and India, nepotism, governance failures, and a prevailing image of these parties as being subservient to Delhi (Devadas, 2019). Illustratively, during the 2019 parliamentary election in the Anantnag constituency, once held by former Chief Minister Mehboba Mufti, the final voter turnout was dismally low, at less than 2.88%, providing a stark indicator of the existing alienation (Devadas, 2019; Sarkar, 2019). Crucially, the political and bureaucratic apparatus has progressively severed its "connection" with ordinary Kashmiris, particularly the youth (Devadas, 2018). Concurrently, the absence of civil society initiatives compounds this credibility deficit. The youth population perceives mainstream political parties as having prospered by manipulating both India and Pakistan, deceiving the masses for their own narrow political and financial interests and creating a political vacuum (Lahir and Rohmetra, 2023). Even the separatist organisation, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), has sustained itself through the suffering of ordinary Kashmiris and financial support from India and Pakistan's intelligence agencies (Pandya, 2019, 6-10).

Simultaneously, there is also a growing sense of disillusionment with Pakistan. The younger generation believes that Pakistan's primary interests in the region are motivated by geopolitics, rather than genuine concern for Kashmiris, their dignity, and their aspirations (Devadas, 2019; Pandya, 2019). It has become evident that over the past three decades, Pakistan repeatedly made promises to support the cause of an independent Kashmir or the resolution of the Kashmir dispute but failed to deliver any conclusive actions (Pandya, 2019). Consequently, a major part of the Kashmiri population realised that the actual conflict was between the competing narratives of a Pro-Indian state and a Pro-Pakistan state, and that their aspiration for a free and independent Kashmir was merely being instrumentalized by both sides (Geelani, 2019).

In 2008 and 2009, a significant shift occurred in the sentiments of young Kashmiris towards their political leaders. During this period, the predominant demographic group consisted of individuals born around 1990 who were transitioning into their teenage years (Chowdhary, 2001). Over the preceding half-decade, they had cultivated a sense of optimism and trust in certain established leaders, as well as in the electoral system itself. This optimism extended to the perceived goodwill of various local, national, and international entities. One source of hope for these young Kashmiris stemmed from the ongoing negotiations between Indian and Pakistani leaders, as well as discussions involving leaders of Kashmir's 'separatist' movement and senior Indian officials, which had gained momentum starting in 2003 (Devadas, 2019). In 2008, the confidence and reliance placed on separatist leaders underwent a significant erosion in the perception of the broader young populace (Devadas, 2019; Geelani, 2019). When the unrest commenced in May of that year, groups of young individuals converged at the doorsteps of established leaders, urging them to lead their demonstrations (Devadas, 2019). Some of these leaders openly admitted to being taken aback but swiftly assumed leadership roles at the forefront of these processions (Devadas, 2019). As these agitations gained momentum in June, these leaders had successfully solidified their positions as figureheads of these movements (Geelani, 2019).

Over the preceding years, several influential geopolitical powers had engaged with three of the most prominent leaders, effectively presenting them as the collective public face of Kashmir's struggle for autonomy: Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and Yasin Malik (Pandya, 2019). During a pivotal moment in the peak of these agitations, when these three leaders convened on a single platform, Geelani sought the recognition of the vast gathering as the sole leader of the struggle (Devadas, 2019). Instead, a few attendees expressed dissent through jeers and boos. This juncture marked a critical revelation and turning point for many young individuals, prompting them to reassess their perceptions (Devadas, 2019; Pandya, 2019).

According to a survey conducted by David Devadas among Kashmiri youth (2019), approximately 55 percent of individuals born in the mid-1990s, who were adolescents and actively involved in the protest movements between 2008 and 2010, expressed a lack of esteem or regard for Geelani in his capacity as a separatist leader (2019). This suggests that leaders formerly esteemed for their advocacy of Kashmiri separatism are now perceived as corrupt, prioritising personal agendas and advantages (Devadas, 2018). Consequently, this vacuum in credible leadership fosters an environment conducive to increased radicalization, as disillusioned youth seek alternative avenues, including religious extremism (Chowdhary, 2001; Geelani, 2019). Moreover, this phenomenon exacerbates the erosion of Kashmiri Muslim identity, as the contestation between Indian nationalism and Kashmiri nationalism intersects with the clash between ethnic Muslim and Hindu identities (Bose, 2021). These intricate dynamic warrants further exploration in subsequent chapters.

Besides, it is noteworthy that administrative insensitivity and widespread corruption have fuelled the disillusionment with the existing system and the escalating discourse surrounding religious identity (Rohmetra & Lahir, 2023). For instance, there is a prevailing belief among young people that a governance system founded on religious principles would inherently be more just and equitable as noted by Yasir in his work *'In a changed Kashmir, Moderates Feel Betrayed by India'* (2 September 2020). However, David

Devadas, in his research, observed during a visit to a Pulwama classroom in April 2016 that one of the most vocal teenage students expressed the view that society was permeated with corruption, equating participation in the established system with corruption. This signalled a disillusionment not only with the Indian state but also with the politics of Kashmir and the separatist movement. In his perspective, all government employees were branded as 'mukhbir' (informers, though he appeared to use the term to denote "traitors") (Devadas, 2018). His rationale seemed to be that those involved in the established system were motivated by greed for financial gain (Devadas, 2018). Consequently, a senior Journalist agreed with Devadas (2019) and stated that "for many young individuals, a governance system sanctioned by religion emerged as a logical alternative to a corrupted system that Kashmiri felt was exploiting them" (███, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes by highlighting the intricate interplay between Kashmiri nationalism and Islamist narratives, tracing their evolution and the complex dynamics shaping Kashmir's socio-political landscape. Kashmiri nationalism, rooted in a deep sense of cultural identity and historical struggle for sovereignty, has undergone a nuanced transformation from early proto nationalism to a broader, more inclusive vision. Despite challenges and conflicting ideologies, the aspiration for an independent Kashmir remains a significant force, driven by the desire to preserve secular values and distinct identity. Conversely, the rise of Islamist narratives, particularly championed by groups like Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), introduces a religious dimension to Kashmir's political discourse. While advocating for an Islamic state, these movements challenge the secular fabric of Kashmiri nationalism, presenting a complex ideological tension within the region. It is imperative to recognize that while JeI operates as a religious entity fostering religiosity within its region, its ideological framework aligns more closely with traditionalist principles. This organisation pursues Islamic objectives through a political democratic modality, imbued with a degree of nationalist sentiment in its ethos. This differs from the purist fundamentalism espoused by the Ahl-e-Hadith and Wahhabism,

which vigorously advocates for the establishment of a Caliphate modelled on a Pan-Islamic Umma paradigm. Furthermore, recent manifestations of a shift towards a more fundamentalist and extremist interpretation of Islam, exemplified by Wahhabism and Ahl-e-Hadith, indicate a trend towards radicalization, specifically among the 1990s generation. Despite these trends, the scale and prominence of this movement remain relatively modest when compared to other doctrinal orientations prevailing in the region and is largely dominated by the nationalistic perspective ingrained in the region.

Besides, the emergence of these extremist ideologies reflects growing disillusionment among Kashmiri youth with mainstream politics and governance. The influence of global Islamic events, coupled with local grievances, has fuelled a shift towards radical interpretations of Islam, posing a challenge to Kashmir's syncretic tradition and exacerbating socio-religious tensions. The period from 2008 to 2010 witnessed profound effects on Kashmiri youth due to the deprivation of human rights and the violence perpetrated by the Indian state as the clash between Indian and Kashmiri nationalism intersects with ethnic and religious identities. This environment of anger and resentment, exacerbated by perceived militarization and the use of force to address issues, created fertile ground for radicalization among susceptible individuals. Furthermore, the erosion of credibility within Kashmir extends beyond militant groups to mainstream political parties and politicians, resulting in political alienation among Kashmiris. Factors such as corruption, perceived disloyalty, nepotism, and governance failures have contributed to this loss of faith in political institutions, leaving a vacuum in credible leadership. This vacuum, in turn, fuels increased radicalization as disillusioned youth seek alternative avenues, typically religious extremism as an ultimate solution for this turbulent situation.

CHAPTER 4: From Nationalism to Pan-Islamic Change? Real or Symbolic

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to explain the underlying rationale behind the shift towards radicalization among Kashmiri youth and militants, building upon the themes of alienation, mistrust, and disillusionment towards politics explored in the preceding chapter. Grounded in a comprehensive analysis of these preceding arguments, this chapter seeks to discern the authenticity of this shift, distinguishing between symbolic and genuine transformations towards a more fundamentalist, extremist form of religion. Firstly, the chapter provides an overview of contemporary phenomena indicative of the shift from nationalism to religious fervour among certain segments of Kashmiri youth and militants. It examines manifestations such as the display of symbols, imagery, rhetoric, and speeches reminiscent of typical radical groups. Secondly, the chapter delves into the dynamic interplay between two emerging phenomena: the revivalism of Hindu India and the revivalism of Islam in Kashmir. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from the sociology of Hindu revivalism and Islam revivalism, it analyses the reciprocal influence between these phenomena. Furthermore, it explores the catalysing effect of Hindu revivalism on the rise of Islamophobia and the subsequent adoption of radicalised Islamic rhetoric as a reactionary response to the ascent of Hindu nationalism in India. Building upon this foundation, the chapter scrutinises the nature of the shift, considering both symbolic transformations facilitated by the proliferation of the Internet and media, and genuine ideological shifts. It offers a detailed person centric case study of Zakir Musa, a prominent militant leader advocating for the narrative of an Islamic Kashmir and examines the potential presence of the Islamic State in Kashmir in light of the spread of radicalised ideologies in the region. Lastly, the chapter concludes by presenting the resistance of the majority of Kashmiri citizens to this trend and its

reasons, drawing conclusive findings regarding the nature of the phenomenon and its implications for the region.

INTRODUCING THE CHANGE

The rise of a radical ideology gained notable attention with the prominence of Zakir Musa, who held the position of 'divisional commander' within Hizb-ul Mujahideen (HM). In 2017, he delivered a speech emphasising the impermissibility of nationalism and democracy in Islam, advocating instead for the establishment of an Islamist system based on Shariah law. His remarks represented a departure from previous discourse within the region's struggle for self-determination, rejecting political aspect of the movement and issuing threats against those who labelled it as such, including leaders of the prominent separatist group, Hurriyat Conference. (Geelani, 2019; Devadas, 2019). Zakir Musa's declarations served as a potent vehicle for shedding light on discernible patterns of Islamist narratives that had manifested over the decade spanning from 2007 to 2017 (Devadas, 2018). In regard to increased religiosity amongst youth as discussed in chapter 3, Zakir Musa's ascension, characterised by his espousal of fundamentalist ideologies, occurred within a context of widespread mistrust and alienation among the Kashmiri populace towards the political apparatus and government institutions. In the face of this entrenched disillusionment, Musa's emergence offered a perceived avenue of escape and resolution from the adversity that had long afflicted the region. Therefore, this sentiment marked a departure from the previously dominant narratives of independence and alignment with Pakistan towards ideas of a caliphate, Islamic state, rejection of nationalism, and an embrace of pan-Islamism. This analysis will be examined in the forthcoming case study section within this chapter.

According to Devadas:

> "The attitudes and aspirations of people had changed radically by 2017. The millennials who had been at the forefront of the 2016 uprising had developed a seemingly unstoppable momentum. They already had no regard for, or trust in,

the 'leaders' whose homes were searched. As these sting revelations and searches finished what little credibility the various leaders of Kashmir's movement still had, many of the youth became more enamoured of the sort of pan-Islamist shariah-based regime Musa espoused" (2018, 109).

Furthermore, Insights from an interview held with a ████████████ local journalist from Kashmir, he explained that:

> "There was a correlation between the adoption of Islamist ideologies and a younger demographic within the Kashmiri population. Specifically, this trend is higher among adolescents, attributed to their sentiments of anger, rage, and frustration, particularly in the aftermath of events such as the killing of Burhan Wani, a youth icon and Musa's predecessor" (██████, 2022).

Moreover, according to an Indian army intelligence officer:

> "This age cohort demonstrated a pronounced inclination towards armed struggle ready to serve as mujahids" (███████████ 2022).

This assertion highlights the prevalent notion among young individuals regarding the Indian state's portrayal as an external occupier responsible for unjust treatment inflicted upon the Kashmiri populace. Such perceptions, compounded by the vacuum resulting from political disillusionment as previously discussed, contribute to the cultivation of fertile ground for radicalised behaviour promoting youth to seek solace and purpose through religious avenues, a sentiment echoed by Devadas (2019), Bose (2021) thereby enhancing the accuracy and minimising the level partiality mentioned in the analysis of the aforementioned interviews.

The importance of religion became very specific during this period as the populace of Kashmir started practising religion very piously. In an interview with a journalist, he explained:

> "During 2016, after the encounter involving Burhan Wani who was a prominent commander of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), an intensified adherence to religious convictions had gained prevalence compared to the preceding times" (█████, 2022).

Furthermore, in another interview, a senior police official stated:

> "There was a noticeable rise in mosque attendance, particularly among young men and teenagers, during events like taraweeh night prayers in Ramzan and aitikaf retreats. Significant financial resources flowed into Kashmir during this phase, a substantial portion of which was allocated for the construction of mosques" (SSP ██████, 2022).

Moreover, the analysis of Geelani further substantiates the accuracy of the aforementioned interviews of ██████ (2022) and SSP (██████, 2022) by stating:

> "Across various towns and villages in the Valley, the proliferation of three neighbouring mosques became a common occurrence. These often-represented distinct sects, including entities such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Ahle-Hadith. Many of these newly established mosques were not only sizable but were also adorned with opulent features such as marble, wood panelling, and luxurious carpets" (2019, 78).

It can be argued that disillusionment with political leaders and a lack of trust in Kashmiri separatist governance has led to a sense of solace through religious participation. This has transformed into a discourse concerning individual identity, particularly among the younger demographic, who have experienced various forms of brutality by the Indian state, intensifying feelings of frustration and anger. The burgeoning attendance of young individuals frequenting mosques, coupled with the proliferation of mosques across the region, denotes a discernible trend towards heightened spiritual engagement and increased religiosity in the region. Participation in heightened religiosity serves as a means of expression for these sentiments as viewed through the lens of Echele who concludes that religion provides a shared identity and sense of belonging, critical to the success of any political movement or leader and states that "One-way social solidarity can be formed is through the employment of religious symbols" (2023, 11) and while Durkheim suggests that society "In all its aspects and every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism" (1912, 232 cited in Echele, 2023, 11).

The shifting mindset among Kashmiri inhabitants is also exemplified by the increasing adoption of religious attire among the youth, such as girls donning Arabic burqas and boys sporting skullcaps, high-ankle Arabic-style pyjamas, and beards (Pandya, 2019). This trend is substantiated by insights gained from interviews with Director General of Police ███ (2022) and an ██████████ local journalist ███ (2022). These findings suggest a departure from prior regional norms, which aligns with a semiotic perspective posited by Barthes, wherein every sign serves as a symbol (1977). In this context, the symbol of heightened religiosity is apparent. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, there is a notable jurisprudential transition from the traditionally moderate and syncretic Sufi traditions towards a more extremist interpretation of religious principles like Wahhabism among a segment of the populace. This transition, however small is underscored by the notable destruction of significant religious symbols of Sufi ideology, notably Sufi shrines (Reuters, 26 June 2012). Such actions reflect the frustration and disillusionment of a portion of the Kashmiri population with the prevailing socio-political climate in Kashmir, leading to the abandonment of longstanding values associated with peace and harmony and the adoption of a more confrontational and radical approach.

As explored in Chapter 3, disillusionment with mainstream political avenues has significantly influenced militants to transition their narrative from a pro-Pakistan stance to a more radical ideology centred on the concept of Kashmir as a nation. Masoodi (30 December 2018) provides evidence of instances where Kashmiri youth and militants have been observed brandishing ISIS and Pakistani flags while engaging in confrontations with security forces near Kashmir's Jamia Masjid. This means that this emergent imagery and rhetoric signify a departure from previous patterns observed in the valley, which means that certain militants now prioritise narratives emphasising the supremacy of Islam and envision Kashmir's integration into a broader caliphate and pursuit of Pan-Islamism, rather than seeking alignment with Pakistan or supporting separatist groups like the Hurriyat Conference. As noted in Chapter 3, these militants now view alignment with Pakistan as just another nationalist perspective exploited by these separatist groups for their own political advantage, which is completely

antithetical to original Islamic principles. Such messaging displayed by ISIS black flag waving during protests and references to martyrdom serves as a means to heighten religious fervour and manipulate audience reactions into taking a more fundamentalist stance of Islam, echoing Jowett and O'Donnell's (2006) definition of propaganda as a deliberate effort to shape perceptions, influence thoughts, and steer behaviours towards the desired objectives of the propagandist.

It is crucial to recognize the multifaceted nature of the transition towards radicalised Islamic ideologies, particularly the significant role played by the utilisation of religious symbols. Several youth and militants such as Burhan Wani and Zakir Musa were seen to employ symbols and imagery as potent tools to convey their mindset and perspectives, thereby propagating specific meanings and messages to the public. This symbolic dimension of the transformation will be subjected to further critical examination in subsequent sections of this chapter. Moreover, the underlying rationale driving this shift will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections of this chapter, commencing with an exploration of the rise of Hindu nationalism as one of the principal catalysts behind this transition.

THE CHANGING IDEA OF INDIA

It is important to note that, since 1947, the conception of India as a nation, as articulated by Mahatma Gandhi and the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, has been predicated on the principles of a secular and democratic state with a parliamentary form of government (Gandhi, 1933). Mahatma Gandhi stated:

> "I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at the Swaraj described therein. I know that India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so. But such is my conviction. I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment

of Parliamentary Swaraj, in accordance with the wishes of the people of India."

(1933)

However, this secular vision of India inherently encompassed a synthesis of identities and religions, without any one religion being deemed superior to others (Bose, 2003). However, despite the end of British colonial rule and the subsequent partition of India and Pakistan, premised on the idea of India as a Hindu state and Pakistan as a Muslim state, the essence of India's secular vision posed a threat to the notion of India as solely a nation of Hindus (Gowalkar, 1966).

Furthermore, since the ascent of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) to power in 2015, the current ruling government of India, there has been a notable shift in the conceptualization of the nation (Narayan, 2020). India's identity has evolved from being primarily secular to one with Hindu underpinnings, drawing inspiration from Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, whose origins can be traced to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Malji, 2018, 39-43). The intolerant segment of Indian society does not align with the foundational idea of India as a secular state (Serhan, 27 May 2022). Instead, it envisions India in a manner akin to the conception of Pakistan by its founders—an enclave for the subcontinent's Muslims who feared Hindu dominance and the potential erosion of their Islamic identity in a unified, secular India (Akbar, 2002). 'The intolerant India' contends that India should have been reclaimed as a nation for Hindus, not only from the Christian British but also from the Muslims who had ruled and occupied the land for centuries, eventually securing their own nation through the Partition (The Economist, 25 January 2020). According to this perspective, all Muslims should vacate India, thereby purifying the land for Hindus. In this view, if any Muslims were permitted to remain in India, they should subsume their Muslim identity within the broader construct of Hindu-ness or Hindutva, mirroring the implication of Pakistan as a land exclusively for Muslims (Bose, 2021). This conundrum of identity, alongside the contrasting and sometimes confrontational ways in which India is perceived, underscores a fundamental rift within the nation. This schism puts the intolerant Indian, characterised by an exclusivist and illiberal vision of the nation, against the liberal Indian,

who upholds the idea of India as conceived by its founding fathers, which hinges on an acceptance and celebration of diversity as the cornerstone for nurturing a unified nation (Petersen, 20 September 2022). The divisive nature of this debate threatens to fracture India along ideological lines (Bose, 2021).

The rise of Hindu nationalism can be explained as the ascendancy of a nationalistic Hindu identity in India, with an aim to assert Hindu culture as paramount within the Indian societal framework (Bose, 2021, 190-195). The concept of a Hindu India has gained significant prominence since the inception of the Modi regime in 2019, as noted by Bose (2021, 192). He further adds that the re-election of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the political party supporting the ideology of Hindu India for a second term marked the zenith of this trend, with the party securing an unprecedented majority in the parliament (2021). This suggests a growing acceptance of the idea of 'Hindu India' or the 'Hindutva' ideology within the Indian diaspora, thereby affirming its status as a revivalist movement. This phenomenon has reverberated in Kashmir, as agreed in an interview with journalist Ganai (2023) who accepts with Geelani's observation in his work *'Kashmir rage and reason'* and assert that a considerable proportion of Kashmiri Muslims in the Valley perceive themselves as being under the occupation of 'Brahmanical Hindu India' (2019, 56). This perception has been ingrained over a considerable period, yet it became notably entrenched following the rise of the PDP (The Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party) advocating Muslim Kashmiri aspirations and the BJP, representing the Hindu India coalition, coming to power in March 2015 subsequent to their merger. This development as discussed previously exacerbates existing disillusionment within youth for Kashmiri separatists' politics and fosters a fertile ground for the radicalization of young individuals (Geelani, 2019, 56).

SOCIOLOGY OF HINDU REVIVALISM

After introducing the evolving notion of India, it becomes imperative to comprehend the underlying rationale driving this ascension by delving into the sociological paradigm of Hindu revivalism. This paradigm encompasses key tenets such as Indianization, the imperative for revivalism, the repercussions of revivalist movements, and the organisational structures that reinforce the mission of revitalising Hindu India. These foundational components collectively exert significant influence on the genesis and trajectory of Hindu nationalist sentiment, thus delineating the contours of this phenomenon. Furthermore, through the prism of this paradigm, the subsequent stages of this research will investigate the extant evidence concerning the current Hindu nationalist government and scrutinise the patterns of Islamophobia to explain the response of Kashmiri Muslim identity towards embracing the rhetoric of extremist ideologies.

Indianization can be characterised as a multifaceted concept involving the recognition of the imperative for change by both liberal and radical elements within society, with their concerns extending to both the present and the future (Gangadharan, 1970). In contrast, conservatives adhere steadfastly to established values and often contribute to social stagnation and disintegration (Gangadharan, 1970). Furthermore, revivalists seek refuge in the past, finding comfort in its exaltation. This process of 'Hinduization' served as a defensive mechanism aimed at consoling and fostering pride in one's cultural heritage, while also acting as a means to counteract the influence of foreign elements on the collective psyche (Tylor, 1870). Some proponents may argue that it was a strategic manoeuvre to mobilise the populace against external powers (Bailey, 1958). Lastly, to actualize the goals of Indianization, a dedicated mechanism or apparatus, be it a political party, the state apparatus, or a social movement, plays a crucial role in advancing the 'ideal cultural archetype' (Mishra, 1997). In this context, the political induces an ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) driven by the 'goal-oriented action' of consolidating the Hindu community under the aegis of a Hindu rashtra, signifying an

imagery of a historical Hindu state (Ghosal, 1959, 19-25). Its mission encompassed the revival and dissemination of Hindu values throughout society, and it even extended to the point of marginalising other religions to assert the perceived supremacy of Hinduism (Golwalkar, 1966, 100-120).

Search for Indianness

The initial question arising within the discourse on Indianization pertains to the intricate concept of culture. Culture, in a comprehensive sense, is defined as "Complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1870, 1 cited in Spencer, 2012 2). This definition underscores the all-encompassing nature of culture, encompassing every facet of human social acquisition, ranging from values, ethics, religious beliefs as well as language, art, and science to customs, laws, and diverse institutions (Tylor, 1870). Often, slogans carry multifaceted interpretations and can be susceptible to misunderstanding, particularly when employed by political entities as sentimentally charged devices aimed at securing votes (Tylor, 1870). It becomes paramount, therefore, to delineate the specific contours of the culture that defines India (Vaishnav, 18 December 2019). This inclination often leads to the assertion that Hindus serve as the custodians of authentic Indian culture (Vaishnav, 18 December 2019).

Concept of Indian revivalism

Indian revivalism traces its origins to India's Renaissance, and the earnest call for Indianization represents a distinct facet of this revivalist tendency (Majumdar, 1951, 478). The contours of modern Indian nationalism, reformism, proletarianism, liberalism, radicalism, terrorism, and, notably, contemporary Indian revivalism are intrinsically linked to the social dynamics that were set into motion with the arrival of the British colonial rule in India (Dange, 1949, 9). Shared symbols, such as totems, flags, revered

figures, historical recollections, battles, and legends, wield a unifying influence when a group collectively cherishes them (Stephen, 1967, 185-186). The method employed by revivalism hinges on a retrospective exploration of the past (Stephen, 1967, 186-186). However, within a nation as diverse as India, characterised by numerous subcultures, caste divisions, religious affiliations, racial diversity, and regional disparities, these symbols often assume a parochial, regional, and sectarian character, ultimately undermining the intended goal of identifying unifying symbols from history (Desai, 1960, 133-134).

The need for Revivalism

Revivalist tendencies, which originated as a response to the early days of British colonial rule, gained momentum in various dimensions during the post-independence era (Gangadharan, 1970). Desai has referred mostly to those areas of revivalism in which the ruling party or its associates are involved (1960). However, it is noteworthy that organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) play a deliberate and substantial role in the propagation of revivalist ideologies (Frayer and Khan, 2019). These groups systematically indoctrinate the youth, fostering a revivalist mindset and encouraging their participation in festivals and events strategically designed to instil Hindu separatist sentiments within the younger demographic (Frayer and Khan, 2019). Collectively, these various forces and processes have continuously cultivated fertile ground for what is termed "Indianization," which essentially represents the latest iteration of revivalism in India (Gangadharan, 1970).

Firstly, the emergence of heightened caste consciousness, accompanied by rivalry and animosity, becomes evident when historical disparities among different castes are brought to the forefront of collective awareness (Tylor, 1870). This phenomenon extends to the confrontation between erstwhile oppressors and the oppressed castes, exacerbating social tensions (Ghosal, 1959). Secondly, Hindu-Muslim discord and the sense of alienation among Muslims ensue as a consequence of labelling them as "un-

Indian," thereby perpetuating religious and cultural divisions (Golwalkar, 1966). Furthermore, inter-regional conflicts significantly manifest as a result of revivalism, contingent upon various factors such as: the prevailing caste composition and dominance within specific regions, the stance of regional political parties in relation to their receptivity or resistance to the Indianization agenda, the cultural complex of the region, influenced by either Aryan or Dravidian heritage, and finally, the varying degrees of modernization and adherence to tradition among the regional populace (Golwalkar, 1966). The overall outcome of Indianization has its potential to incite fanaticism within a limited faction of Hindus, rendering them active proponents of this ideology. The broader repercussions, however, are anticipated to be detrimental to the community as a whole (Ghosal, 1962).

The adoption of the name "Bharat" for India reflects a deliberate alignment with ancient Hindu traditions and signifies a conscious departure from nomenclature associated with Muslim influence (Desai, 1960, 133-136). This shift is further underscored by the evolution of Sanskritized Hindi, characterised by efforts to purify the language by eliminating any remnants of Muslim cultural influence (Gangadhara, 1970). Moreover, the selection of national symbols is strategically aimed at revitalising specific cultural values from India's pre-Muslim history (Gangadharan, 1970). Additionally, the advocacy for religious education (Lele, 1995, 1520-1528) and the promotion of religious and superstitious festivals, often with direct or indirect support from the state and certain leaders of the ruling party (Desai, 1960), exemplify key features of Indian nationalism. These manifestations of nationalism reflect a revivalist trend that asserts hegemony against perceived external influences, particularly those associated with Islam.

Reaction to change

Individuals' perceptions, whether positive or negative, within a given context are inherently contingent upon the impact of that context on their personal experiences and interests (Sarkar, 1928). Faced with the responsibility of advocating for the different

facets of the existing social structure, individuals devised a defensive strategy that encompassed contemporary propaganda techniques and invoked nationalist sentiment (Farquhar, 1915). This defensive mechanism gradually evolved into an ideological framework known as revivalism (Farquhar, 1915). Revivalism was characterised by its idealisation of historical greatness and was driven by a compelling aspiration to reinstate bygone eras (Gangadhar, 1970).

'RSS' - THE HINDU RIVIALIST MOVEMENT

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was established on September 27, 1925, by K. B. Hedgewar as a right-wing paramilitary volunteer organisation (Narayan, 2020). The overarching objective of the organisation was to unite the Hindu community under the banner of a Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu state, instilling character principles of 'Hindu discipline' centred around the creation of a distinct identity for Hindu culture, commonly referred to as Hindutva (Bose, 2021; Venkatesh, 2019; Bal, 13 April 2022). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has consistently adhered to the principles of Indianization, aiming to revive an idealised "golden age" from India's historical heritage. This commitment is demonstrated through systematic operations and the establishment of well-defined objectives (Gangadharan, 1970). The RSS, evolving into the Sangh Parivar, has emphasised social conservatism, and engaged in social outreach efforts to reinforce traditional Hindu values (Ghosal, 1962). However, the RSS's political aspirations clashed with Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a secular India, challenging the construction of an exclusive Hindu narrative during this period (Chattopadhyaya, 1964).

Modern Indian nationalism, reformism, proletarianism, liberalism, radicalism, terrorism, and contemporary Indian revivalism all find their foundations in the societal transformations initiated by the British colonial presence in India (Gangadharan, 1970). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) formulated its definition of 'Hindu' in overtly exclusionary terms, positing the 'Hindu' as synonymous with the 'Indian.' (Leidig, 2020). This absolutist stance left no room for religious minorities, encompassing not only

Muslims but also Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews, except to be relegated as 'others' as explained by Vaishnav in his work *'The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism'* (2019). Significantly, these religious minorities were subjected to different modes of 'othering,' but the authentic Indian identity against which they were discriminated invariably remained unequivocally 'Hindu.' (Noorani, 2000). The term 'Hindutva' was originally coined by Savarkar, who elaborates on this concept that Hindus have inhabited India since time immemorial and, consequently, constitute the nation as their cultural, civilizational, and life contributions are unparalleled (Savarkar, 1923). Non-Hindus are cast as either invaders or guests, and equality can only be extended to them if they embrace Hindu traditions and culture. The RSS perceives the freedom and progress of the country as intrinsically tied to the freedom and progress of Hindus (Savarkar, 1923). In a speech in 1960, he referred to Muslims, Christians, and Parsis as 'guests' who could not be considered on equal footing unless they adopted Hindu customs (Golwalkar, 1966).

HINDU NATIONALISM UNDER MODI GOVERNMENT

The Hindu revivalist movement established the perception as Hindu-dominated entity aiming to establish hegemony within the broader Indian populace under the banner of Indian nationalist identity. In a heterogeneous nation like India, such policies can engender sentiments of resentment among minority communities. On this note, the PDP (Kashmiri separatists political party) to gain power and BJP (mainstream Indian government) alignment against the prevailing sentiments of the local Kashmiri populace was an assertive intervention within the Kashmir region (Bose, 2021). This development, described by Bose in his work, alludes to a "cynical deception" (2021, 177). Furthermore, Geelani (2018, 45), states it is an 'unholy alliance'. After the alignment, PDP, was regarded by the youth as pursuing political power that sold out Kashmiri independence, leading to compromising in its founding principles on right to self-determination aligning with Right-wing Hindutva ideology expressed disillusionment within the militants and

youth psychology that further contributed to a sense of alienation, fuelling support for militancy (Geelani, 2018).

This apprehension was further magnified by the BJP's assertive policy as highlighted by Geelani (2019, 57) and (Ahmad, K.B., 2017), towards the annulment of Article 370, a constitutional provision granting special status to Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union, its propositions for segregating migrant Kashmiri Pandits in 'separate townships,' and its endeavours to establish Sainik Colonies, have collectively ignited controversies in the region (Geelani, 2019). The mounting concerns of former soldiers about an impending demographic transformation in Kashmir have added to these tensions. Therefore, it is understandable that Kashmiris would perceive a threat to their Muslim identity or when their concept of a Kashmiri nation is challenged in contrast to the notion of 'azadi' ('freedom'), which serves as the cornerstone for constructing a Kashmiri nationalist narrative (Duschinski and Ghosh 2017). As emphasised in the research conducted by Meha Dixit (2020) and corroborated during an interview, she states:

> "This sequence of events can be interpreted as a profound attack upon the Muslim identity of Kashmir, which holds significant cultural and historical significance for its inhabitants. These occurrences have intensified anti-Indian sentiments and augmented the trend of radicalization among the youth in Kashmir." (Dixit, 2022).

In addition, the resurgence of a Hindu ritual practice observed among Kashmiri Pandits in 2014 has amplified the complex dynamics in Kashmir (Yasir and Dixit, 2016). The pilgrimage was reintroduced and actively endorsed within the Kashmir valley after the BJP-PDP alliance (Yasir and Dixit, 2016). Furthermore, Geelani (2019) chronicles the initiation of a yatra, or pilgrimage, commemorating a revered Hindu philosopher and mystic associated with Kashmir. This endeavour strongly encountered resistance from separatist leaders, most notably Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who contended that the communal forces within India, supported by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the government, are pursuing an expedited implementation of their cultural

dominance agendas, with the state of Jammu & Kashmir as their primary focal point in this endeavour. These revivalist trends initiated under the regime of Modi seems to be a way employed to bring back the lost culture of the Hindus in the valley.

During Vajpayee's tenure, the previous BJP led Prime Minister, he appointed two Muslim cabinet ministers (Bose, 2021). However, the current BJP-led government lacks Muslim representation (Kuchay, 6 July 2022). Furthermore, formal organisations such as the Hindu Sena (Hindu Army) and Bhartiya Gau Raksha Dal (Cow Protection Group) have received state patronage under government (Aiyar, 2020). Despite the fact that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi occasionally condemned instances of mob violence and killings of Muslims (The Guardian, 29 June 2017), spokespersons for the BJP said that mob lynching incidents, had historically occurred in rural India (Aiyar, 2020). An analysis conducted by Human Rights Watch in its report *'Violent Cow Protection in India'* reveals that from 2010 to 2017, there were 60 cow-related clashes, resulting in the deaths of 25 individuals, of whom 21 were Muslims (2019). Remarkably, 97 percent of these cases transpired after Modi assumed power in 2014 (Siyech and Narain, 2018; Abraham and Rao, 28 June 2014). Significantly, half of these fatalities occurred in non-BJP-governed states, indicating that vigilante actions were not solely contingent on government endorsement (Human rights Watch, 2019; Iyer, 2020). As a result, it is noteworthy that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in its annual report, recommended designating India as a "Country of particular concern" (2020, 20).

The resurgence of political Hinduism was facilitated by the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) open alignment with hard-line Hindu organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), with the shared objective of propagating Hindutva (Paulec, 4 November 2019). This alliance coalesced around a longstanding dispute concerning a modest piece of land, featuring a shrine (Paulec, 4 November 2019). Ayodhya, located in Uttar Pradesh, was the site of an aged mosque, the Babri Masjid, constructed in 1528 by a general in the army of Mughal emperor Babur (Thakor, 12 May 2021). However, after 2014, Hindus nationalist contended that the

general had erected the mosque after demolishing a temple that had existed on the site since at least the eleventh century CE, commemorating the birthplace of Lord Ram the most important Hindu deity (Saberin, 6 December 2017). The dispute that resulted in the demolition of the mosque in 1992 and now winning the land to build the Hindu temple on the same place did not revolve around whether it was indeed Lord Ram's birthplace but rather whether a temple had been destroyed to build the mosque. This contentious issue catalysed the ascent of Hindutva (Thakor, 12 May 2021).

It is imperative to underscore that one of the pivotal methodologies consistently employed by the revivalist movement rests upon a retrospective examination of the past (Gangadharan, 1970). This retrospective lens encompasses a thorough exploration of shared symbols within a collective group, which may encompass culture, flags, venerable figures, historical narratives, pivotal battles, and cherished legends (Gangadharan, 1970). At its core, revivalism is fundamentally characterised by the idealisation of historical grandeur and an unwavering aspiration to resurrect bygone epochs (Desai, 1960). Consequently, safeguarding the religious values and the esteemed standing associated with religious symbols, such as temples, assumes paramount significance in the process of Hindutva revivalism, particularly concerning the reconfiguration of the national identity into a Hindu Raj (Gangadharan, 1970). In this context, these endeavours serve as potent conduits for instilling a collective community with an enduring sense of the sacred spirit intrinsic to Hindu values (Golwalkar, 1966). Furthermore, these efforts symbolise a concerted attempt to resurrect perceived values that are believed to have been usurped by Islamic influences. Therefore, the dispute surrounding the Ayodhya site serves as a quintessential illustration of this facet of revivalism as well as a poignant exemplar of how revivalism seeks to rekindle the sacred ethos of Hindu values and, concurrently, to revive the notion of a Hindu-centric nation (Bose, 2021).

As explained within the theoretical framework that examines the ramifications of Hindu revivalism it becomes apparent that the dynamics between Hindus and Muslims are

inevitably characterised by a substantial division in the society (Bose, 2021). In the course of this process, the overarching categorization of Muslims as un-Indians engendered an atmosphere of discrimination enacted in the name of safeguarding Hindu values and supremacy (Bose, 2021). As also noted by Golwalkar (1966) with regards to the consequences of revivalism of Hindu, Hindu-Muslim discord, and the sense of alienation among Muslims ensue as a consequence of labelling them as "un-Indian," thereby perpetuating religious and cultural divisions. This trajectory of Indianization concurrently foments a burgeoning fanaticism within a specific segment of the Hindu population, thereby posing a potential threat to the collective community which is perceived by the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir. On this note, an interview with a journalist ███████ explains that:

> "Since partition, the threat to the Kashmiri identity from the larger Hindu India identity has always existed. While provisions such as special status served as protective measures, the present-day discrimination completely unveils the false reality of Indian secularism before the Kashmiri populace, creating feelings of alienation and fostering an environment for radicalization" (2022)

Consequently, evident manifestations of this destructive trend encompass instances of mob violence and the targeted killings of Muslims, the deliberate dissemination of negative portrayals of the Muslim community through media outlets, the propagation of misleading narratives with heightened coverage of crimes involving Muslims, accusations of "love jihad" (Interfaith relationships with Muslims) and terrorism (Petersen and Khan, 21 January 2022), collectively contributing to the global phenomenon of Islamophobia (Bhuktawer and Asad, 2022). Moreover, these incidents bolster the notion that an Islamist system of governance offered the most viable solution to their grievances and inequities (Ganguly, 2020). These examples underscore the existence of a palpable vacuum wherein heightened religious fervour resonates among both the youth and those with liberal inclinations who held sentiments of discontent and frustration towards the state but lacked a means to articulate them (Tremblay, 2018). Consequently, Islamism and the identification as Islamist emerged as

mechanisms to reconcile and address these societal discontentment's (Tremblay, 2018), thus leading to a reactive response within the Islamic community, a phenomenon to be further elucidated in the subsequent section of this chapter.

The construction of the category 'Muslim' as an identarian label is a relatively recent development, rather than a primordial, centuries-old classification (Bose, 2021). This phenomenon is analogous to the formation of other identity labels, such as 'Sikh' and 'Kurd,' to which Arjun Appadurai characterises as transformations of existing names and terms to serve substantial frameworks of identity, entitlement, and spatial sovereignty (2006, 40-43). In the context of the Indian subcontinent, historians often attribute the religious and political associations of Muslims, if not the very conceptualization of the 'Muslim' as a category, to the late nineteenth-century census reports during British colonial rule (Akbar, 2002).

RISING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Analysed in the previous section, the revivalist movement of Hindutva intricately employs a strategic mechanism characterised by the vilification and marginalisation of the Muslim community within the societal fabric and further demonising them (Bose, 2021; Heath, 2015; Shani, 2007). This strategy is notably manifested through the deliberate crafting and manipulation of news narratives, along with the propagation of misleading accounts that depict Muslims as purveyors of terrorism, imminent threats to societal stability, and perils to the very essence of humanity (Bose, 2021). The overarching objective is alienation of Muslims from the nation and to pursue the purification of the Hindu nation (Ahmad, 12 September 2021; Varshney, 2013; Heath, 2015).

In this context, it is crucial to contextualise these endeavours within the contemporary backdrop of globalisation and the proliferation of the Internet. These factors have given rise to a global phenomenon recognized as Islamophobia. Manifesting on a worldwide

scale, Islamophobia entails the exacerbation of negative perceptions towards Islam and Muslims (Yasir and Berigo, 3 March 2020). It entails the propagation of adverse stereotypes and prejudicial, discriminating attitudes, thereby engendering a climate where Islam is depicted unfavourably and cultural divisions are exacerbated, particularly in contrast to other religions, most notably Hinduism (Heath, 2015; Varshney, 2013).

Furthermore, to delve deeper into the demonization of Islam during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is pertinent to analyse a specific scenario regarding the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic proselytising organisation, that convened its annual congregation at its headquarters in Delhi in early March 2020, prior to India's declaration of a health emergency and nationwide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mohsina & Franco, 2020). This gathering drew an attendance exceeding 2,000 individuals, including foreign nationals from countries contending with active COVID-19 cases. Consequently, a campaign disseminating explicit content portraying Muslims as the primary vectors responsible for the transmission of the COVID-19 virus gained traction across various media platforms, including television channels and social media (Mohsina & Franco, 2020). Moreover, members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) contributed to the amplification of this narrative, thereby exacerbating the demonization of Muslims and the proliferation of Islamophobia to what academics refer to as 'Culturalization of terror' (Freedman and Thussu, 2011). Moreover, Arun Kundnani (2008) underscores that the framing of Islam as an oppositional force to the rest of the world is not exclusive to the conservative and neoconservative political wings. He distinguishes this perspective from the neoconservative portrayal of Islam as inherently violent, backward, and totalitarian (2008, 40-45).

Vinod Bansal, the national spokesman for Vishwa Hindu Parishad, in an interview with New York Times articulated a perspective in which he posited that Indian political dynamics had been substantially oriented towards the policy of appeasement directed at minority communities (Gettleman, Schultz, Raj and Kumar, 11 April 2019). The report '*Under Modi, a Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India*' contended Vinod

Bansal, the spokesperson a conversative hindu organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad that stated:

> "Indian politics had been geared to the appeasement of minorities, and minorities were dominating the majority . . . It was becoming difficult for Hindus to survive" (Gettleman, Schultz, Raj and Kumar, 11 April 2019).

Furthermore, an incident Delhi widely circulated online showed residents of a locality restricting the entry of Muslims into their area (Sikander, 2021, 124). The utilisation of posters or flags on the carts of vegetable and fruit vendors to signify their Hindu identity was exemplified (The Hindu, 15 April 2020).

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping collective perceptions and images of communities and individuals, as articulated by Zelizer & Allen, who posit that it is based largely on journalism that we make up our national mind (2002). Furthermore, televised debates on national news channels such as Republic news have exacerbated divisions by constructing adversarial "us-versus-them" narratives, employing prejudicial designations like "corona villains," "enemies of the nation," and "human bombs" to describe the Muslim community (Slater and Masih, 23 April 2020; Republic TV, 31 March 2020; Yasir and Berigo, 3 March 2020). Concurrently, hashtags such as #CoronaJihad, #BioJihad, #Coronaterrorism, and #MuslimsSpreadingCorona gained prevalence in online discourse (Perrigo, 3 April 2020). Notably, the anti-Muslim rhetoric received validation from members within the government's cabinet adopting the term "Corona jihad"(The Hindu, 4 April 2020) to characterize the Tablighi Jamaat gathering as a "Talibani crime" (Venugopal, 2020). Furthermore, Bassiouni (1981) posits that the psychological impact of a particular act carries greater significance than the act itself, with sensationalist media amplifying this impact. Additionally, a proliferation of fraudulent videos falsely linking Indian Muslims to the dissemination of COVID-19 emerged, accusing them of deliberate acts such as spitting, licking, or sneezing on food items. These misleading videos gained virality across various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, further exacerbating the vilification of the Muslim community (Salam, 20

April 2020). Bajoria on these light titles his work as *'CoronaJihad is Only the Latest Manifestation: Islamophobia in India has Been Years in the Making'* (1 May 2020).

One of the most appalling instances of Hindu vigilantism manifested in the mass rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl from a Muslim nomadic community in Jammu, perpetrated by a Hindu mob (BBC, 10 June 2019). Notably, among the culprits were three policemen and a former government official (BBC, 10 June 2019). Furthermore, a report submitted by Human Rights Watch titled *'Violent cow protection in India'* states that

> "Between May 2015 and December 2018, at least 44 people – including 36 Muslims – were killed in such attacks. Police often stalled prosecutions of the attackers, while several BJP politicians publicly justified the attacks'' (2019).

In a specific instance in 2016, an incident unfolded in Jharkhand where a vigilante group subjected a Muslim cattle trader and a 12-year-old boy, en route to an animal fair, to a fatal assault (Yadav, 21 December 2018). The aforementioned evidence provides a significant vacuum for a radicalised environment stemming as a reaction to the Islamophobic sentiments. Several theoretical and qualitative investigations have indicated a positive correlation between instances of anti-Muslim discrimination and the propensity towards radicalization leading to violent extremism (Abbas & Siddique, 2012; Cesari, 2009; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Moreover, Dell'Isloa (2022, 118-133) explains:

> "This effect is higher in the presence of religious and cultural networks where these grievances can be brought at the centre of the public debate and be connected together resulting in the possible development of more radicalised positions of small portions of the discriminated community" (2022, 118-133).

A senior police official explained that:

> "During our interrogation with individuals who have been radicalised, they often mentioned the rising Islamophobic sentiments in the rest of India. We are asked by them that don't you see what is happening, the rapes, murders, and lynching's" (SSP ██████, 2022)

Additionally, ███████████ Journalist ████████ in another interview added to a similar theme:

> "Incidents like cow vigilantism and lynching's serve as catalysts, galvanising the involvement of youthful individuals such as Zakir Musa and Eisa Fazli in his radicalised militant activities. In contexts marked by increased religious fervour, this trend further translates into a more puritanical ideological belief within these individuals that if they don't retaliate with extremeness they will be killed, it is a threat to their identity as being Muslims and Kashmiris" (2022).

The psychological reaction to rising Islamophobia

As indicated earlier, under the influence of the prevailing Islamophobic sentiments and the perceived marginalisation and denigration of Muslim identity, the Kashmiri Muslim community, particularly those who entered adolescence during the period of 2008 - 2010, has undergone a discernible ideological transition as a coping mechanism in reaction to the negative perception of the public towards their identity (Geelani, 2019; Barton, 2022). Moreover, this, according to security analysts on Kashmir, is a concern of the youth inclining towards more conservative and orthodox thoughts, believing they are in danger from the Hindu regime (Geelani, 2019; Zia, 5 August 2019; International Crisis Group, 2022).

As discussed in previous chapters, the landscape of Kashmir underwent a profound transformation marked by expanded mobile internet from 2012 (Devadas, 2019). A senior police officer notes:

> "This technological shift facilitated young individuals with religious-themed videos and messages, predominantly channelled through various social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups" (SSP ██████, 2022).

Additionally, CDs, public gatherings, and religious instructions during atakaf (charity) retreats, wherein youngsters immersed themselves in meditative retreats within mosques during the month of Ramzan, were harnessed by various movements to

propagate their messages (Geelani, 2019). This mode of preaching, highly popular among young audience, consistently underscored themes of Muslim victimhood on a global scale in response to the phenomenon of Islamophobia. It aligned with narratives that framed Kashmir's repression by an essentially Hindu India, allegations of illegal occupation, non-Muslim-led looting, and the enduring oppression borne out of their Islamic faith (Medha, 2019, 1-12; Ramachandrana, 2020, 15-20; Geelani, 2019). Furthermore, these messages encompassing the Muslim victimhood effectively reinforced pre-existing perceptions and experiences of oppression and human rights violations exploited by militant groups and religious organisations (Devadas, 2018; Geelani, 2019). These issues were placed within the broader framework of a perceived global pattern of political, economic, and cultural aggression against Muslims. Several incidents of beef vigilantism, characterized by the lynching of Muslims in various parts of India after 2014, further solidified the notion of Muslim victimhood among the youth (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In the specific case of Kashmir, the penchant for a religious cause steeped in the extreme values of Islam has become notably pronounced among the millennial generation. This shift can be attributed, in part, to influential militants such as Zakir Musa and Burhan Wani, coupled with disillusionment with the democratic politics as analysed previously. In an interview, DSP ██████ states:

> "The main aim of the insurgency is to invite the wrath of the state so, that the state uses disproportionate force against the general population which creates a sense of humiliation and oppression amongst the people. There is currently a general disaffection with the state. there is situational conflict between the armed forces and the civilian population" (2022).

Furthermore, SSP ████ in another interview stated:

> "A number of youth in south Kashmir has used internet and social media to read about radical ideologies and how they perceive that they need to protect their identity from India who is negating their culture. we have found individuals with

downloaded videos of Muslim lynching's, beef vigilantism, kathua rape case, and this is the anger that is generating" (2023).

As Vorster observes, social prejudice, in terms of the "in-group" and "out-group," can be understood by examining its psychological causes, discrimination and social stratification, reconstruction of history, inbreeding, fear, the tendency to stereotype, and the propensity for violence are potent ingredients for seeking refuge in a religious identity (Vorster, 2007, 11). Other reasons include a radical reaction to change and the emergence of a perceived enemy that "threatens" the sanctity of old values, ideas, and the security of a community's traditions and customs (Vorster, 2007, 17). Moreover, Geelani's (2019) analysis suggests a sense of urgency to safeguard their Islamic identity, which they perceive as profoundly imperilled by external forces – including the perceived abuses of the Indian government and the negative portrayals propagated by global media. Consequently, the notion of a religious cause has emerged as a salient solution to protect and preserve their cherished values (Geelani, 2019). therefore, the aforementioned interviews do corroborate when looked through the lens of Vorster and Geelani therefore adding to more conclusive findings.

THE REVIVALISM OF ISLAM

The revival of Islam therefore emerges as a defensive response to the various triggers and occurrences detailed in the preceding sections of this thesis. Motivated by a need to safeguard the Muslim identity against perceived threats and oppressions, this revivalism has gravitated towards the more radical and extremist end of the spectrum in Kashmir over recent years, thus promoting the religion and emphasising its supremacy as a fundamental tenet of the movement. However, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying rationale and mechanisms driving the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in Kashmir, it is imperative to first engage with the sociology of Islamic revivalism as a theoretical framework. This approach encompasses fundamental

characteristics of the phenomenon, thereby facilitating a more nuanced and critical analysis of the escalating trend towards radicalisation in Kashmir specifically.

Sociology of Islamic Revivalism

Islamic revivalism can be explained by employing a behavioural model of religion grounded in the theoretical framework of relative deprivation. According to Runciman (1966, 10), an individual experiences relative deprivation when they desire but lack a certain object, X, while observing others, including themselves at a previous or anticipated time, possessing X. Two primary manifestations of relative deprivation, namely envy and unfulfilled aspirations, align with this definition. A crucial psychological mechanism underlying the transition from increasing relative deprivation to a resurgence in religious activity is the ability of religious engagement to instil values that aid individuals in coping with envy and unfulfilled aspirations. Consequently, individuals are presented with the choice of intensifying their efforts to achieve their income goals or disengaging from the pursuit of status by dedicating more time to religious practices. Through this process, they can "immunise" themselves against the adverse effects of negative income comparisons. In the contemporary discourse on the Islamic revival, several scholars have identified relative deprivation as a driving force behind the emergence of moderate Islamic movements, religious fundamentalism, and radical groups (Wickham 2002 and Gambetta & Hertog 2009). Factors such as rising inequality, poverty, and unmet aspirations contribute to this religious resurgence.

Cultural Defence

In response to perceived threats to their cultural and moral values, individuals often exhibit a propensity to reinforce traditional norms and beliefs. Dekmejian (1988, 3-19) observes a prevailing sense of xenophobia within Muslim societies, stemming from the perception that Islam itself is confronted with an existential peril. Revivalist intellectuals argue that the very essence of Islamic culture and way of life is jeopardised by non-Islamic forces, particularly secularism and modernity, which are purportedly encouraged

by Muslim governments. Consequently, Western cultural values and practices are vehemently repudiated as incompatible with Islam, prompting calls for the mass media to promote Islamic values instead of foreign cultural influences (Dekmejian, 1988, 3-19).

While the spectre of colonialism continues to linger in the collective memory of many Muslims, contemporary concerns extend to the perceived siege on the global Muslim community (umma) by initiatives such as the "war on terror" and Israeli occupation (Schmiedel, 2023, 730-746). Moreover, the support of Western nations and foreign companies for secular regimes in Muslim societies, such as Egypt and Pakistan, is viewed as prioritising foreign interests over the welfare of citizens. Domestically, Islam has been perceived to be under assault since the 1920s through state-led modernization efforts championed by secular elites (Khalid, 2014, 50-80). This process of secular societal transformation has been attributed to sociomoral decline, contributing to the erosion of the Muslim family structure, the proliferation of permissive and promiscuous behaviours, and a sense of spiritual malaise. Additionally, leaders' deviation from Islamic norms in their personal conduct and lifestyles has created opportunities for the infiltration of foreign cultural influences, further exacerbating moral decay. Consequently, there is a widespread belief that individuals have intensified their religious adherence in response to the multifaceted threats posed to their traditional beliefs and values (Khalid, 2014, 50-80).

Identity, Continuity & Certainty

Muslims responded to cultural threats by actively reinforcing their religion due to various socio-cultural factors. Hoffman (1995) asserts that Islamic fundamentalism emerges as a response from young individuals who find themselves caught between the traditional values of the past and the secular education they receive, which exposes them to Western intellectual influences and the materialistic culture prevalent in urban environments. Hovsepian (1995, 1-14) states that the rapid pace of social change and

urbanisation has resulted in significant social and psychological dislocation, wherein traditional sources of identity such as family, regional, and tribal affiliations are marginalised, leading to a pervasive sense of displacement. In such an environment, characterised by frequent interactions with strangers, individuals experience an identity vacuum that is filled by Islamic revivalist ideologies. Islam, in this context, emerges as the sole remaining bastion of identity and authenticity (Dekmejian, 1988). This revivalist movement often adopts a more universalistic and international form of Islam, known as tajwid, which prioritises adherence to the Quran and Sunnah over the veneration of local saints and the intricate details of religious law. Lapidus (1997) contends that in fragmented societies, tajwid serves as a unifying force, fostering a sense of commitment to a common cause and facilitating the transcendence of social fragmentation in favour of religious and ideological unity.

Radical Islam or reactionary Islam?

 Radical Islam is championed by Muslims who seek to return to the foundational principles of the Islamic faith. It is important to note that adherence to a radical interpretation of Islam does not necessarily entail violence. Some scholars have critiqued the conventional usage of the term "radical" in association with Islam. They argue that "radical" connotes a sudden, dramatic shift in thinking, and thus, the term "reactionary Islam" may be more appropriate than "radical Islam" (Matusitz, 2020). These scholars contend that contemporary violent manifestations of global jihad stem from perceived actions against Islam or Muslims as a whole (Matusitz, 2020).

Conversely, other scholars assert that "radical Islam" is a fitting term, as it represents the continuation of a longstanding radical interpretation of the Quran and the implementation of Sharia law, applicable to both Muslims and non-Muslims (Hamid, 2010).

Defensive jihad vs. offensive jihad?

Referred to as jihad al-dafaa, defensive jihad is characterised by Muslims reacting to an adversary's assault, compelling them to assume a defensive stance. This form of jihad is considered a duty binding upon all Muslims (Jackson, 2002, 1-26). On the other hand, offensive jihad, known as jihad-e-Asghar, involves a proactive offensive against non-believers who have been duly notified of the jihadists' message—typically a call for conversion to Islam—but persist in rejecting these demands or impeding the global expansion of Islam. (Jackson, 2002, 85-90; Lahoud, 2014, 782-788)

Jihad as the answer

Ontological security denotes an ideal state wherein an individual possesses a fundamental sense of safety in their surroundings, encompassing a foundational trust in others (Matusitz, 2020). The attainment of such trust becomes imperative for maintaining psychological well-being and averting existential anxieties. In light of perceived vulnerabilities and purported existential distress among certain Muslims, there arises a propensity to seek solace in jihadism as a means to fortify a beleaguered sense of self-identity (Matusitz, 2020; Kinnvall, 2004, 741-767). Any communal mechanism capable of furnishing such security becomes an apparent locus of attraction. Nationalism and religion represent two notable examples of such "identity-signifiers" that can readily furnish answers to those grappling with existential queries. Nationalism and religion offer longstanding, potent narratives, and myths by virtue of their capacity to convey an aura of security, stability, and unequivocal solutions (Kinnvall, 2004, 741-767). These narratives and myths are constructed as conduits for messaging that ostensibly rest upon firm foundations, portraying themselves as truthful and serving as instruments for understanding the nature of reality (Kinnvall, 2004, 741-767).

ISLAMIC REVIVALISM IN KASHMIR - "REACTIONARY ISLAM"

According to the conceptual framework of revivalism regarding the reaction to change, it is widely suggested that individuals' perceptions, whether they manifest as affirmative or adverse, are inherently determined by the contextual effects that said circumstances exert upon their personal experiences and vested interests (Gangadharan, 1970, 30-31). Confronted with the exigent task of championing the diverse components of the established social order, individuals adroitly contrived a strategic response (Majumdar, 1951, 90-91). This response, characterised by its adept incorporation of contemporary propaganda techniques and its invocation of nationalist sentiments, steadily coalesced into a discernible ideological construct, also aptly referred to as "revivalism." (Sarkar, 1928, 120-125). In this particular situation, it can be seen clearly that the sense of social injury confronted by Kashmiri Muslims caused by a variety of external threats as critically analysed in the previous sections of this thesis, including the revivalism of Hindu India, the perceived oppression by the Indian government, the militarisation of the region by the Indian army forces, the betrayal of the democratic system, the rising phenomenon of Islamophobia, and the gradual jurisprudential transition to Wahhabism has cumulatively led to a reinforcement of religious identity as a defensive mechanism, which implies the emergence of revivalism of Islam as an inevitable response and counterbalance to the revivalism of Hindutva (Mueller, 2010). In order to present a defence mechanism as explained by Gangadharan (1970) and Zutshi (2018), religious identity attains heightened significance during such circumstances and hardships, often overshadowing other forms of identity (see Figure 1).

Upon meticulous scrutiny of Hindutva revivalism, it is evident that the phenomenon of Hindu nationalism has been executed with a meticulous and systematic modus operandi, as aforementioned in the previous section of this chapter (George, 2016). This approach is defined by its judicious planning, well-thought-out mechanisms, incremental methodology, and adherence to a set of principles and strategies that span a multitude of societal dimensions (George, 2016). This orchestrated endeavour finds its facilitator in

the form of a comprehensive revivalist movement, bolstered by organisations such as the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). The genesis of this movement can be traced to deeply ingrained intrinsic motivations, a profound religious perspective, and an enduring veneration of the concept of Hindu Raj, entwined with a longing for the resurgence of a perceived "golden past" with aspirations for even greater prominence in contemporary public discourse (Golwalkar, 1966).

Interviews held amongst multiple journalists and academics from Kashmir, all agree that the revivalism of Islam appears as a reactionary phenomenon, emerging in response to the shifting paradigm of Indian identity from secularisation towards Hindutva (████, 2022████████, 2022 and █████, 2022). Its principal objective is to counter external threats to its identity and protect itself from perceived oppression (████, 2022). Moreover, Muqbool concluded his observation with his students and stated:

> "As the idea of an emerging Hindu-centric India and the phenomenon of Islamophobia gain prominence, they simultaneously serve as catalysts for the strengthening of the collective Muslim identity in Kashmir. This phenomenon is rooted in the perception that the militaristic and nationalist Hindu identity promoted by India, alongside the global negative portrayal of Islam, presents a significant threat to the Muslim identity of Kashmir" (2022).

Moreover, ex-Chief Minister Omar Abdullah added that:

> "Islamophobic sentiments and the militaristic Hindu India narrative provides an opening for radical fundamentalist groups seeking to uphold and exploit the puritanical principles of Islam. Organisations such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Ahl-i-hadith seized upon the growing wave of Hindu nationalism and the prevalence of Islamophobia among non-Muslims, interpreting it as a threat not only to Kashmir but to Muslims on a global scale. In this context, an observable ideological shift takes place, with individuals who once adhered to liberal Islam gravitating toward the more conservative Salafi Wahabi interpretation of the faith." (2022).

Furthermore, in another interview conducted with a different Ex-Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, noted that:

> "Hindu India's actions such as beef lynching, the negative portrayal of Muslims by the media causing Islamophobia, and the maltreatment of Muslims by the Indian administration are skilfully leveraged to formulate a sense of Islamic revivalism that establishes heightened religious observance among the youth, increased pilgrimage to religious sites, and the promotion of a cultural reformation of Islam or one can say universal Muslim brotherhood" (2022).

Thus, while acknowledging the potential for bias in the aforementioned interview analysis, it is noteworthy that they remain consistent and congruent with the limited research and analysis conducted by Devadas (2019) and Geelani (2019) and Bose (2021) on these issues. These studies highlight the impact of external Islamic jurisprudence on the youth amidst the vacuum created by Hindu dominance over Kashmiri identity. Additionally, as Hindu revivalism unfolds with strategic precision, the revivalism of Islam, often perceived as reactionary ("reactionary Islam"), tends to manifest in a spontaneous and unpredictable manner, shaped by immediate contextual factors or negative experiences such as oppression, humiliation, abuse, or deprivation of human rights, as expounded upon by the deprivation framework of Islamic revivalism and cultural defence theory by Dekmejian (1988). Furthermore, this underscores that the struggle to safeguard the Kashmiri identity from human rights violations and abuse is an almost inevitable response to the atrocities and brutality inflicted by the Indian armed forces (Macdonald, 2018). Furthermore, the aforementioned interviews do stand in congruent with the analysis provided by Devadas (2019), Geelani (2019), Macdonald (2018) and Dekmejian (1988) further validating their response and decreasing potential bias.
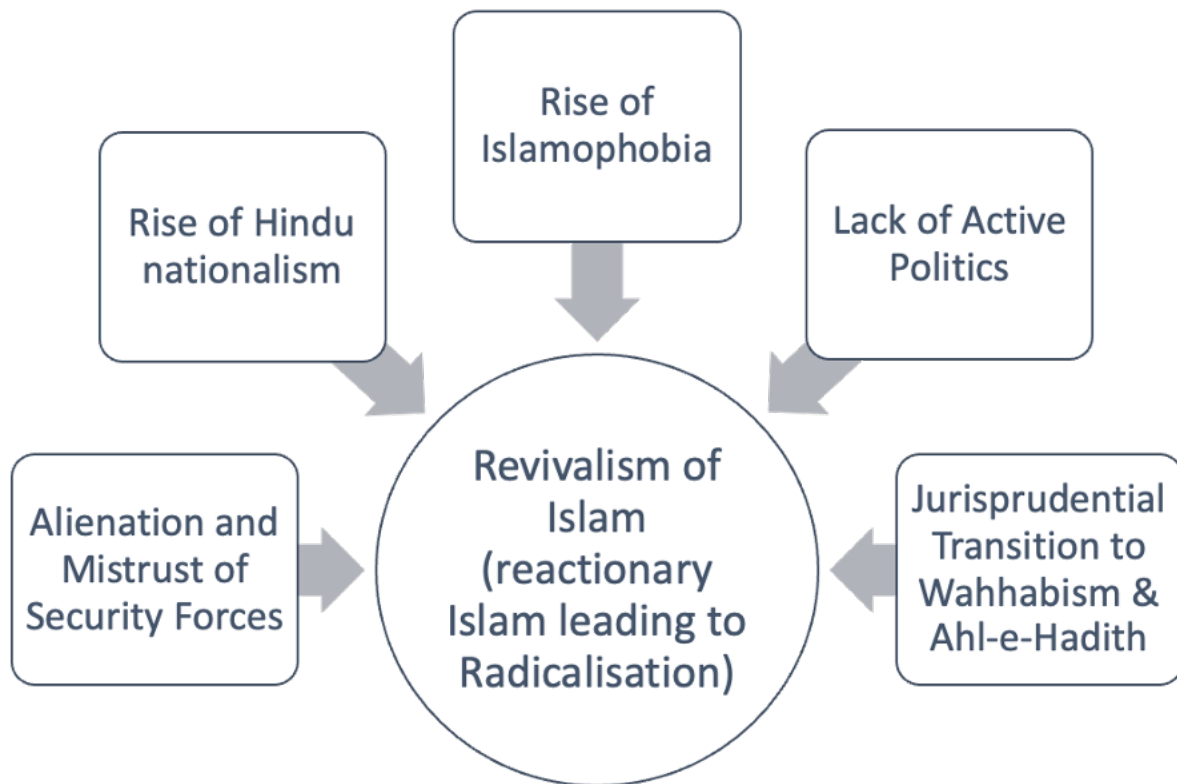
Figure 8: Causes of Revivalism of Islam

The revivalism process of Islam is characterised by the divisive narrative of 'Us vs. Them,' a rhetoric employed both by Hindu revivalists and Muslim revivalists (Kaul, 26 July 2017). This narrative not only increases the ideological disparities, but also differences in religion, symbolism, race, language, culture, social dynamics, politics, ethnography, and more between the idea of Hindu India as a nation and the idea of Muslim Kashmir (Kaul, 26 July 2017) as Omar Abdullah in an interview noted that:

> "Instead of fostering secularism, this revivalism, undertaken by both sides, generates a cycle of cause and effect" (2022).

Therefore, these competing visions, thereby perpetuate a cycle of atrocities against Kashmiris, further radicalising the youth who become adherents of this ongoing process, pushing them to join the militancy (Kaul, 26 July 2017). In addition to the perceived deprivation of Kashmiri Muslim's identity stemming the perceived domination of Hindu India, Islamophobia, and the oppressive actions of Indian armed forces, the erosion of their identity and existential distress are compounded by the secularisation and politicisation of Islamic and separatist groups and leaders purportedly advocating for the

core tenets of Islamism (Devadas, 2019). This perceived betrayal and disillusionment exacerbates feelings of frustration, prompting a defensive reaction aimed at safeguarding cultural and moral values. Consequently, there is a tendency to reinforce traditional, conservative norms and beliefs, in this case, the adoption of radical Islamic ideologies, as strongly consolidated by the cultural defence theory previously expounded upon.

It becomes evident that the Kashmiri militants fighting for Muslims worldwide perceive a sense of persecution and consider it a righteous duty to liberate fellow Muslims from oppressive regimes and establish Islamic supremacy (Thomas, 2020, 63-75). This narrative, rooted in religious ideology, is underscored by a profound sense of righteousness. In this context, senior police official SSP ▆▆▆ stated:

> "This religion-based narrative possesses a remarkable potential to transcend not only national borders but also extend its influence on local subnational entities" (2023).

Furthermore, SSP ▆▆▆▆ in another interview stated:

> "This dynamic underscores an interconnectedness of like-minded individuals across geographical domains, united by shared philosophical underpinnings and ideological tenets" (2022).

Therefore, a pivotal advantage inherent in this narrative's interconnected nature is its ability to foster a profound sense of solidarity among its adherents, fostering a shared sense of purpose that transcends conventional national and regional boundaries (Thomas, 2020).

Hence, the aforementioned analysis also maintains congruence with the findings of Ganor (2021, 23-32), who explains that actions initiated in one geographic sphere can elicit reverberations in distant locales, effectively knitting together individuals who espouse a common philosophy. Moreover, the broad-reaching nature of this global

ideology advocating Islamic supremacy endows it with the capacity to resonate universally, transcending geographical limitations (Ganor, 2021, 23-32). This transcontinental narrative bears the potential to ignite inspiration and motivation in individuals regardless of their physical location.

The introduction of Islam from Arabia came with the infusion of Arabic values and principles into the society (Safi, 2022). This infusion catalysed the emergence of a perceived superiority complex, wherein Arabic Muslims were considered more devout (Safi, 2022). Simultaneously, a senior police officer stated:

> "The landscape of external threats and narratives engendered a heightened resonance of the concept of a 'Caliphate,' and offered a certain sense of romanticism for those who were disillusioned with politics. It is at these times the superiority of the Wahhabi culture has dominated the young minds. They believe that they have become a pious Muslim by inculcating this culture" (DSP ▮▮▮▮, 2022).

This resonance is particularly notable among Muslim reformists, accelerating the adoption of the 'Caliphate' concept as a dominant identity, one that transcends geographical origins and diminishes the significance of national boundaries and affiliations (Vertigans, 2009). The collective ideological shift toward radicalization within a segment of Kashmiri Muslims can be conceptualised within the framework of "defensive jihad," wherein individuals perceive a loss of trust and security in their surrounding environment, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability. In this context, "jihad" is viewed as an ultimate response to the challenges and hardships faced, serving as a means to address struggles and alleviate misery (Vertigans, 2009). This perspective aligns with the Islamic revivalism framework, which posits jihadism as a mechanism to bolster a compromised sense of self-identity in the face of perceived threats and existential uncertainties (Matusitz, 2020; Kinnvall, 2004, 741-767).

EXPLAINING THE ISLAMIC MINDSET: SYMBOLIC OR REAL

Internet, media, socio-political environment and radicalisation

Drawing from the preceding sections of the thesis, the narrative of Muslim victimhood resonates profoundly among Kashmiri youth, fuelled by incidents of Islamophobia and perceived oppression (Obaidi, et al. 2022, 1675-1685). This narrative seamlessly aligns with broader discourses framing Kashmir's plight within the context of repression by predominantly Hindu India, allegations of illegal occupation, non-Muslim-led looting, and enduring oppression rooted in Islamic faith (Kanjwal, 2017). Additionally, the perceived failure of secular democratic institutions has instilled feelings of frustration, betrayal, and diminished trust among a significant portion of the populace (Devadas, 2018). Consequently, a confluence of factors including connectivity, global Islamic consciousness, and alienation from mainstream protests has engendered a novel perception of Kashmir's situation and its populace (DSP ████, 2022; ████, 2023). This perception is further reinforced by the orchestrated projection of Kashmiri colonisation, exploitation, and oppression (SSP ██████, 2022), consistently highlighting themes of Muslim victimhood on a global scale. Consequently, the cumulative grievances, suffering, and disillusionment collectively cultivate a state of vulnerability, both psychologically and environmentally, thereby creating a conducive milieu for the proliferation and entrenchment of radical ideologies.

In the context of escalating conflict and repression, the Internet and social media assume a significant role as a potent platform for disseminating propaganda, and accentuating phenomena such as Islamophobia, oppression, human rights violations, Indian domination, etc. These narratives underscore existing suffering and injustice, thereby amplifying the perception of victimhood among Muslims on a global scale. This portrayal of reality is also vigorously propagated through various mediums including media channels, academic discourse, literary works, and cinematic productions, which

serves as a convergence point for these narratives. Consequently, an increasing number of young individuals interpret the militarization of Kashmir within the broader context of a global pattern of Muslim community oppression, thereby contributing to their process of self-radicalization as a way to release their anger and resentment towards these external forces. In this light, insights gleaned from interviews align with a sociological perspective and social movement theory as articulated by Koehler (2015).

Koehler's theory elucidates how radical social movements emerge from strained socio-political conditions, fostering a widespread sense of discontent among the populace. This framework emphasises the significance of radical milieus, small-group dynamics, and antagonistic competition with the state as primary driving forces behind such movements. Individuals are drawn to these movements as they passively yield to pervasive social pressures.

Furthermore, while the youth in Kashmir are actively utilising social media as a platform to express their political, religious, and cultural views, seeking a sense of empowerment and liberation for their voices, this same social media landscape has become a powerful tool for radicalising the youth, with provocative content featuring militants and extremist religious leaders circulating widely. The availability of extremist fundamental ideologies like that of ISIS and al Qaeda online and the pervasive dissemination of false, one-sided, and extremist messages contributes to the spread of radical ideologies, exacerbating existing tensions and grievances. At the same time, the media and internet play crucial roles in disseminating Islamist symbols, images, and ideologies to the public, as highlighted by scholars such as Jewkes (2015), McNair (1998), and Bell (1978) This dissemination serves as a platform for propagandistic efforts, particularly in replicating symbols associated with radical entities, as noted by Hockings (1992). For instance, the internet, including online literature from radical organisations, has played a pivotal role in the genesis of militants like Zakir Musa and other radicalised individuals. They encountered ISIS and Al-Qaeda literature online and subsequently adopted similar

rhetoric in their propaganda, despite expressing no signs of religious affiliations previously or having no physical connection with them.

The video recording in 2015, orchestrated by Burhan Wani, the commander of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), exhorted the youth to partake in Jihad against perceived Indian state oppression and propagated the aspiration for an Islamic Caliphate (Rashid, 26 August 2015). He referenced the concept of 'Khilafat' (caliphate) in the video but provided no further explanation. Notably, Wani's public appearance with an AK-47, an emblem reminiscent of practices adopted by leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, served as a visual representation aligning with their shift in ideologies (Hartwell, 2017). Subsequently, Zakir Musa, Wani's successor, continued this pattern in a series of videos, further championing the supremacy of Islam and advocating for the establishment of a purely Muslim Caliphate (Safi, 22 May 2017). Notwithstanding their proclamation regarding the "Al-Qaeda caliphate," their statements collectively underscore a notable lack of familiarity or comprehension regarding this radicalised organisation and demonstrate no clear connection with the parent organisation (Jameel, 4 March 2018). This suggests that Musa and Wani's association was not rooted in adherence to the radical ideologies espoused by these organisations. Instead, it appears to be a calculated adoption of symbolic imagery as a means to express dissent against the Indian state and to incite retaliation against the perceived oppression perpetrated by the Indian government (Stern and Berger, 2015). This argument will undergo further examination in the forthcoming section of this chapter, specifically in the case study of Zakir Musa.

The argument of online ideological transmission is also supported by the Director General of Kashmir Police who highlighted:

> "The multi-dimensional nature of the media accelerates the global transmission of these ideologies, aiding recruitment efforts into militant groups. The availability of media and internet facilitates electronic links between like-minded subgroups and larger parent ideologies such as Al Qaeda or ISIS, fostering shared belief systems among individuals across different regions." (Lohiya, 2022)

Overall, the intersection of social media, religious ideologies, and political grievances has created a complex landscape in Kashmir, where the youth are both empowered and vulnerable to radicalisation.

The process of religious and ideological transformation observed among the youth of Kashmir reflects a complex interplay of historical, socio-political, and global factors (Devadas, 2018). Islam, Pan-Islamism, and the notion of Muslim brotherhood, deeply rooted in Islamic principles, have garnered moral authority among a portion of Kashmiri youth, who perceive them as avenues for addressing societal challenges. (Ahmad, 15 May 2017). Through a synthesis of interview findings corroborating with the existing literature, this study contends that the youth's adoption of a puritanical interpretation of Islam, coupled with aspirations for governance grounded in Shariah law, signifies a quest for moral revitalization and societal purification (███, 2022; ███, 2022; DSP ███, 2022). Moreover, a local journalist noted:

> "By 2016- 2017 there was a feeling of absolute discontent and disillusionment specifically amongst the youth where they believed that all the stakeholders fighting for Kashmir have personal and political gains rather than anyone talking about Kashmir as a society. This made them reject political affiliations and adopt religion as a symbolic communication" (███, 2022).

While a senior police officer stated:

> "This inclination aligns with the emergence of the increasing influence of movements such as the Salafis and the Ahle-Hadith movement. The further adoption of religious ideologies and practices represents symbolic tokens that are facilitated by the advent of social media and the dissemination of messages by televangelists. This has played a significant role in the radicalization of a segment of Kashmiri youth" (DSP ███, 2022).

Thus, the interviews aforementioned resonate with the analysis delineated in the preceding section of the thesis concerning the role of the internet and social media in the dissemination and adoption of ideologies. This contributes to the attainment of more conclusive findings. Furthermore, this aspect will be subjected to further analysis.

Moreover, DSP ███████ (2022), SSP ████████ (2022), and SSP ████ (2023), representing distinct zones within Kashmir—namely, the north, south, and central regions—unanimously concur that the growth of movements like Ahle-Hadith, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Salafism over the past decade signifies a shifting landscape of religious affiliation and ideological adherence. However, SSP ███████ explained:

> "The combination of local, regional, and global factors has catalysed the radicalisation process among Kashmiri youth. The transformative power of religious ideologies, coupled with socio-economic grievances and geopolitical influences, underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to address the underlying drivers of radicalization and promote dialogue and engagement." (SSP ███████, 2022).

Besides the Internet and media, theological groups like Ahle-Hadith have capitalised on the vulnerability of the youth to broaden their sphere of influence, augment their follower base, and increase religiosity in the region as noted by Mir in his work *'Kashmir: From Sufi to Salafi'* (5 November 2012). DSP ███████ (2022), SSP ███████ (2022), and SSP ████ (2023) expounded in their interviews on the influential roles played by preachers such as Maulana Mushtaq Veeri and Dr Zakir Naik in shaping the religious convictions and political aspirations of Kashmiri youth at the time of vacuum created through disillusionment with the politics, particularly in advocating for the establishment of Islamic governance structures. Based on these motivations, it can be argued that individuals who undergo radicalization under the influence of those religious groups and televangelists may not necessarily embrace religion for its intrinsic essence and genuine values, but rather as a means to channel their frustrations with the prevailing circumstances. Moreover, the assertions and analyses presented in these interviews align with the framework of coercion and motivation theory as proposed by Trujillo et al. (2009 cited in Pandya, 2019, 6). This theory examines the influence of external factors such as charismatic leaders, firebrand preachers, radical clerics, or intellectual figures in fostering increased religiosity among individuals and recruiting new members for

terrorist organisations. Trujillo et al. (2009 cited in Pandya, 2019, 6) also acknowledge the occurrence of systematic, directed, and conscious psychological manipulation, akin to the tactics employed by sectarian or totalitarian groups.

On the other hand, it is imperative to evaluate the authenticity and efficacy of the radicalization process occurring through online channels and religious intermediaries, considering the widespread dissemination of radical ideologies and negative sentimental events. SSP ████ (2023) and SSP ███ (2023), counter-terrorism officers operating in the southern region of Kashmir where the adoption of radical ideologies is particularly rapid, concurred that:

> "While many individuals utilise social media platforms to present themselves as Islamist militants, there exists no tangible evidence linking them physically to any global radical organisation." (SSP ████, 2023).

Moreover,

> "Interrogations have revealed that most of these individuals perceive such strategies as useful for their cause, instilling fear in the government, and legitimising their objectives concerning Kashmir. one such individual told me that we have to something that scares the government, so that they listen to us" (SSP ███, 2023).

Therefore, for assessing the veracity of the aforementioned interviews, Gabriel Weimann's research (2004, 5) is pertinent, as it provides a framework for analysis through the perspective theory of enemy publics. He states that by using the internet, terrorists seem to try to demoralise the enemy by threatening attacks and by fostering feelings of guilt about the enemy's conduct and motives. In the process, they also seek to stimulate public debate in their enemies' states, to change public opinion, and to weaken public support for the government regime.

In line with this, ████████████ Police ████ suggested that the

> "Catalyst for radicalization in Kashmir is not merely a religious passion or comprehensive religious knowledge transmitted via online platforms. Rather, it is

the prospect of a more promising future promised by religious ideals, that fit in within their mindset against the suffering and adversity experienced by militants in Kashmir, that usually serves as drivers of radicalization" (2022).

This perspective aligns with overarching ideological frameworks of ISIS and Al-Qaeda available online, fostering the emergence of collective belief systems among individuals from diverse geographical regions. During such times, militants find a shared sense of purpose and existential meaning within these ideologies, despite not necessarily endorsing or subscribing to them. Rather, these ideologies provide a common narrative of religious supremacy, offering a cohesive identity and security for individuals undergoing radicalization. The interview findings resonate with the tenets of identity theory as explained by Eric Ericson's (1968) identity theory which suggests that young adults reach a stage where ideologies help in forming identity. Moreover, Dalgaard-Nielsen posits that, if a young adult lacks self-esteem, joining a terrorist group might function as a strong identity stabilizer, providing the young adult with a sense of belonging, worth, and purpose. In cases where the young adult feels excluded from a surrounding majority culture, as might be the case with regard to violent Islamist radicalization in Europe, the perceived need for a violent "defence" of the group and the ideology might develop (Nielsen, 2008, 7).

Siyech (2018) agrees that exposure to global extremist ideologies that fervently espouse the primacy of Islam plays a pivotal role in shaping the perspective of individuals who subsequently come to view the pursuit of a political agenda, as opposed to a purely Islamic one, as lacking in purity and fraught with corruption. Furthermore, ███████ ████████ Police ████████ in an interview agrees and corroborates with the above literature stating:

> "That during periods of political vacuum, these voids tend to be occupied by heightened religiosity and overtone of religion". (2022)

It is important to note that this transformation does not necessarily entail a comprehensive transition toward Islamist ideologies or radicalised violent tendencies in the individual's nature. Rather, it signifies the heightened symbolic importance ascribed

to religious identity, eclipsing the prominence of engaging in purely political endeavours. This aspect of symbolism will be further explored in the following section.

Flag waving

 In the subsequent section of this chapter, the symbolic manifestation of the shift will be examined in more depth, shedding light on the underlying meaning of this technique among Kashmiri youth and militants. This examination will extend beyond the realm of the internet, delving into the physical manifestation of symbols in real-life contexts. This analysis aims to yield further valuable insights into the nature of the symbolic aspect of the transformation.

The prevalence of ISIS black flag waving in the region serves as a significant phenomenon indicative of the adoption of symbolic gestures aimed at disseminating radical ideologies. In the early months of 2015, the Islamic State formally declared the establishment of Wilayat Khorasan (Islamic State in Khorasan province of Afghanistan). Shortly thereafter, the Kashmir Valley commenced experiencing sporadic occurrences involving the display of black flags associated with this organisation (Routray, 2018). These incidents exhibited a range of manifestations: at times, individuals wearing masks would brandish black flags reminiscent of those employed by the parent entity in Iraq and Syria, while on other occasions, young men would do so without concealing their identities. Subsequently, a novel practice emerged in which black flags were positioned atop the deceased bodies of militants following encounters with security forces. Notably, while conventional custom in the Kashmir Valley dictated that deceased individuals be shrouded in black coverings, the introduction of these new shrouds constituted the flags of the Islamic State (Routray, 27 September 2018). These flags have, with growing regularity, begun to make appearances in various public gatherings, altercations with security forces, as well as in the form of graffiti adorning walls and shop shutters.

Instances also exist wherein ISIS flags were raised by young militants during confrontations with the Indian army, as well as during militant's funeral documented in the case of a youth's demise in an encounter (Indian Express, 14 July 201; Mir, 11 May 2019). Additionally, masked individuals were observed brandishing ISIS flags during post-Eid prayers in 2019 in Jammu and Kashmir (Business Standard, 5 June 2019; Indian Express, 5 June 2019), further underscoring the incorporation of symbols associated with global extremist organisations into the local context. As corroborated by multiple assertions taken from interviews conducted by Geelani and Devadas as part of their research, they elucidate that, some youths exhibit the practice of brandishing ISIS flags during protests with the intention of eliciting agitation and provocation against the domination and oppression of the Indian administration, rather than demonstrating genuine adherence to ISIS or radical Islamist doctrines (Devadas, 2019). Furthermore, Geelani states:

> "In places where Kashmiris are surrounded by a presence of 600,000 military personnel's slogans such as 'Narai-e-Takbeer, Allah-o-Akbar', signify not an Islamist orientation but a declaration of multiple identities, both Kashmiri and Kashmiri Muslim. Similarly, slogans like 'Yahan kya chalega, Nizam-e-Mustafa' (who will govern here, sharia law) do not seek the establishment of a Caliphate but rather express a rejection of both perceived military intervention and cultural aggression from a perceived 'Brahmanical Hindu India" (Geelani, 2019, 74).

> Additionally, Kabir Taneja notes that the photographs and videos of the flag waving flashed by various news channels offered more confusion than clarity. One of the first images to appear in the media was of a flag that did not belong to ISIS and the imagery was wrong (2018, 21). He states in his article *'Islamic State Merits High Caution but Not Careless Alarmism in Kashmir'* that "The flag in question bore no resemblance to the Middle Eastern group's flag and had the words "Allah" and "Taliban" printed on it" (Taneja, 20 October 2014)

This implies that this flag-waving incident was possibly the work of a single miscreant or a small fringe group that aimed to ape the symbolism used by terror outfits linked to the

Taliban or the Pakistani Taliban, not with a systematic calculated strategy planned carefully beforehand by a professional radicalised entity (Taneja, 20 October 2014). In this light, it becomes evident that the black flags of the Islamic State have emerged as a novel emblem representing resistance and the mobilisation of the populace in Kashmir (Geelani, 2019).

Figure 9 (Taneja, 20 October 2014)

Furthermore, a report published by the International Business Times (21 August 2015) titled *"Kashmir: Posters Welcoming Baghdadi Spotted in Srinagar Along with Flags of LeT, ISIS and Pakistan,"* along with a post on Twitter by the Asian News International (2015) titled *"Pakistan, LeT and ISIS flags seen near Jamia Masjid in Nowhatta, Srinagar (J&K),"* illustrates the adoption of two distinct rhetorical symbols by Kashmiri youth as seen blow in figure 10 and 11. The former prominently displays the Pakistan flag, advocating a nationalist ideology, while the latter features the Islamic state flag with the poster stating, *"Welcome Kashmir Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi"* (IBT, 21 August 2017). Notably, there appears to be a lack of nuanced understanding among these youth regarding the ideological disparities between Pakistan and Islamic State. Pakistan, functioning as a democratic state with no imposition of Islamic law, stands in contrast to IS, which espouses extremist principles of enforcing Islamic laws. Moreover, an article on the Islamic State's Telegram channel titled *"Realities of Jihad in Kashmir and Role of Pakistani Agencies"* highlights the assertion that the "Kashmiri struggle is not guided by Islam but rather by Pakistan and its agents" (Jadoon, 2018). Consequently, the

simultaneous display of symbols associated with these two rival entities during protests against the Indian state reflects a symbolic expression of discontent and frustration directed towards the state, rather than a profound comprehension of the underlying ideological implications.

(ANI, 2015) figure 10

(ANI, 2015) figure 11

Furthermore, in an interview with a senior police officer in the Nowhatta region of Kashmir in downtown Srinagar, where majority cases of waving ISIS flags were recorded, he explained:

"In instances where young individuals are apprehended in the area of the central Mosque in Srinagar while displaying flags associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), interrogations reveal an absence of understanding regarding the concept of an Islamic state and the specific Islamic jurisprudential foundations relating to it. For example, they use a Pakistan and the Islamic state flag together, not knowing both hate each other. It becomes evident that these individuals lack substantive religious knowledge in this regard. In the course of inquiries, it is frequently ascertained that their motivation is rooted in a combination of frustration and aggression and a desire to manifest resistance against the Indian state apparatus and provoke them. Notably, the void left by mainstream institutions often becomes a fertile ground for the infiltration of extremist organisations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which seek to exploit the grievances and disillusionment of these individuals." (DSP ██████n, 2022).

Additionally, interviews conducted among Police, Academics, Army officials and political leaders, explained:

"The ideological shift within these militant groups towards an extreme form of Islam appears to be more of an illusory than doctrinally grounded" (██████ ████████ Police █████, 2022).

Furthermore, Dr Dixit notes:

"This arises due to a dearth of profound comprehension of genuine Islamic values and the nuanced concept of jihad, thereby reflecting a calculated response perceived as requisite to navigate the intricate political terrain in Kashmir with the intent of safeguarding their deeply entrenched Islamic identity." (2022).

While Colonel ██████████ states:

"Within the context of changing ideologies, their religious identity functions as a collective motif for Kashmiri Muslims to shield the longstanding Islamic principles from external forces like that of Hindu India—not as a pretext to unleash violence upon the populace for insubstantial reasons attached to radicalised ideologies." (2022).

Additionally, the aforementioned interviews resonate consistently with the research findings of Geelani (2019), Devadas (2019), and Taneja (2014), thereby augmenting the objectivity and reducing bias in the interview.

Moreover, DSP ███████ further states in an interview:

> "It is crucial to mention that ISIS gained global prominence in early 2014 when it successfully seized control of key Iraqi cities during its Western Iraq offensive. Therefore, the appearance of ISIS and Al-Qaeda flags in Kashmir during protests and stone-pelting incidents in Srinagar, particularly outside the Grand Mosque in the same year, was emblematic of the organisation's growing territorial influence globally. The dissemination of this influence via social media and television platforms had a profound impact on Kashmiri youth, giving them with a sense of empowerment and the belief that they could challenge the presence of the Indian military in the region in the same way the territorial gains were achieved by ISIS with regards to Iraqi cities". (2022).

As a result, it can be argued that the adoption of radicalised rhetoric by these youth may not necessarily stem from a genuine religious conviction, but rather from the inspiration drawn from the perceived success of ISIS in dominating external forces.

It is important to highlight that these militants and youth employed a foundational comprehension and theoretical framework of imagery and symbols to disseminate particular ideologies among the Kashmiri populace. According to the scholarly insights of Jowett and Donnell (2012), symbols and visual representations, whether conveyed through various forms of visual communication or embodied by human figures such as posters, flags, or prominent figures recurrently associated with potent messages, possess the inherent capacity to mould and influence public mindsets, thereby transforming conceptual constructs into tangible realities. This phenomenon is tantamount to what is commonly denoted as propaganda. Moreover, images, posters, and symbols serve as potent instruments capable of eliciting intense emotions which consequently mould public perceptions and foster the construction of specific narratives

(Stern and Berger, 2015). For example, a quintessential embodiment of an iconographic representation of authority and universality lies in the emblem of a flag (Donell & Jowett, 2012). It is postulated that when a speaker assumes a stance in front of a substantial flag or poster, it triggers an emotive transformation in the audience, signifying a heightened sense of importance and empowerment (Chomsky, 1992).

Additionally, in this light, Amulya Gopalakrishnan in her work *'Raise the banner high: Why flags remain such potent propaganda, from Kashmir to the American South'* explains that:

> "Flags are the blank screens on which we project our fiercest feelings, feelings that lie too deep for words which is this case in the hatred and resentment towards the Indian state" (22 July 2015).

Furthermore, she adds that a

> "Flag is nothing by itself but merely a carrier of meanings we imbue it with. Some flags can create an atmosphere of aggression, altogether changing the character of public space. The presence of many flags still gives you a sense of an army massed together. The flag is the most important part of the ensemble of symbols that make a nation-state. In other words, flags are fluttering bits of mythology" (Gopalakrishnan, 22 July 2015).

Furthermore, Jowett and Donnell (2012) talk about the important role of the usage of flags as a symbol in propaganda. People usually relate to flags as a sense of identity. The effect of the usage of slogans as discussed gets enhanced by the usage of flags as both possess a sense of identity and have a symbol of culture inside them. When a speaker stands in front of a huge flag and shouts that slogan, an emotional association is transferred to the speaker. This symbolises a larger-than-life feeling and creates a sense of potency.

Figure 12: Kashmiri protestors hold Islamic State (IS) flags during a protest in Srinagar. (Rashid, 26 December 2015)

Figure 13 (Pandit, 14 July 2017)

Within the specific context of Kashmir, the aforementioned militants strategically endeavoured to adopt and spread analogous symbols and images with the significant facilitation of social and mass media that were once employed by ISIS and Al-Qaeda, including the notorious black flag, speeches, videos, and materials propagating extremist and radicalised Islamic principles (Pandit, 15 January 2019; Stern and Berger, 2015). This conscious selection of symbols, images and terminology is predicated on the awareness

that these visuals are inextricably associated with emotions of fear and foreboding. Through the adoption of such symbolic language, these individuals align themselves with the identity propagated by organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. In doing so, they utilized signs and messages, a concept often described as the 'semiotics of terrorism' by Barthes (1977), to captivate public attention and effectively instil fear, thus contributing to what has been termed the 'Theatre of Terror' (Weimann, 2004).This approach to adopting an identity resonates with Kates (2004, 455-464), who posits that the alignment between an influencer and their followers' beliefs and values strengthens cultural resonance, thereby enhancing self-influence congruence. Consumers tend to adopt the traits, behaviours, and values endorsed by an influencer when they perceive shared beliefs, norms, and interests (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005; Reid, Kialdini, and Aiken, 2010). In this context, radicalised individuals who adopt attributes similar to those of influential organisations such as ISIS and Al Qaeda could gain legitimacy and societal acceptance, positioning themselves as authentic entities in the minds of the government and the public (Suchman, 1995, 571-610; Bitektine and Haack, 2015, 59-75). The legitimacy sought by radicalised individuals in this scenario lies in their ability to appear dangerous and threatened, thus exerting significant psychological influence akin to that of radical groups. In line with this, Siyech (2018) claims that this strategic adoption of symbolic lexicons is orchestrated to achieve distinct objectives: engendering fear, albeit directed primarily at governmental entities and army force; fomenting widespread anxiety with minimal proclivity toward resorting to overt acts of violence or aggressive strategies that may entail loss of life; and engendering mass hysteria that buttresses the agenda of fervent Pan-Islamism. as a way to gain recognition, support and legitimacy, actions are executed to garner attention to perceived inequities and prejudice against the tenets of Islam (Siyec, 2018).

Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that "fear" and "danger" propagated by these insurgents majorly serve as a tactic to assert their nationalist resolve for autonomy, and to escape from perceived oppression and betrayals inflicted upon by the political apparatus of the state. Importantly, these sentiments do not inherently stem from their

genuine attachment to Islamic principles. In this regard, Dr Abdul Haq, a spokesperson for a Pakistani separatist's organisation, dismissed the practice of waving the ISIS flag as absurd and questioned the motives behind using the ISIS flag at militant's funeral, he states that these:

> "our enemies who want to give our just struggle for freedom a bad name".
> (Jameel, 22 November 2017)

Fleegler (2008), Jowett and Donnell (2012) and Kirschenbaum (2000) all agree and explain that a commonly observed propagandist tactic involves appeals to action driven by a sentiment of patriotic duty. These messages are often conveyed through symbols such as flags symbolising national pride. Patriotic fervour possesses a formidable emotion capable of inspiring individuals to undertake actions that may require personal sacrifice but are deemed beneficial to the nation, a collective, or an ideology, while Raeside in his article '*Flags and religion*' states:

> "Most flags by their very nature assume religious significance. In most countries civil religion mingles with patriotism in some sort of veneration of the flag". (22 July 2022).

Furthermore, Devadas in his two authorly works conducted a survey where it is underscored that many young individuals in Kashmir that participated in the flag waving lacked profound knowledge or insights into their own religion, let alone a comprehensive understanding of the global landscape (Devadas, 2018). Their responses were frequently driven by emotions and sentiments of deep frustration from the state (Devadas, 2018). Moreover, in an interview with DSP ███████, he stated that:

> "Youth were heavily influenced by their online interactions and exposure to ideologies propagated by radical extremist leaders. In interrogation with a group of 5 individuals from South Kashmir, we found downloaded videos of Anwar-al-Alwaki on all of their mobile phones to which they suggested to have come into awareness of the name in the daily mosques they go. When i asked them about their knowledge on Sharia law, they knew absolutely nothing" (2022)

While according to DSP ████ :

> "In circumstances where political avenues are perceived as inadequate, religion
> emerges as the primary recourse. This phenomenon is reinforced by the shared
> religious identity among Kashmiris, rendering religious narratives as an appealing
> and unifying force. Similarly, within the realm of militancy, the adoption of these
> narratives propagated by radical organisations through the utilisation of similar
> symbols akin to what they usually encounter in videos through internet and
> images serve as strategic tactics to easily attract attention from the public,
> engage the audience more effectively and gather heightened support. This
> strategic approach proves instrumental in revitalising their religious identity and
> fostering collective unity with the overarching goal of mobilising the populace to
> collectively confront threats perceived as directed at Islam imposed by external
> forces" (2022).

By drawing parallels with historical precedents in Kashmir, as analysed in Chapters 1 and
2, wherein the collective ethnic identity of Kashmiriyat was consistently invoked to
assert and preserve communal status during periods of adversity and deprivation, the
current embrace of a more extremist Islamic rhetoric by Kashmiri militants can be
understood as emblematic of an exclusive manifestation of Kashmiri religious
adherence, which is constructed by both inclusive and exclusive dimensions of the
Umma model. This strategic technique functions as a veneer, reflecting the deep-seated
sentiment and aspiration for the preservation of a self-determined, autonomous
Kashmiri identity apart from external influences, rather than advocating for a genuine
allegiance to the establishment of a Caliphate or Islamic laws. Such phenomena
underscore a pattern of continuity from past to present within the Kashmiri cultural
fabric, showing an incessant undercurrent of nationalistic spirit deeply ingrained in the
region. Therefore, it is important to posit that this conflict continues to retain its

fundamental nature as a political dispute, rather than transforming into a religious conflict as purported by radicalised militants and youths.

As a result, it can be seen that in comparison to Kashmiri militants' current approaches of using symbols and images similar to ISIS and Al -Qaeda, the parent organisations inevitably evince a heightened inclination for violence, propagated through a more radical and unyielding interpretation of Islam (Jadoon, 2018). Their methodology encompasses forceful tactics, including coerced conversions and the imposition of their doctrinal framework, irrespective of the broader politico-strategic considerations which significantly lacks in the youth of Kashmir (Jadoon, 2018). Despite the attempted manifestation of specific symbols and signs attached to Islamic principles, the militants and the youth under scrutiny lack the requisite foundational constituents and overarching attributes necessary for them to attain a status akin to these extremist groups. This demarcation emerges from the profound divergences in their motives, methodologies, knowledge, and the scope of their impact, delineating the variance in their religious commitment, the profundity of their actions, and the levels of brutality they exhibit. Corroborating this perspective, a dialogue with Director General HK Lohiya, revealed that,

> "Efforts to manipulate Kashmir's conflict to the global jihad phenomenon are
> devoid. Unlike recruits of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban, Kashmiri insurgents are
> away from orchestrating bombings in civilian-populated marketplaces, public
> domains, or religious places to incite civilian casualties. Instances of suicide
> bombings targeting non-combatants remain exceptionally rare" (2022).

Therefore, the shift of these militants towards religious underpinnings serves predominantly as a symbolic and emblematic gesture, which operates primarily on the surface level. This transformation is ostensibly rooted in their sense of disillusionment and resentment, which motivate them to safeguard Islamic values and to counteract the external threats presented by both the Indian government and the Pakistani government rather than a genuine desire for the establishment of a Caliphate.

Furthermore, upon meticulous examination, it becomes evident that their adoption of religious motifs and the emulation of certain extremist organisations is not substantiated by the foundational components that define the radical ideologies and actions of those groups. The distinction in the ideological foundation between radicalised militants and the genuine radical framework will be further explained in the following sections of the research.

Militant leader case study of Zakir Musa & AGUH (Ansar Gazwat-Ul-Hind)

As previously noted, Zakir Musa emerged as a prominent militant leader advocating for religious ideology in Kashmir, vehemently rejecting the notion of nationalism in the face of perceived threats to the Kashmiri Muslim identity. His influence encapsulated a spectrum of perspectives, sentiments, and opinions reflective of the broader contemporary viewpoint of Kashmiri youth during that period, as emphasised by Post (2003). Post underscores the pivotal role of militant leaders across various domains, including the cultural, political, and historical landscape of their country, as well as the individual background elements shaping their persona, and the prevailing political circumstances (2003, 69-85). Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an in-depth exploration of Musa's personality, motivations, mindset, and radicalization trajectory to comprehend the origins of his influence on his followers. Such an investigation is essential for understanding the mechanisms through which Musa shaped the beliefs and ideologies of Kashmiri youth under his leadership, ultimately leading to their adoption of radical Islamic ideologies.

Theoretical framework of militant mindset - Motivation, personality traits and skills

To comprehensively grasp the nature of Zakir Musa's ideological shift, it is imperative to engage with a theoretical framework capable of rationalising his motivations, actions, techniques employed for disseminating radical ideologies, and the underlying mindset

driving his entire radicalization process. This framework encompasses several key theories, including Roberts and Yoon's (2002, 494-510) theory of personality traits and skills, Kruglanski and Fishman's model delineating the proficiencies and motivations of militants, as well as the framework elucidating the social relationships, cultural contexts, and political structures influencing their radicalization process (2009). Subsequently, these frameworks will be applied to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the case study of Zakir Musa across all pertinent aspects.

According to Roberts and Yoon, their inquiry delved into the intricate relationship between motivation and personality traits while simultaneously distinguishing between personality traits and skills. Within their framework, they expounded upon the notion of motivation of personality, which they defined as "what people desire, whether this desire is consciously or unconsciously" (2002, 492). To distinguish between skills and personality traits, Roberts and Yoon introduced a novel domain in their analysis, encompassing cognitive abilities as opposed to traditional personality traits articulating the following differentiation: Personality traits are typically characterised as enduring and automatic patterns of cognition, affect, and behaviour that exhibit consistency over time and across relevant situations. These traits represent predisposed cognitive, affective, and behavioural tendencies, portraying what an individual is inclined to engage in, as an average across diverse situations. In contrast, skills are regarded as capacities or abilities that a person possesses, which can be effectively deployed when the context necessitates their application (2002, 492).

In the context of militant leadership, the competencies and circumstances that hold relevance predominantly revolve around the domain of violence. Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) delineate three specific proficiencies observable among militants. Firstly, militant leaders adeptly employ language as a tool for forging a collective narrative. Through linguistic manipulation, they extol the virtues of their group members' sacrifices, vilify their adversaries, and construct shared interpretations and significance around acts of violence. Secondly, militant leaders often legitimise their acts of violence

by invoking the authority of a singular expert or a group of individuals who serve as the conduit for translating ideological beliefs into tangible action. This process lends a veneer of legitimacy to their actions in the eyes of their followers. Lastly, militant leaders employ public demonstrations of commitment, utilising various forms of media such as audio messages, videos, and written documents to publicly showcase their unwavering dedication to the cause, thereby deterring potential betrayals within their ranks and reinforcing ideological cohesion among adherents.

Furthermore, in the realm of assessing militants' motivations for joining militancy, Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) demonstrated that life experiences from the social psychology of political violence mostly come from proximate environments, interpersonal associations, and the broader community milieu. In the context of militancy and insurgent movements, it is contended that the primary impetus for these militants' actions stems from the confluence of personal networks, institutions, and the immediate external environment. Personal networks, consisting of family members or close friends affiliated with militant groups, exert a significant influence on individuals, potentially propelling them towards violence. Institutions, such as educational or religious establishments, serve as additional influential factors, exposing individuals to extremist ideologies and providing avenues for the adoption of militant worldviews.

Analysis of Zakir Musa and AGUH (Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind)

Zakir Musa became involved in the radicalised movement upon joining Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), a separatist militant organisation that advocates a merger with Pakistan. However, his process of radicalization can be traced back to his teenage years, predating this pivotal benchmark significantly. Therefore, it is imperative to explore his transformation by examining several pivotal events from the development of his childhood as well as his personality before the radicalization.

Zakir Bhat was born on July 25, 1994, into a well-to-do family (Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017). A glimpse into Zakir Bhat's personality can be discerned from the accounts provided by his classmates in interviews with journalists (Mufti, 20 August 2016). One classmate portrayed him as "Being fun-loving, sociable, extroverted, and notably friendly." Another affirmed that Zakir Bhat was "a diligent student who was inclined towards a strong eagerness to engage with all his classmates and instructors." (Mufti, 20 August 2016). In the context of his lifestyle, one of Zakir's friends remarked, "Zakir's primary concerns appeared to revolve around fashionable clothing, high-end footwear, premium fragrances, the latest hair grooming products, and his regular consumption of cigarettes." (Aakash, 30 May 2019). Another friend noted that Zakir was predominantly driven by hedonistic pursuits, to the extent that he paid limited attention to militant activities, commenting, "He perpetually envisioned a Kashmir where people could relish life. However, he appeared rather indifferent to the occurrences in his surroundings, primarily preoccupied with his own life." (Aakash, 30 May 2019). This suggests that Zakir Musa was initially drawn towards the typical allure of a materialistic, Western modern lifestyle characterised by comfort and a carefree mindset during his formative years. Additionally, there were no conspicuous indications of religious attachment, belief, or piety evident in his demeanour during this period (Aggarwal, 2023).
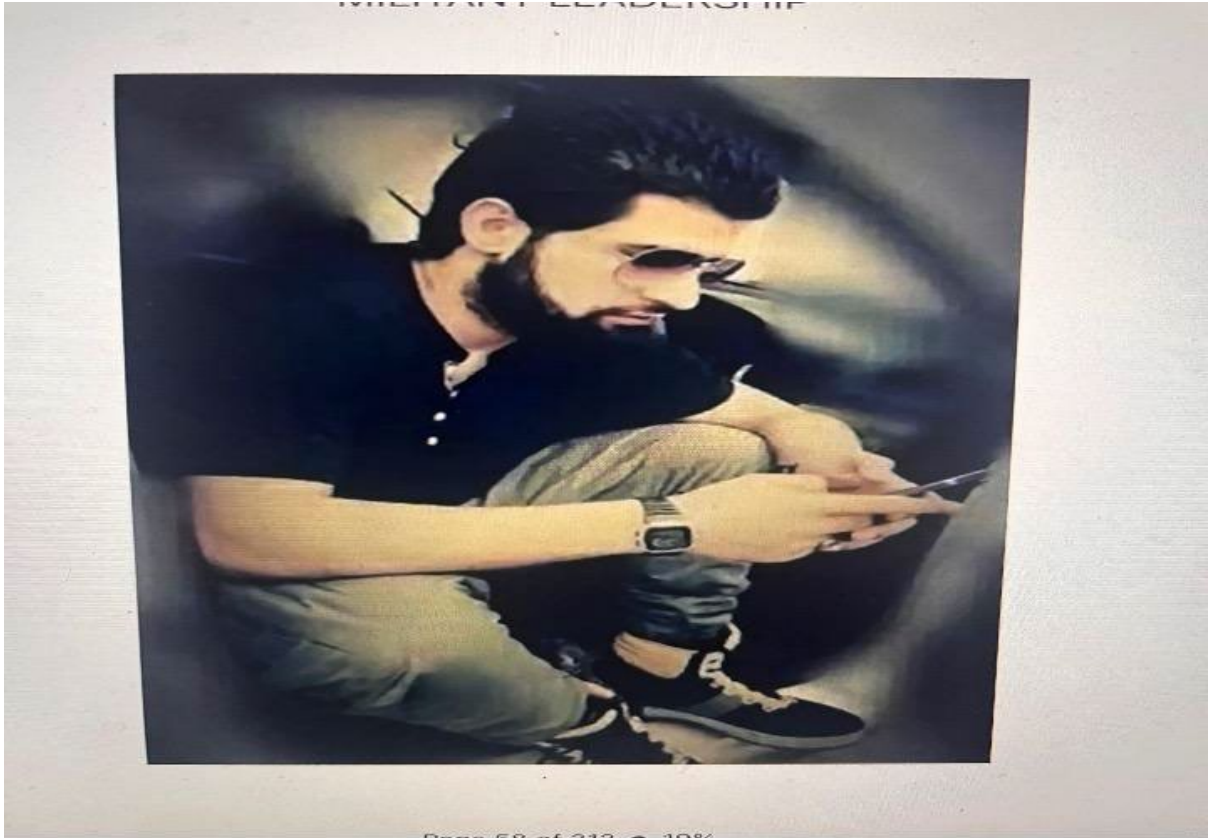
Picture: 1 (Aggarwal, 2023)
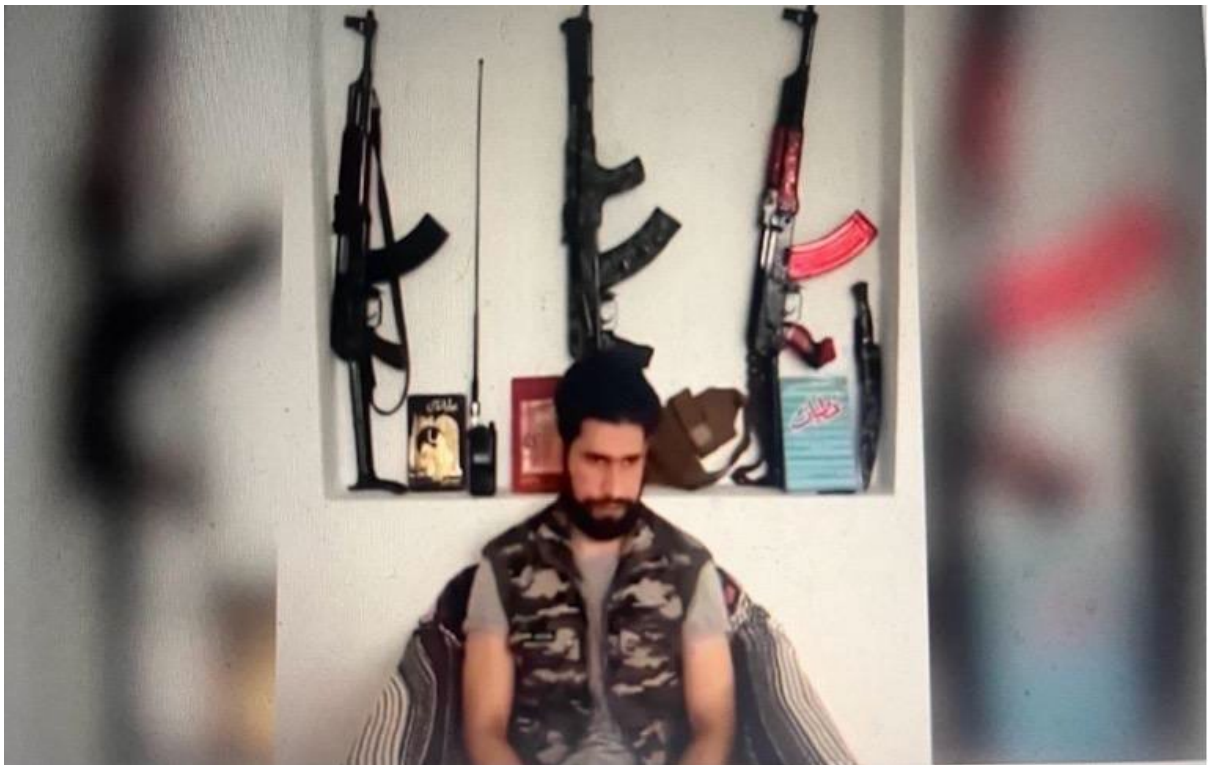
Picture: 2 (Aggarwal, 2023)

Picture: 3 (Aggarwal, 2023)

The initial catalyst that ignited Zakir Musa's resentment toward the mainstream government can be traced back to an incident involving his father, Abdul Rashid Bhat, and Zakir himself when he was 14 years old. This event involved intimidation from the police, which sowed the seeds of discontent within him (Munshi, 18 September 2017). Abdul Rashid vividly categorises this incident as deeply "traumatising". He expressed,

> "I had never raised my hand against my son, and at that particular moment, I witnessed a policeman striking Zakir across the face. Zakir hadn't been involved in stone pelting, but the policeman disregarded our pleas. I can never erase that moment from my memory, and perhaps, neither could he" (Munshi, 18 September 2017).

Abdul Rashid Bhat took the step of relocating Zakir outside of Jammu and Kashmir in an attempt to protect him from the pervasive violence in the region. This decision was made in light of Zakir's diminishing sense of personal significance within the tumultuous environment. Abdul Rashid conveyed his efforts, stating, "I made attempts to uplift his spirits, to extract him from this hostile atmosphere. I sent him to Jammu for educational coaching. However, even from Jammu, the police summoned him for questioning and

subjected him to harassment". (Aggarwal, 2023, 56; Munshi, 18 September 2017). This phenomenon can be further explained by applying the work proposed by Maskaliūnaitė (2015), *'Exploring the Theories of Radicalization'* wherein he argues that situations of personal crisis, harassment, and humiliation served as catalysts to intensify Zakir's extremist beliefs and not the fact that were influenced by them.

Zakir Bhat started his journey into militancy in 2012, during his tenure as a civil engineering student (Mufti, 20 August 2016). This critical juncture in his life occurred when he returned home for a vacation but opted not to return to college. Instead, he made the pivotal decision to join Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) (Mufti, 20 August 2016). According to Abdul Rashid Bhat, Zakir penned a letter in which he articulated his decision to join militancy as a means to attain personal significance and address perceived injustice, with Zakir expressing concerns about the mistreatment of Kashmiri Muslims as expounded upon by Speckhard (2015) and Kruglanski and Orehek (2011), the significance of personal meaning and life purpose is attached to terrorism recruits. He highlighted the hardships faced by Kashmiri students residing outside the Valley and posited that jihad represented the sole viable solution to these issues (Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017).

During this transitional period, Zakir Musa underwent a noticeable physical transformation. As depicted in picture 1, a photograph shared on social media before his affiliation with Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Musa presented himself with slicked-back hair, wearing sunglasses, a short-sleeved polo shirt, skinny jeans, and sneakers—typical attire reminiscent of a student engaged in a Western modern lifestyle. This
 portrayal exhibited no discernible signs of religious attachment. In contrast, as illustrated in picture 2 and 3, Musa exhibited a distinct appearance characterised by unshorn hair, a substantial beard, and military fatigues, accompanied by the presence of guns and weapons—an image more aligned with radicalised ideology associated with religious fervour. This transformation in appearance signifies a significant shift in his

ideology following his involvement in militancy, transitioning from the guise of a typical student to one embracing a more religious and pious demeanour (Singh, 14 July 2018).

As demonstrated above, Zakir Musa's life experiences, particularly his encounter with the police at the age of 14 and his growing disillusionment with the Indian administration over the years, have emerged as significant life events that motivated him to act for freedom and justice of Kashmir (Aggarwal, 2023). These experiences occurred in an environment marked by daily brutality and oppression imposed by the police on the citizens of Kashmir (Aggarwal, 2023). During his college years, Musa began to identify with the idea of Kashmiri nationalism. He believed that engaging in militancy and jihad was a means to help Kashmiris break free from Indian force and control, thereby ending the ongoing conflict and suffering in Kashmir (Aggarwal, 2023), although, before this, he had not exhibited any commitment to religious principles. His motivation was grounded in the desire to counter the hardships faced by Kashmiris, including himself (Aggarwal, 2023). This perspective aligns with the argument put forth by Kruglanski and Fishman (2009), who emphasised that the propensity for violence exhibited by militants often stems from their immediate environments and life experiences. In Musa's case, the oppressive environment and personal encounters with violence played a pivotal role in driving his commitment to the cause of Kashmiri nationalism and militancy as a means to achieve it. In addition, early childhood and adolescent figures played a crucial role in justifying Zakir's rationale for embracing militancy. His brother, Shakir Bhat, states:

> "They [Kashmiri youth] had stones in their hand and that was the way of their protest, now if you're not even giving them the option of even protesting with stones, what are the other options among them? I will speak on behalf of the family. There is no shame that he picked up the gun. I mean, you can see the frustration among the people" (Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017).

Besides, Zakir's sister highlighted his sacrifice of luxuries to fight for the cause of Kashmir against Indian-administered Kashmir. This transformation reflected his unwavering commitment to his cause (Bhat and Gazi, 31 May 2019). Resultantly, it can be concluded

that none of these family members described making efforts to dissuade him from pursuing militancy (Bhat and Gazi, 31 May 2019).

This observation is consistent with the perspectives of Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) regarding the role of personal networks in guiding an individual towards acts of violence and insurgency. They posit that family members or close friends within an individual's network can consciously or unconsciously, intentionally, or unintentionally, influence the person's thoughts or inclinations towards revolt and insurgency. This influence can serve as an impetus for the individual to act in line with the beliefs and values propagated within their close social circle. In Zakir Musa's case, the absence of any familial efforts to dissuade him from militancy suggests a level of agreement or acceptance within his immediate social environment regarding his chosen path and the pursuit of Kashmiri freedom through insurgent means.

It is imperative to emphasise the profound nature of the trigger that propelled Zakir Musa into a drastic transformation, prompting him to forsake his erstwhile comfortable life, relinquish valuable possessions, and transition from a conventional appearance akin to many ordinary college students (Aakash, 30 May 2019). Instead, he chose to embark on a path marked by deprivation, hardship, and a commitment to militancy. Such a profound motivational force in this context can be cogently attributed to both the childhood trauma caused by the police brutality and witnessing of oppressions imposed on Kashmiri Muslims during his formative years (Aggarwal, 2023; Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017). On this note Police Officer SSP ████ (2022) noted:

> "Consequently, he [Zakir] began to prioritise his Muslim identity over his Kashmiri ethnicity and family-based identity, thereby emphasising his need to assert his status and social position as a Kashmiri Muslim, more importantly using that to address the deprivation of human rights" (SSP ████, 2022).

Furthermore, Army personnel Lt Colonel ████ explained:

> "This shift has been realised by his belief that Muslims constituted a numerical majority in Indian-administered Kashmir but were a minority in mainland India, which predominantly consisted of Hindus, triggering his [Zakir's] inclination to safeguard his [Zakir's] Muslim identity as a minority group amidst the predominance of Hinduism" (2022).

His growing religiosity during this period aligns with acculturation strategies observed in Muslim adolescents living among non-Muslim majorities in various cultural contexts. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews aligns with the statements provided by his family members, thus contributing to more conclusive findings (Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017; Bhat and Gazi, 31 May 2019).

Furthermore, scholarly reviews on this topic suggest that leaving the parental home and entering college often trigger qualitative changes in religious identity development as argued by Phalet, Fleischmann and Hillekens in their work *'Religious identity and acculturation of immigrant minority youth'* (2018, 35-41). Religious identity, which may have been relatively unquestioned or foreclosed during childhood and adolescence, becomes a conscious and declared aspect of one's identity when his/her living environment has been surrounded by a different facet of religion, which he/she has barely encountered previously. This transformation is akin to Zakir Musa's journey, as reflected in his photographs before joining the HM, which portrayed an adolescent more inclined toward popular youth culture and Western lifestyle than religious devotion (Phalet, Fleischmann and Hillekens, 2018, 35-41). Moreover, according to his close social network, Zakir was a habitual tobacco user and did not engage in religious practices, which detracted from his portrayal as a devout Muslim individual (Aakash, 30 May 2019). Hence, it can be argued that the underlying impetus for his transition towards the adoption of a religious identity did not stem from an intrinsic passion or profound religious understanding but rather was influenced by external events and forces that left enduring emotional traumas (Kashmir News Trust, 22 November 2017). These external factors were compounded by his continuous exposure to the perceived injustices and human rights violations in Kashmir, fuelling his growing resentment towards the Indian

administration. Consequently, he adopted religion as an intermediary means to retaliate against the government and champion the cause of Kashmir's freedom and chose to align himself with Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) (Bhat and Gazi, 31 May 2019).

In the next stage of his life, Zakir Musa rapidly emerged as a prominent figure in the landscape of terrorism within the Kashmir Valley (Mir, S., 25 May 2019). This followed the demise of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) commander Burhan Wani, who had been killed on July 8, 2016. Despite being in his early twenties, Zakir Musa's ascent through the ranks of HM was notably swift (Wani, 27 February 2018). Shortly after becoming disenchanted with the political processes aimed at resolving the Kashmir conflict, Zakir Musa released a series of videos in which he vehemently criticised Pakistan, separatist leaders, and the democratic system aligned with HM. He commenced efforts to undermine nationalist sentiments in the region (Mir, 25 May 2019) and asserted that the actions of militants in the region, whether involving firearms or stone-throwing, should not be motivated by nationalism but rather by a commitment to Islam (Mir, 25 May 2019). This marked a departure from the traditionalist religious stance embracing the nationalist narrative to a more extreme and puritanical religious-based cause. It is crucial to underscore his deliberate efforts in these videos to adopt mannerisms, attire, rhetoric, and religious terminology reminiscent of ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

In this context, Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) theory of personal networks once again emerges as a significant explanatory framework for the influence of Zakir Musa's rapid adoption of religious rhetoric, particularly following the death of his commander, Burhan Wani. Musa's brother and close associate, Burhan Wani, were already prominent militants (BBC, 24 May 2019), revered as exemplars of heroic jihadist duty and proponents of liberating their homeland from perceived occupiers (Aggarwal, 2023; Ashiq, 7 June 2019). As implied earlier, Musa maintained a close relationship with Burhan Wani, his close friend who emerged as one of the early figures within their social circle to advocate for the ideology of the caliphate and the governance under Sharia (Islamic law) (Rashid, 26 August 2015).Upon Burhan's demise, Zakir Musa purportedly

adopted a similar mindset and publicly espoused the same narrative of Caliphate and Islamic laws, signifying Wani's ideological transformation was also a catalyst to his radicalisation afterwards (Sandhu, 6 July 2017; Rashid, 26 August 2015). This underscores the profound impact of Musa's social connections, akin to Jerrold Post's (2003) exploration of early relationships and their role in fostering susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

In 2016, Zakir Bhat released a video in which he made a concerted public display of commitment to the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). Through his use of language, in his videos, he aimed to construct a shared reality that framed the militancy as a religious struggle rather than an ethnic one (Hindustan Times, 17 August 2016). He referred to three individuals as "martyrs," including their commander Burhan Wani, highlighting their willingness to sacrifice their lives, and portraying their actions as pivotal in advancing the Islamic movement. The terms "martyred" and "Islamic movement" in his discourse emphasised in group and out group categorisations based on religious identity (Hindustan Times, 17 August 2016; Aggarwal, 2023, 59).

Moreover, Zakir Musa sought to convey that he held no official leadership position within any organisation nor was he a commander. Instead, he identified himself as a "soldier of God" with the sole intention of conveying his message to the audience (Hindustan Times, 17 August 2016). It is important to note that the heavy use of language to delineate social identity categories based on religious affiliation remained a consistent theme in Zakir Musa's messaging, as Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) observed that militant leaders exhibit a remarkable proficiency in utilising language as a strategic tool for constructing a collective narrative. Through linguistic manipulation, they adeptly glorify the sacrifices made by their group members, demonise their adversaries, and imbue acts of violence with shared interpretations and significance. In the case of Zakir Musa, this linguistic manipulation was evident in his endeavour to transform the

Kashmir conflict into a religious struggle rather than merely a political one, thus shaping a shared reality for the public.

In May 2017, he asserted that nonviolent separatist leaders associated with the Hurriyat Conference had, over generations, misled the Kashmiri populace by capitalising on prevailing religious sentiments for political advantages, thereby revealing what he perceived as the duplicitous nature of separatist leaders. These leaders, ostensibly tasked with advocating for Kashmir's liberation and its incorporation into Pakistan, were purportedly betraying their followers for personal political gain. In the subsequent passage, he invoked religious authority and raised doubts regarding the faith of other Kashmiri Muslim leaders:

> "I want to pose a question to those individuals: If this is not an Islamic struggle, then why have we grown up hearing slogans that proclaim, 'The meaning of freedom is there is no God but Allah. Our relationship with Pakistan is that there is no God but Allah.' What is the significance of these slogans? If your struggle is purely political, then why have you consistently employed the majd [an Arabic term denoting the phrase, 'There is no God but Allah'] for political purposes?"
> (India Today, 12 May 2017; Ahmad, M., 15 May 2017)

Zakir Bhat's critique of the Hurriyat Conference extended to what he perceived as their hypocrisy in leveraging religious concepts to attract supporters while refraining from explicitly framing the militancy as a religious cause. He questioned this stance by stating:

> "If this is not an Islamic struggle, then why do you call the Islamic mujahideen your own? Why do you come to their funeral processions? Stop your politics."
> (India Today, 12 May 2017; Ahmad,15 May 2017)

This statement underscores his belief that the Hurriyat Conference was inconsistent in its position, using Islamic rhetoric opportunistically while avoiding a direct religious framing of the struggle (India Today, 12 May 2017). Moreover, this speech followed by

other videos disseminated later (Hindustan Times, 17 August 2016) underscores the rhetorical argument supporting one of the reasons for the shift in imagery, namely, the disillusionment with separatist politics among militants. Furthermore, this discourse exemplified "in-group and out-group categorizations" based on religious affiliations. It delineated social identity classifications grounded in religion, wherein Zakir invoked authority through religious rhetoric and cast doubt on the faith of Kashmiri political leaders (Aggarwal, 2023, 58-59). SSP ███ in an interview stated

> "This strategy serves to gain legitimacy, recognition and support of Zakir as a singular figure purportedly championing altruistic motives amidst the conflict" (2023).

And Zakir explicitly rejected the authority of the Hurriyat Conference leaders, asserting,

> "These people cannot be our leaders. If these people want to prioritise their political agenda, they shouldn't obstruct our path, the path of Sharia. Otherwise, we will confront them." (India Today, 12 May 2017)

This reflects his uncompromising stance against the Pakistan separatist's politics, whom he accused of compromising religious principles for political expediency and their personal monetary and personal gains further implying the distrust in active separatists' politics he once started fighting for (Ibid.).

He also accused the Hurriyat Conference of appeasing Hindus, stating,

> "We need to unite around the principle of monotheism. We will not align with these hypocrites, or else they may even argue tomorrow that idol worship is permissible." (Dutta, 13 May 2017).

On May 12th,2018, Zakir Musa released another video, drawing significant attention both within Kashmir and beyond (Geelani, 2019). In his speech, Musa unequivocally denounced nationalism and democracy, asserting their impermissibility within Islam. He

urged Kashmiri youth to give up nationalistic sentiments and embrace Islam's supremacy as their sole motivation, Zakir stated:

> "Nationalism and democracy are not permissible in Islam, and I want to tell my stone-pelting brothers that they should check their motives as to why they are fighting when they pick up stones (against Indian forces). I want to tell these brothers that they should not fall for nationalism, as it is observed that most of the people in Kashmir were involved in a nationalistic fight which was 'haram (not permissible)' in Islam. The sole motive should be for the supremacy of Islam" (Mir, 25 May 2019).

Moreover, Musa expressed his frustration with those who labelled Kashmir's struggle as merely "political" and strongly opposed nationalism as the basis for the movement, including Kashmiri nationalism, Pakistani nationalism, or any other form. His rhetoric included threats against leaders who characterised Kashmir's struggle as political, further exacerbating tensions within Hizb-ul Mujahideen (HM) (Devadas, 2018).

Zakir Musa's transition to radicalised ideologies, as depicted in his videos, signifies a notable shift in his motivations regarding his involvement in militancy. At the outset, Musa's enlistment in the militancy with Pakistan separatist militant organisation HM can be attributed to his disillusionment, disenchantment, and the perceived marginalization of Muslims by the Indian state. He articulates his sentiments, expressing a discontent reaction to instances where Hindu nationalists purportedly target Muslims in India (Wani, 5 June 2017). Furthermore, as previously examined, his experience of humiliation at the hands of security forces served as a pivotal turning point (Munshi, 18 September 2017). These episodes collectively fostered a sense of alienation from the Indian state. However, his disillusionment and resentment deepened significantly upon perceiving what he interpreted as the politicisation and corruption of the separatist groups he was fighting for (India Today, 12 May 2017).

This is discernible from the contemporary discourse and his declarations denouncing Pakistan as an un-Islamic nation, stating that the "Pakistan flag is not a part of the Islamic law and that whoever supports the Pakistan flag is our enemy" along with his critique of separatist leaders, coupled with threats of beheading them (Safi, 22 May 2017: Mir, 25 May 2019). This led him to lose trust and hope in separatists' systems, upon which he had previously placed his trust but ultimately found disappointment. Subsequently, his motivation shifted towards pursuing freedom for the sake of Islam ("Azadi baraye Islam"), solidifying his radicalization in religious beliefs (Mir, 25 May 2019: Wani, 5 June 2017). Furthermore, Musa sought solace from his Muslim identity, gravitating towards a more extreme and puritanical religious commitment, explicitly stating that "his blood would be shed for the cause of Islam." (Mir, 25 May 2019). Director General HK Lohiya highlights this transformation, noted that:

> "A year prior, Musa showed no religious inclination; however, following Burhan's death, his disillusionment with politics led him to embrace religion as a means of survival. Musa subsequently adopted the Al-Qaeda brand name and renounced nationalism, redirecting his efforts toward advocating for a religious cause, namely, the defence of Muslims in Kashmir." (2022).

This sentiment is supported by Fernandes (2019), who suggests that during periods of despair and hardship, religion serves as a potent source of solace and reconciliation for individuals more than any other identity.

Zakir Musa's transition from affiliating with HM, to embracing Al Qaeda's fundamentalist ideology represents a rare instance of a militant leader switching groups and engaging in a different form of militancy, as opposed to disengaging from violence altogether. According to political psychologist Daniel Koehler (2015), who has conducted case studies on militants in Germany, the motivations behind such group-switching can be explained by the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. Musa, like the individuals in the study, began to question the legitimacy of HM's alignment with the Government of Pakistan and the nonviolent methods advocated by older separatist groups that brought no benefits to Kashmir's conflict (Koehler, 2015). This suggests that he may have

experienced cognitive dissonance due to a misalignment between his beliefs and the actions of his in-group (Hizb leadership). This discomfort might have motivated him to secede and align with a group (Al Qaeda) that he perceived as more ideologically consistent. Koehler's insights into the psychological function of switching sides also provide context for Musa's shift. Musa's narrative likely involved a sense of ideological continuity, perhaps accompanied by a "moment of awakening." This allowed him to craft a narrative that portrayed his change as a natural and minimal departure from his core beliefs, enabling him to counter accusations of treason more effectively, thus avoiding the effect of cognitive dissonance (Koehler, 2015). Furthermore, the videos disseminated by Zakir Musa serve as illustrative examples of three specific skill sets employed by militants to enhance their leadership effectiveness and facilitate propaganda among the general public. These observations align with the framework outlined by Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) regarding the psychology of extremism, offering valuable insights into the nature of his radicalization process.

Firstly, Zakir Musa consistently employs religious language and specific terms throughout all of his videos designed to evoke Islamic identity, such as "Azadi baraye Islam" (Freedom is Islam) or "There is no God but Allah". The endeavour to depict the Kashmir conflict as an Islamic struggle is merely a strategic manoeuvre aimed at propaganda, garnering attention, and seeking legitimacy from the populace, as endorsed by Donell and Jowett (2012) regarding the utilization of religious slogans and specific terminology to evoke public sentiment and transmit emotions from the leader to the audience. Nevertheless, the prevailing sentiment among the majority of the population continues to advocate for a nationalist vision of an independent Kashmir rooted in Kashmiri identity. Furthermore, this assertion will be subjected to further analysis. Additionally, senior police officials and counter-radicalisation experts, while being a part of the force, SSP ▉▉▉▉ (2022) and DSP ▉▉▉ (2022) explained that:

> "To maximise effective propaganda, Musa deliberately adopts media frame
> associated with Al-Qaeda culture, including the imitation of wearing a traditional

Islamic cap, and communicates in the same language of Muslim persecution, while featuring imagery of weapons in the background" (DSP ████, 2022). Furthermore, SSP ██████ explained:

> "These deliberate choices aim to project a religiously charged and intimidating persona, draws parallels with radicalised extremist organisations like that of Al-Qaeda without knowing what these organisations are. He [Zakir] himself stated not knowing about them in his videos" (2022).

By imitating the identity of these radicalised organisations, Musa seeks to emphasise the religious underpinnings of the struggle, fostering a climate of fear, intimidation and issuing threats to people who don't abide by them (Aggarwal, 2023). Moreover, he seeks to persuade individuals to embrace his puritanical principles and ideology more effectively, especially among the youth (Aggarwal, 2023). Through this linguistic manipulation, he explains his group members' sacrifices and adversaries, and constructs shared interpretations of a religious struggle necessitating collective action and unity among Muslims against injustice suffered by Islam a language very similarly used by foreign terrorist organisations (Ahmad, 15 May 2017; Mir, 2019, 1-4; Wani, 5 June 2017).

On the other hand, despite Zakir Musa's overt alignment with a puritanical and radical interpretation of Islam, it is noteworthy that he openly admitted in one of his videos that he lacked substantial knowledge of religion, Islam, or even the radicalised organisations he purportedly emulated, ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Zakir Musa stated:

> "When we talk about organisations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, neither I know anything about ISIS, nor do I know anything about Al-Qaeda because I haven't researched about them" (Dutta, 13 May 2017).

This admission contradicts his proclaimed mission of establishing a Caliphate and his assertion of the similar rhetoric and semantics involved with extremist ideological organisations. Moreover, in an interview with a senior police official, DSP ██████ explained:

> "Zakir Musa didn't possess any theological or jurisprudential understanding of the Caliphate and its implications. We have no evidence linking him to any global

radical organisations. it was a strategy to portray himself as the most pious fighter fighting for Kashmiri Muslims". (2022).

This contradiction raises questions about the authenticity and reliability of Musa's purported dedication to the religious cause. Achieving a profound commitment to religion typically necessitates a deep understanding and passionate engagement with religious teachings, rituals, and spiritual goals. However, Musa's admission suggests a significant deficiency in this regard, despite his public proclamations of radicalization as espoused by Charles Taliaferro who states:

> "Evidentialism is the view that for a person to be justified in some belief, that person must have some awareness of the evidence for the belief. This is usually articulated as a person's belief being justified given the total evidence available to the person. In this view, the belief in question must not be undermined (or defeated) by other, evident beliefs held by the person" (Taliaferro, 28 March 2023)

Moreover, Juan Comesaña states

> "Evidentialist reliabilism entails that every justified belief is based on some evidence. But this seems to rule out the possibility of knowledge without evidence - for instance, it seems to rule out the possibility of innate knowledge. It might be that there isn't any innate knowledge, but that seems to be an empirical question, not one that can be settled by philosophical fiat" (Comesaña, 2010, 586).

Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge that, despite assuming the leadership of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Zakir Musa's practical adeptness in handling firearms and orchestrating effective combat operations was conspicuously limited (SSP ███████, 2022; DSP ██████, 2022). This contrasts starkly with the rigorously trained and proficient members of ISIS or Al-Qaeda, who demonstrated expertise in firearms and combat tactics (Pandya, 2020). This observed discrepancy highlights an indistinct link between the entities responsible for indoctrination and those being indoctrinated, further

compounded by the absence of concrete evidence substantiating a formal and substantial connection between them (Taneja, 2018).

Zakir Musa's notable deficiency in both religion and combat expertise suggests that his involvement in militancy, for the freedom of Kashmir and religious causes, may have been more a product of aspiration and desire rather than stemming from a deep-seated inner motivation and profound attachment to religion. This interpretation posits that Musa's engagement in the recent shift in adopting radical Islamic ideologies may be symbolically construed as a superficial reaction to his disillusionment and animosity towards conventional political channels. Additionally, senior police official SSP ▮▮▮▮ agreed that:

> "This sentiment is notably expressed in his speeches, aiming to garner legitimacy by presenting himself as a brand representing the Islamic identity offering a religious symbology that he thought would be consumed by the Kashmiri Muslim identity" (2023)

Moreover, in an endeavour to mitigate bias and achieve greater objectivity, the analysis of the interviews aligns with legitimacy theory, as posited by Suchman (1995, 575-587) further contends that legitimacy represents an asset accrued by an entity, be it an individual, brand, or corporation, subject to evaluation by others rather than the entity itself. Brands acquire identities and values over time by embodying specific cultural norms, thereby attaining legitimacy as an authentic and congruent entity in the minds of consumers (Bitektine and Haack, 2015, 52-61). Moreover, Reisenwitz, Iyer, and Kutler (2004), denote the alignment between the actions of an entity and the communal values, thus rendering it contingent upon societal acceptance rendering a nostalgic response. Therefore, Zakir represented the face brand of Islamic values and principles Kashmiri society should uphold rather than the political venture the conflict was based on. This imitation of the cultural norms of a true pious Islam while being away from it jurisprudentially as discussed is a way to achieve legitimacy to his narrative.

Secondly, the videos demonstrate Musa's proclivity for invoking authority. As shown clearly in his speeches, this highlights the main targets of his criticism and resentment are other separatist organisations like Hurriyat leaders and the Indian government (Mir, 25 May 2019), while conspicuously omitting ordinary Kashmiri citizens from his critical purview. This divergence from the modus operandi of radical Islamic organisations particularly IS is noteworthy, as the latter tends to indiscriminately target individuals who do not adhere to their interpretation of Islamic laws, irrespective of their civilian status, governmental positions, or law enforcement affiliations (Aggarwal, 2023). This highlights that despite his purported allegiance to Islamic doctrines and radicalised groups, his actions, particularly the selection of targets, seem incongruent with his professed allegiance, suggesting that his disenchantment with politics remains more influential than his religious convictions in driving his tendency towards radicalization.

Finally, these videos serve as a tool to publicly showcase Zakir Musa's unwavering commitment to the cause of Islam. They also reinforce the ideological cohesion of his followers by demonstrating his resolute dedication and unwavering resolve in the face of adversity. In this context, whilst being in the security domain of Kashmir, interviews conducted with senior police officials DSP ████████ (2022) and SSP ██████ (2022), alongside Army intelligence personnel Colonel ██████ (2022) and Colonel ████ (2022), agreed in regard to Zakir's use of symbolic religious linguistics to garner legitimacy and his lack in awareness regarding jurisprudence and combat. Moreover, Colonel Amar Singh asserted:

> "Zakir Musa's propagation of radicalised ideologies has predominantly manifested through non-violent means, primarily through the dissemination of videos and speeches. To date, other than accusations, there is a notable absence of police documented instances of direct involvement in violent activities or killings attributed to him also while him being as a militant with the Hizbul Mujahideen organisation. Consequently, his method of disseminating radical propaganda primarily revolves around symbolic gestures, linguistic articulation, and visual representations aimed at captivating audiences. As such, the degree of

extremism or brutality exhibited in his propagandistic endeavours remains relatively subdued." (2022).

To place the above interview analysis more objectively, Kates (2004) argues that the greater the influencer's alignment with their followers' beliefs and values, the stronger the cultural resonance with the influencer, thereby enhancing the individual's influence. Consumers are predisposed to adopt the traits, behaviours, and values endorsed by an influencer when they perceive shared beliefs, norms, and interests (Hoffner and Buchana, 2005; Reid, Kialdini, and Aiken, 2010). Identification may stem from actual or perceived similarities or the degree to which individuals believe they possess attributes akin to those of another individual (Kelman, 2006).

Subsequently, in 2017, Zakir Musa founded Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind (AGUH), a Kashmiri militant organisation, and formally declared his allegiance to AQIS (Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent) through the means of social media (Syed and Hamming, 2023). A counterinsurgency expert in Indian-administered Kashmir made this observation that "Despite its relatively modest size, Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind has managed to garner favour among young Kashmiri Islamists who had grown disenchanted with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen" (Cheong and Seng, 2019, 11-17). The AGUH has been posited as an outgrowth of Al-Qaeda due to ideological similarities shared by Zakir Musa in a video he released (Sandhu, 2017). In this regard, ███████████████████ exemplified:

> "The imitation of Al-Qaeda is evident in Musa's adoption of the name "Ansar Gazwat Ul Hind" for his organisation. This nomenclature bears a resemblance to the concept of "Ghazwat-ul-Hind," thus aligning with the ideological concept of 'Ghazwat-ul-Hind', as propagated by pro-Islamic State (ISIS) propaganda magazine Sawt al-Hind" (2022)

Additionally in another interview Army intelligence official Colonel ████████ agreed and responded to the same question regarding the adoption of nomenclature AGUH by Zakir, he stated:

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"The language embedded in this choice of name underscore his symbolic affinity with an organisation influenced by the ideologies of Islamic State while pledging allegiance to al-Qaeda signalling his failure to acknowledge the ideological clash between the two as stated by himself in his speech. This alignment with 'pick and choose' ideologies suggest a degree of ideological confusion or strategic symbolism rather than a clear adherence to one particular group's ideology" (2022).

Despite Al Qaeda's proclamation of an association with the jihadist movement in Kashmir via Zakir Musa, substantial and concrete evidence justifying the actual physical presence of Al Qaeda in Kashmir is conspicuously lacking. This deficiency in evidence prompts inquiries into the true extent of their influence in the region (Shah, 20 April 2018). Their communication appears to be primarily relegated to online platforms, and any linkage through a figure like Musa remains largely subtle and vague, with no concrete literature, videos, or recordings conclusively establishing this connection. Consequently, it can be contended that Al Qaeda's announcement might have been a strategic manoeuvre designed to instil fear and propagate threats in another region as part of its expansion strategy (Shah, 20 April 2018). This is an opportunity for such organisations as Al Qaeda to symbolically expand their territorial gain in India without a physical presence. This online approach allows for more convenient, effective, and efficient dissemination without necessitating a physical presence. Thus, it can be argued that the formation of AGUH as an extension of Al-Qaeda in Kashmir carries greater symbolic significance than a tangible one (Aggarwal, 2023; Taneja, 2019). This argument will be further explored in the next section of this chapter.

On May 22, 2019, Musa was killed by security forces in an encounter at Dadasara village in Tral (Safi and Farooq, 24 May 2019). Following his death, nearly 10,000 people attended Zakir Musa's funeral (Safi and Farooq, 24 May 2019). Many individuals chanted slogans such as "Musa! Musa!" and "Long Live Musa!" during this gathering. Some attendees also displayed Al Qaeda flags (BBC, 24 May 2019). Ustad Usama Mahmood,

the leader of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, conveyed his condolences, expressing the collective grief felt among the mujahideen in Afghanistan (Crux, 24 May 2019). Interestingly, several Kashmiri leaders, whom Zakir Musa had vehemently criticised during his lifetime, offered praise and eulogies upon his death (News Clickin, 24 May 2019). Syed Salahuddin, for instance, issued a statement commemorating Musa's sacrifice, characterising it as a dedication to Islam and the freedom of Kashmir (Zelin, 6 June 2019; Shukla, 27 May 2019). Even as recently as April 2022, it has been observed that men across Indian-administered Kashmir continue to assemble in mosques during Friday prayers, where they vocally advocate for freedom, brandish posters featuring Zakir Musa, and openly defy the Government of India (Shukla, 27 May 2019). These actions underscore the enduring influence and impact of Zakir Musa's legacy in the region (OpIndia, 22 April 2022). This phenomenon establishes a cyclical process of symbolisms begetting symbolisms, wherein individuals, influenced by his image and rhetoric, are motivated to follow in his footsteps, often without a comprehensive understanding of the profound religious values and principles he symbolically represented during his lifetime. Essentially, they are drawn to the symbolism of his figure rather than delving into the genuine essence of the religion he symbolically espoused.

Overall, it can be concluded that the radicalization process of Zakir Musa exhibits a predominantly symbolic nature rather than constituting a genuine transition towards fundamentalism. His tactics involved leveraging radical Islamist rhetoric and symbolism similar to that of Al Qaeda, adopting their identity as a means to channel feelings of anger and resentment towards the political establishment and a sense of retaliation against the Indian state. Concurrently, this strategy aimed to garner increased publicity and facilitate the rapid spread of influence by capitalising on the perceived legitimacy of these radical groups. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that he exhibited no discernible religious commitment before his affiliation with HM, and his conspicuous lack of religious expertise and combat proficiency, coupled with a focus on online platforms for ideological dissemination, suggests a relatively low degree of extremism and violence

tendency in his actions. Therefore, his transition from nationalist to radical Islamist narratives is predominantly symbolic, emblematic of underlying sentiments and aspirations aimed at preserving the unique, indigenous, self-determined, and liberated Kashmiri Muslim identity against external pressures. However, the allure surrounding his persona, image, and the ideologies he espoused continues to exert a considerable influence on impressionable youth. This influence holds the potential to steer more individuals away from political engagement and towards embracing religious ideologies.

The presence of Islamic State ideologies and organisation ISJK (Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir)

 Based on the insights indicated from the preceding analysis, it becomes apparent that the ideological shifts towards radicalization are often more symbolic than reflective of genuine transformation. However, given the appealing influence wielded by these figures and their propaganda on impressionable youth, coupled with the ongoing oppression, deprivation, and suffering prevalent in the region, it is imperative to assess the potential proliferation of adherence to these radicalised ideologies as well as question the presence of Islamic state in Kashmir. Should sentiments of disillusionment and resentment of the youth persist and intensify, it is plausible that an environment conducive to the continued development and potentially exacerbation of these radicalised ideologies may ensue, potentially leading to more extreme tendencies in the future. Thus, this section of the chapter will delve into an analysis of this perspective by introducing additional case studies of individuals who have also embraced religious causes as a means of resilience in the backdrop of conflict, emphasising the symbolic aspect of the shift and its glamorising effect on the youth. Furthermore, it will explain the concept of hybrid identity, which encompasses parallel facets of the phenomenon: one characterised by symbolic adherence and the other marked by a subtle shift towards genuine radicalization initiated by the symbolic manifestations of radicalization itself. Based on this, it prompts consideration of the potential expansion of radicalization within the region, particularly in light of the internet's facilitative role in this process.

Despite operating exclusively in the digital domain, Al-Qaraar, a media outlet in Jammu and Kashmir sympathetic to the Islamic State (ISJK), persists in disseminating its propaganda through online channels. This endeavour is aimed at capturing the mindset and sentiments of the youth amidst the turbulent environment of the region, while also meticulously disseminating its messages to encourage more youth to forsake the political path and embrace the sole pursuit of a religious cause, committing themselves to Islamic laws in the pursuit of Azadi (Siyech, 2018). This strategy proves highly effective and convenient, allowing for the broad targeting of a large pool of youth under the guise of the Islamic State identity, swiftly radicalising them through linguistic, visual, imagery, and literary means propagated by the organisation, as counter-terrorism expert from Kashmir police states and corroborated that:

> "Substantiating the existence of ISJK primarily resides in the digital realm. Al-Qaraar, a media outlet in Jammu and Kashmir sympathetic to the Islamic State, has initiated a social media campaign since late 2017, disseminating messages aimed at galvanising the local populace." (SSP ▮▮▮▮▮, 2022).

Furthermore, the above statement corroborates an article that explains the usage of online media by employing the hashtag "Wilayat Kashmir," a pro-Islamic State video in Urdu that was circulated on its Telegram channel in December 2017. The video featured a masked individual purporting to be a "Mujaheddin in Kashmir," pledging allegiance to the Islamic State (Farooqi, 26 December 2017). Notably, a recent poster emerged depicting images of two purported "Islamic State Soldiers," Fidoos and his brother Sameer, portrayed as ISJK martyrs in Kashmir (Jadoon, 2018). The more detailed writings distributed by Al-Qaraar entitled "Realities of Jihad in Kashmir and Role of Pakistani Agencies" and "Apostasy of Syed Ali Shah Geelani and others" provide deeper insights into the nature of the jihad that the Islamic State seeks to promote amongst Kashmiris followers (Taneja, 2023). The first article argues that the struggle in Kashmir has not been guided by Islam, but rather by Pakistan and its agents. The primary objective of this message is to unequivocally depict the Pakistani state as a legitimate target, thereby

portraying Pakistan and all of its separatist organisations as political and secular entities, while discrediting them as corrupt and betrayal to Islamic laws (Taneja, 2019). Despite the anti-Pakistan stance adopted by ISJK conflicting with the prevailing narrative propagated by dominant militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir, this strategic approach holds the potential to alter the mindset of a certain segment of youth and militants who harbour significant resentment and animosity towards the government (Routray, 27 September 2018). Consequently, they may become disillusioned with mainstream politics and view religion as the ultimate recourse in their perceived state of despair (Jadoon, 2018), as justified earlier in the radicalisation of Zakir Musa.

It is noteworthy that Al-Qaeda has articulated similar arguments to incite jihad against the Pakistani state previously (Rassler, 2017). During the late 2000s, the organization launched a campaign aimed at portraying Pakistan as an un-Islamic government and characterizing its engagement in Kashmir through jihad and proxies as corrupt (Rassler, 2009, 1-4). However, the limited efficacy of Al-Qaeda's campaign underscores the complexities inherent in influencing the trajectory of the Kashmir jihad against Pakistan and its proxies (Jadoon, 2018; Rassler, 2009, 1-4). Conversely, the messaging of ISJK may hold greater appeal to its target demographic owing to its portrayal as a newer, more youthful, and potentially more assertive entity, coupled with its adeptness in leveraging online platforms for disseminating its propaganda, thereby exerting a more pronounced influence on the youth (Jadoon, 2018; Katoch, 26 June 2018). Therefore, as previously analysed, the proliferation of Internet access and the availability of diverse ideological narratives enable individuals to expose to radical literature and pledge allegiance to various groups on online space without necessarily being actively involved with them or genuinely understanding their operation principles, thus escalating the circulation of radicalised ideologies more rapidly and effectively. This tactic is utilised as a defence mechanism that allows individuals to protect their identity, garner attention and inspire intimidation in the face of deprivation and hardship.

This indicates that although the majority of militants' allegiance pledging to radical groups remains symbolic and confined to the virtual realm, lacking tangible ties to the parent organisation, the resulting impact has the potential to engender a virtual cycle of radicalization in the environment that is conducive to such processes (Shah, 2020; Devadas, 2018). For instance, the pervasive influence of Zakir Musa among Kashmiri youth, as evidenced by his elevation to a heroic symbol of militancy, underscores his perceived role in safeguarding the identity of Muslim Kashmiris and advocating for the region's independence (Vishwanathan, 1 August 2017; Geelani, 2019). This sentiment is exemplified by the widespread reverence accorded to him upon his demise, indicating the amplifying effect of the symbolic meaning he embraced among the youth (Geelani, 2019). This cycle manifests as a chain reaction of circulating symbols, wherein instances of self-radicalization perpetuate further instances of self-radicalization due to exposure to radical literature and figures without necessarily committing to a genuine religious cause, signifying potential occurrence of a minor radicalisation "vacuum" in the region (Devadas, 2019)

As discussed previously, the Islamic State's infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir commenced in 2017, marked by reported instances of the group flags being displayed during demonstrations and rallies within the region. The symbolic use of flags bearing extremist slogans, demonstrating allegiance to the radical entity, is justified to reinforce symbols connoting hostility, aggression, and dissatisfaction towards the Indian state (Devadas, 2019; Jadoon, 2018). This mode of expressing discontent has become increasingly pronounced, as evidenced by the funeral of Mugees Ahmed Mir, the assailant killed during the attack in Srinagar on November 17, 2017, which resulted in the death of an Indian policeman (Jameel, 22 November 2017).

Notably, Mir was found wearing an Islamic State T-shirt, suggesting potential influence from the group's online propaganda (Lateef, 20 November 2017). Despite doubts raised about his affiliation with radical groups, this incident presents a dual argument. Firstly, his body was wrapped in an ISIS flag, symbolically aligning with radical ideologies.

However, it is evident that the radical group does not have a tangible presence in the region; rather, it relies solely on online propaganda to create the illusion of existence and activity in the area (Jameel, 22 November 2017). This suggests that Mir may have been exposed to this online radical propaganda circulated by radical groups or radicalised individuals, thus becoming more pious during this process. Secondly, it is pertinent to note that during Mir's funeral, there was a conspicuous absence of pro-Pakistani slogans but a prevalence of fervent "pro-freedom slogans" (Kashmir Reader, 18 November 2017), indicative of a sentiment aligned with Kashmiri identity while using Islamic identity at the same time to present resentment. However, upon observing the youth who attended the funeral, as evidenced by available imagery (see Figure 14), they appear to be subject to manipulation and drawn into a radicalised environment. These individuals seek solace and refuge in extremist ideologies, assimilating the symbols presented by influential figures and expressing support for radical entities, regardless of their perception of the group's tangible presence in Kashmir (Devadas, 2019; Pandya, 2020). This scenario serves as a typical example illustrating the symbolic yet potentially threatening influence of radical figures and ideologies in the region.

FIGURE 14: Mugees Mir's funeral at Parimpora attracted huge mourners on Saturday. KL Image: Bilal Bahadur (Kashmir Life, 18 November 2017)

Mohammed Sirajuddin, a resident of Jaipur, Rajasthan, serves as another illustrative example of self-radicalization facilitated through online materials disseminated by

extremist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda (National Investigations Agency, 2016). Mr. Sirajuddin faced legal charges for actively promoting ISIS, inciting others to join the Islamic State, and disseminating pro-ISIS propaganda through various online channels (National Investigations Agency, 2016). He amassed a collection of ISIS propaganda materials, including issues of Dabiq, and maintained a significant online presence, which he used to attract potential recruits. Furthermore, he established an online discussion group that attracted participants from countries as diverse as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Indonesia, and even Argentina (National Investigations Agency, 2016). Sirajuddin's online activities included marking Indian currency notes with the message "ISIS Welcome in Kashmir" and sharing these images on social media platforms (Taneja, 2023). Notably, his affinity for TIME magazine's annual 'Person of the Year' listing led him to advocate for hacking the magazine's website to declare Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the former leader of ISIS, as the winner (Taneja, 2018). His attraction to ISIS ideology was not primarily motivated by Kashmir; rather, it was rooted in his broader perception of Islam's global role and position.

In an interview conducted with SSP ████████, he stated:

> "It was revealed that individuals like Sirajuddin lacked theological understanding of ideologies such as the Islamic State, Salafism, or Wahhabism. Instead, their actions were driven by a sense of frustration and anger towards the Indian state, stemming from perceived grievances rather than a genuine commitment to any particular extremist ideology." (2022).

This perspective aligns with Oliver Roy's analysis (13 April 2017), which suggests that many foreign fighters associated with ISIS exhibit limited religious motivations. Roy argues that these individuals are driven to terrorism by a variety of socio-psychological factors, including frustration, deprivation, alienation, stigmatisation, and feelings of revenge and discrimination, all of which are compounded by difficulties in integrating into the host society and a sense of identity crisis. Their actions do not demonstrate a deep understanding of theological concepts associated with Islamic State ideologies, nor do they involve the perpetration of brutalities typically associated with such groups (Pandya, 2020, 4-5). Instead, their actions appear to symbolically represent a means of

venting anger and frustration only through the virtual sphere, rather than genuine adherence to extremist ideologies (Pandya, 2020, 4-5).

Another paradigmatic case study of an individual undergoing radicalization and extremism is exemplified by Eisa Fazli. Despite presenting a transformation that appears symbolic, Fazli's case reveals a potential for greater threat and danger, reflecting his deep-rooted religious background and commitment during childhood and education, which may have contributed to a more extremist course of action.

Hailing from South Kashmir, Eisa was an engineering student who discontinued his studies in August 2017. While his family had affiliations with the theological foundation of political Islam of Jamaat-e-Islami, Eisa embraced the puritan tenets of Salafism and Wahhabi Islam and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) before meeting his demise in an extrajudicial police encounter (Outlook, 12 March 2018; Geelani, 2019). Fazli's transformation began during his university years after a close associate, also an engineering student, was killed during the 2016 protests. Expressing agitation, Eisa conveyed to his father a sentiment of prioritising the acquisition of knowledge to aid the Kashmiri people (Slater, 28 March 2019). In an interview with Eisa's father, Geelani documented the young man's initial characterization by religious devotion and piety, which later underwent radicalization influenced by Wahhabi/Salafi literature. Eisa's father lamented the influence of Wahhabi preachers, whom he accused of misleading, inspiring, and encouraging his son (The Quint, 7 November 2018). Additionally, a classmate of Eisa recalled how he engaged in arguments about religion with classmates and teachers during school days, displaying fervent reactions when criticised for his affiliation with what is now known as ISIS. This period coincided with school authorities' refusal to accommodate religious practices, further fuelling Eisa's anger and protests (The Quint, 7 November 2018). These pieces of evidence suggest that Eisa had already exhibited religious commitment before the incident involving his friend occurred. However, it was only after this event that he underwent a true process of radicalization and embraced the Wahhabi/Salafi school of thought (Financial Express, 16

March 2018). This indicates that the incident involving his friend served as a significant catalyst for his exposure to Salafist literature, eliciting feelings of resentment, anger, deprivation, and injustice upon encountering his friend's death. Consequently, the primary driver behind his radicalization appears to be his disillusionment towards the state rather than solely his religious beliefs, although religion did contribute to shaping his mindset prior to the event. In essence, Eisa's resentment towards the government appeared to outweigh his religious knowledge and commitment, suggesting a symbolic aspect in his ideological shift towards Wahhabism (Pandya, 2020).

In this regard, in an interview, Police officers observed that:

> "Individuals like Eisa may have adopted the ideology of the Islamic State, their numbers are minimal, serving more as symbols than active participants. Their adoption of radical ideologies is not driven by a desire to kill non-Muslims but rather as a means to protect the Muslim identity of Kashmiris from the perceived threats posed by Hindu India". (SSP ███, 2023).

Moreover, another officer noted:

> "The emotional and social trigger compels individuals like Eisa Fazli to join militant groups as a rational choice, to publicise their cause and gain media attention, even if that meant adopting the name of the Islamic State for effect. Deep down these individuals are filled with resentment and have lost someone dear to which they account the state responsible. This is a revenge. However, Eisa was one of the very few individuals who knew his religion" (DSP █████, 2022).

Moreover, this interview aligns with the analysis provided by Baba who attributes the increasing attraction towards militancy (2014). Moreover, he highlights the widespread use of cordon and search operations and the suppression of dissent as factors pushing Kashmiri youth towards militancy. He argues that the shrinking political space in Kashmir leaves youth feeling marginalised and humiliated, leading them to seek alternative means of resistance (Baba, 2014, 66-80). Additionally, the interview findings resonate with rational choice theory, as articulated by Daniela Pisoiu (2011), Lewis Rambo's

conversion theory (1999) and Maskaliūnaitė's psychological approach (2015). Daniela Pisiou (2011) suggests that individuals opt for careers in terrorism after weighing the risks and rewards, including factors like recognition and heroism. Furthermore, Rambo (1999) adds to this perspective offers insights into how radicalization occurs through ideological shifts, as individuals adopt extremist religious ideologies to address perceived injustices. In the case of Eisa, his transition from Jamaat to Salafism reflects a symbolic drift towards an ideology he adopted as a resistance to the state's oppression rather than his pre-existing belief in religion. Additionally, Maskaliūnaitė's (2015) underscores the role of personal crisis and psychological factors, such as deprivation and identification with victims of perceived injustice, in driving individuals towards terrorism. Eisa's experience of personal loss during the 2016 protests serves as a potential driver for his adoption of extremist ideologies, highlighting the complex interplay of emotional, social, and cognitive factors in his radicalization.

Furthermore, a critical examination of the attack perpetrated by Eisa reveals a deliberate targeting of a police officer in Srinagar in 2018, indicating his deep-seated animosity towards the state apparatus. It can be seen that his selection of this target aligns with his proclaimed allegiance to the Islamic State, yet it diverges from the puritanical theology of Salafism by focusing on state agents rather than innocent non-Muslim civilians. This strategic decision suggests a conflict within his ideological alignment between his espoused Salafist ideologies and his chosen course of action, particularly in terms of his targets for violence. This divergence prompts an examination of the concept of hybrid identity, as exemplified by the mindset of Eisa Fazli. In this light, it is significant to observe his transition from one group to another, suggesting a distinct stance regarding their objectives amidst a complex and diffuse identity structure. The Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2014, 338-342) assumes that people who are uncertain about themselves and their identity are motivated to identify with such groups that provide clearly defined identity, beliefs, and behavioural prescriptions.

Furthermore, this underscores the multifaceted nature of individual motivations, where individuals like Eisa, upon encountering political disillusionment, corruption, and the propagation of Pakistan-based rhetoric to advance state agendas, find solace and purpose in ultimately advocating for religious causes that further provide a defined identity. Hence, he adopted the rhetoric of the Islamic State not necessarily due to conviction in the organisation's operational methods, but rather as a means to align with a broader religious ideology as Routray (27 September 2018) explains that in the context of the ISJK, 'outfit hopping' or 'recycled militants' is rather common. The ISJK has never been the outfit of first choice, for any of its cadres. They have hopped from one outfit to the other, before finally deciding to opt for the ISJK. Exact reasons are probably rooted in a combination of factors such as search for a definite world view, religious background, influence of Wahhabi preachers, and frustration with the lack of success that either the Pakistan sponsored terrorism or internal dissent. In this light, Eisa's embrace of a fundamentalist Salafist identity associated with his pre-existing religious commitment might steer him towards a trajectory of genuine radicalization, marked by a propensity for danger and a proclivity towards extremism. However, his specific choice of target, a police officer and not an innocent citizen, reflects a motivation grounded more in retaliation against the government than in a sincere belief in Salafism. This illustrates the multifaceted nature of his adoption of Salafism, which, while symbolic, manifests in an approach that can exhibit potential genuine radicalised and violent tendencies.

In 2018, ISIS asserted responsibility for the attacks targeting Eisa Fazli 2018 and the fatal shooting of police officer Farooq Ahmed in 2017, as reported by Jadoon (2018). The IS-affiliated Al Amaq News Agency released a statement confirming their involvement, citing the assassination of police personnel near Srinagar in Kashmir, accompanied by an ominous declaration indicating the commencement of a conflict (Jameel, 4 March 2018). However, it is imperative to exercise caution in accepting these claims, given ISIS's historical tendency to falsely attribute attacks to itself, as highlighted by Qui (2 October 2017). Indian security agencies have consistently contended that ISIS maintains an

insignificant presence in the region, primarily attributable to a paucity of active members, as documented by Jameel (22 November 2017). Moreover, Police General Vaid underscored in an article that despite claims of ISIS's involvement in the attacks, its tangible presence in the region remains minimal. Vaid suggests that these incidents may instead be the actions of isolated individuals or small groups influenced by ISIS's ideology rather than orchestrated by the organisation directly (Wani, 27 February 2018). Consequently, IS's influence in Kashmir remains predominantly confined to the online sphere, where recruitment efforts have encountered both opportunities and challenges.

Furthermore, in interview with security experts DSP ▮▮▮▮▮ (2022), DSP ▮▮▮ (2022), SSP ▮▮▮ (2023) and SSP ▮▮▮▮ (2022) and an article by Taneja (2018) all corroborate and agree that there is no physical evidence which suggests the involvement of Islamic state organisations in perpetrating an attack in Kashmir in real. moreover, SSP Hussain stated:

> "There is a difference between conducting a terrorist act in the name of ISIS and acting as an agent of ISIS. In cases such as that of Eisa Fazli the individual himself brought his actions to the attention of ISIS online channels and actively sought recognition from the organisation. The organisation's subsequent acknowledgement of the act is just part of a broader tactic employed by ISIS to sustain its global presence and counter prevailing narratives of its alleged defeat. however, the number of militants who claimed their allegiance were very few and now they are not in any picture." (2022).

Figure 15: Amaq new agency in Arabic language on Telegram claimed an attack on a police officer in Anantnag, Kashmir (Taneja, 2018).

TRANSLATION: [Amaq Agency: An Indian Army soldier was killed and 7 wounded in clashes with the Islamic state fighters in the area of Anantnag district in Kashmir]

In this regard, both the parent organisations and the militants symbolically adopting its rhetoric, can derive individual benefits without establishing direct physical ties, thus creating a mechanism and dynamic that operate interchangeably. For an organisation like ISIS, it serves as a means of garnering publicity and maintaining visibility in the public sphere, thereby implying its continued existence. Conversely, for individuals like Eisa Fazli, it serves as a method of legitimising their cause as a fight for Islam, utilising their brand name to instil fear and apprehension within the Indian state apparatus. A pertinent exemplification of this modus operandi is evident in the claim proffered by Amaq, the official media outlet of the ISIS, regarding the gun violence incident in Las Vegas in the preceding year (Dearden, 3 October 2017). Despite subsequent investigations uncovering no substantial link between the perpetrator and the organisation (Smith, 3 October 2017; Levine, 2 October 2017), Amaq disseminated images depicting a bloodied Mandalay Bay hotel in connection with the incident. As Taneja (2018) explains in the case of Eisa Fazli, that while his attack was indeed self-proclaimed, it was opportunistically seized upon to foment disruption in a region where the organisation had hitherto lacked substantial influence, with a focus on the psychological impact it could engender. This is supported by Slovic (1987, 280-285)'s argument, which articulates that terrorist attacks, and the threat of a terrorism event,

may also result in more severe psychological consequences than other types of traumatic events due to a perceived lack of control. Perceptions of risk are influenced by the degree to which individuals feel they have knowledge of and control over an outside event and how familiar and catastrophic the event will be. In this context, the internet serves as a conduit for the rapid dissemination of information, enabling the amplification of psychological fear and perceived threat generated by these organisations through the mere assertion of responsibility for attacks across diverse geographical regions, regardless of the veracity of such claims. This phenomenon underscores the symbolic presence of these radical organisations in Kashmir, highlighting the challenge of accurately measuring and managing their influence in the region.

In return, underscored by Ehsan (22 June 2018), the embracement of extreme Islamist ideologies serves as a common nexus between IS-affiliated organisations claiming responsibility for attacks and individuals such as Eisa Fazli, Dawood, Majid, and Adil, who operate as influential agents on behalf of these organisations. This sentiment finds resonance in the statement made by the Director General of Police for Jammu and Kashmir, SP Vaid to the media:

> "The militants used to post on a website of the IS information about any attack they carried out on J&K police or the Central Reserve Police Force in J&K, the IS has no infrastructure in Kashmir and these were all IS inspired individuals acting as freelance jihadis and to induce fear by using IS name and symbology" (Ehsan, 22 June 2018).

This once again underscores the efficacy of individuals' strategies in amplifying the dissemination of radicalised ideologies and symbols through the simple act of pledging allegiance to various radical groups, even without direct involvement in their activities or genuine belief in their principles.

Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to highlight another case study involving a 19-year-old student, Ahtisham Bilal Sofi, who sustained injuries during an 'ethnic clash' at his

university near Delhi (Quint, 3 December 2018). Subsequently, he went missing after departing from the campus to his home in Kashmir (Zargar, 4 November 2018). After a two-week absence, he reappeared online, publicly aligning himself with a militant group. In an audio message, he proclaimed,

> "By the grace of Allah, I have joined the ranks of Jundul Khilafah Kashmir and pledged my allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Quraishi" (Quint, 7 November 2018).

Similar to the case of Eisa Fazli, this incident represents another instance where an individual pledges allegiance to an Islamic state ideology without any concrete evidence of physical connection with ISIS. Director General of Police Dilbag Singh remarked in his statement to the media

> "They always float a new name whenever they have a new recruit. It's like a one-man army. It does not make an outfit" (Zargar, 4 November 2018).

Figure 16: (Zargar, 4 November 2018)

Bilal Sofi also underwent a similar radicalisation process as Eisa Fazli and Mohammed Sirajuddin. The sense of deprivation, marginalisation, and humiliation, coupled with his identification as a Kashmiri minority Muslim within a predominantly Hindu nation, constituted a profound catalyst for his radicalization (Abbas and Sidique, 2012, 119-126). The attack he experienced at the university further exacerbated his feelings of victimisation and served as a trigger for his adoption of extremist ideologies. Moreover,

the cognitive benefits associated with group membership, as elucidated by rational choice theory by Pisoiu (2011), Rambo's conversion theory (1999), and Maskaliūnaitė's socio-psychological approach (2015), played a significant role. Bilal Sofi's university ordeal stands as a potential catalyst for his embrace of extremist ideologies, underscoring the intricate interplay of emotional, social, and cognitive factors in the process of radicalization as guided by Rambo (1999). On this note, Baier involves the questioning of the previous stable identity due to special events, whereupon a phase of searching for a new identity sets in (2018, 9). Similarly, Transformative Learning Theory assumes that personal crises are the starting point of extremist radicalization. If these crises cannot be overcome with the existing resources (so-called meaning schemes), new patterns are sought that create identity. This is accompanied by an openness for extremist interpretations and offers (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010, 33-51).

Similar to Zakir Musa and Eisa Fazli, Bilal Sofi exemplifies both facets of the radicalization tendency in Kashmir. On one hand, his radicalization appears to be primarily symbolic, driven not by genuine religious convictions but rather by a sense of disillusionment. Consequently, his adoption of radical rhetoric lacks a firm ideological foundation and is often characterised by inconsistency and lack of coherent structure, diverging significantly from the original frameworks of radical ideologies. On the other hand, the fact that those individuals embrace religious extremism and pledge allegiance to radical groups without actually associating with them or believing in their principles underscores the powerful influence of such ideologies as well as the pervasive circulation of symbolic Islamist rhetoric within the population (Lone and Bhat, 2018). This continued circulation of radical ideologies and symbols creates an environment conducive to recruitment, thereby perpetuating a cycle of radicalization and potentially fostering a certain threat of further extremism (Devadas, 2019). In this sense, counter radicalisation officers, SSP ████ (2023), SSP ████ (2023) and SSP ██████ (2022) agree that this collective sentiment, portraying the struggle as not merely political but inherently Islamic, motivated individuals like Eisa Fazli and Bilal Sofi to eschew political rhetoric in favour of religious fervour. Furthermore, these individuals fervently align

themselves with the Islamic State, whether under the banner of Islamic State Hind or the Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir, seeking to sow fear and hysteria through language and tactics and further publicise, legitimise, and gain attention mimicking radicalization tendencies. Moreover, senior police officer noted:

> "It is crucial to emphasise that individuals like Bilal Sofi and Eisa Fazli operate as lone actors, lacking formal organisational backing, and drawing inspiration from figures like Anwar Al-Awlaki. They remain a minority, adhering to a distinct operational methodology that targets security personnel rather than non-Muslim civilians, distinguishing them from traditional radicalised organisations, which often targeted individuals regardless of their religious affiliation" (SSP ███████, 2022).

Consequently, it is noteworthy that radicalised ideologies persist in the region and have the potential to grow among the populace, as they continue to exert a powerful allure, particularly on impressionable youth. The heroism and glamorization effect, coupled with their symbolic significance, retain a significant influence, facilitated by the pervasive reach of the Internet and media platforms. Al Jazeera (12 May 2019) underscores this notion, citing insights from a senior police official who observed that while overt militancy of the ISJK may have waned in Kashmir, vestiges of ideological alignment persist to some degree. This suggests that the dissemination of symbolic messaging associated with radical ideologies, albeit detached from the original organisational framework, still poses a risk of inducing further instances of self-radicalization, exemplified by cases such as Eisa Fazli, Ahtisham Bilal Sofi, or Zakir Musa. This phenomenon exacerbates tensions in the region, particularly amid escalating threats to Kashmiri identity and the perpetuation of a vulnerable environment conducive to radicalization (Rambo, 1999, 264-271) as Taarnby (2005) and Berry (2007) have posited marginalisation, alienation, and discrimination as potential antecedents to radicalization. Moreover, Hogg (2014, 338-342) and Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson (2010, 1061-1066) suggests that marginalised individuals experience a personal sense of

insignificance and may be drawn to fundamentalist groups that provide a distinct sense of belonging and purpose, as well as the chance to regain a sense of self-esteem.

Jammu & Kashmir police chief S.P. Vaid noted the paucity of evidence regarding the existence of the purported organisation 'ISJK' in the valley in a statement made to the media, he states: "There is no ISIS presence in the State" (Wani, 27 February 2018). Vaid attributed a specific assault, perpetrated by an individual identified as Eisa Fazli, to the label 'ISJK', indicative of its unilateral nature and lack of recognition within any established organisational hierarchy. Despite such assertions, the propaganda apparatus remains poised to exploit the situation, potentially amplifying tensions and further destabilising an already volatile region. Then, police chief Vaid further states:

> "The militants used to post on a website of the IS information about any attack they carried out on J&K police or the Central Reserve Police Force in J&K. The IS has no infrastructure in Kashmir. This group was headed by Dawood Sofi. In our records they were the only four (remaining IS-inspired) militants present in Kashmir" (cited in Ehsan, 22 June 2018).

The resistance of Kashmiri citizens against the militants' adoption of fundamentalist Islam

Despite the potential emergence of an ideological vacuum conducive to the attraction of further radicalised individuals, driven by the dissemination of symbolic propaganda, it is essential to recognize that the majority of the Kashmiri population espouses differing viewpoints and perspectives concerning this phenomenon as (Shivamurthy, 2022, 265-279). Offering insight from the security perspective, a senior police officer in J&K police's Nowhatta region near Jamia Masjid where majority of ISIS flagging incident took place agrees and emphasise:

> "The ideology of the Islamic State (IS) demonstrated by these radicalised militants lacks substantial following in the Kashmir Valley. While a small fraction of armed Kashmiri youths claim affiliation with the Islamic State of Jammu & Kashmir (ISJK)

and Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGUH), this phenomenon does not mean widespread support for the IS ideology in Kashmir. ISIS remains limitation of weaponry, support structures, or infrastructural foundations in the region. Consequently, armed resistance against Delhi's governance in Kashmir lacks the conviction and the understanding of what these organisations desire and jurisprudence they inherit to and most importantly people are ware this is a political dispute for freedom and this narrative of IS is very counterproductive for them [Kashmir's] and they know that and we [Kashmiri's] are far away from this fundamental jurisprudence, we belong to Sufism" (DSP ████████, 2022).

Moreover, the above interview aligns with the findings of Siyech (2018) further providing more credibility. Concerning the ascendancy of Zakir Musa's 2017 recording advocating for radical Islamic ideologies and the establishment of a Caliphate as mentioned in earlier parts of this chapter, it is noteworthy that while it found resonance among a considerable faction of adolescent males, older members of the Kashmiri populace did not uniformly espouse these sentiments representing the composite Kashmir identity of Kashmiriyat (Geelani, 2019; Alia el Didi, 2015; Ahmad and Saklani, 2016, 74-77). While a notable portion of Kashmiri students and teenagers aligned with Musa's perspectives, this alignment was not ubiquitous among the youth in their mid to late twenties (Devadas, 2018; Alia el Didi, 2015). Indeed, certain individuals in their mid to late twenties displayed profound discomfort with Musa's discourse, harbouring apprehensions about its potential future ramifications (Taneja, 2019; Alia el Didi, 2015). Musa's audio recording elicited significant intrigue due to its audacious nature, although its foundational ideological stance was not entirely unprecedented (Taneja, 2019). The sway it exerted over the younger generation epitomised the ascendancy of radical ideologies, concurrently engendering concerns among certain elder individuals about the trajectory that lay ahead for Kashmir (Geelani, 2019).

When a suspected attack resulted in the killing of eight Amarnath pilgrims in south Kashmir on July 10, 2017, it triggered widespread outrage in the region (Safi, 10 July

2017). This incident drew a strong protest in Srinagar from Kashmiri society, to unequivocally condemn the attack on Hindu pilgrims (The Hindu, 11 July 2017). Moreover, a Member of Parliament from Kashmir and ex-Chief Minister stated: "It's an attack on the soul and spirit of Kashmir. Islam teaches us to protect and safeguard the lives of our guests. The attack is an assault on our religion and our identity as Kashmiris" (The Hindu, 11 July 2017). Moreover, a student activist in a protest stated: "This attack is against the ethos of Kashmir" (Masood and Wani, 12 July 2017). Their collective stance demanded an impartial investigation to identify the perpetrators behind the assault, highlighting that attacks on civilians, unarmed police personnel, tourists, and pilgrims regardless of their religions were not socially endorsed actions in Kashmir (The Hindu, 11 July 2017).

Figure 17: (The Hindu, 11 July 2017)

Figure 18: (Masood and Wani, 12 July 2017)

Figure 19: (Tribune, 15 July 2017) TRANSLATION: [CONDEMN TERRORISM, CONDEMN PAKISTAN, CONDEMN TERRORISM]

Additionally, the period spanning from 2008 to 2010 witnessed a notable surge in the participation of Kashmiri individuals who emerged from their residences to engage in nonviolent protests, akin to the Arab Spring demonstrations (Devadas, 2019). This shift in the tactics employed in the Kashmir conflict implies a recourse to the democratic expression of grievances. The aforementioned instances collectively underscore the reality that a significant segment of Kashmir's indigenous society has consistently eschewed puritanical approaches, instead favouring strategies that align with democratic principles and processes (Ahmad and Saklani, 2016, 73-78). Moreover, in limited studies conducted by Pandya, he notes:

> "Kashmiris did not show much enthusiasm for fundamentalist terror movements like the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Perhaps, Kashmir's Sufi traditions, cultural factors, and functional democracy nourished by the Indian state prevented them from joining the bandwagon of global Islamism" (2021, 394).

The resistance among the majority of the Kashmiri population to adopt violent tendencies and embrace radical propaganda can be elucidated by the intrinsic dichotomy between two divergent belief systems that have coexisted within the historical context of the Kashmir valley (Taneja, 2019). These two belief systems represent contradictory sets of values and have maintained an interwoven existence

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over time. The first of these belief systems revolves around the tenets of Sufism, a mystical and introspective branch of Islam characterised by its emphasis on renunciation of worldly pursuits, soul purification, and contemplation of the divine nature, which has been deeply entrenched in Kashmiri traditions and culture (Ahmad and Saklani, 2016, 75-77). The second belief system, in contrast, entails the adherence to extreme and orthodox Islamic principles (Pandya, 2019).

As aforementioned in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding the overlapping identities and competing nationalism, the juxtaposition of the two contrasting belief systems, Kashmiri ethnic nationalism, and religious nationalism, lies at the heart of the Kashmiri perspective (Akbar, 2002). Owing to the justified assertion that Kashmir's ethnic nationalism has consistently held precedence over its religious nationalist identity across historical epochs, the majority of Kashmiris perceive the jihadist rhetoric of an Islamic state system based on Islamic laws as incongruous with their long-standing values and goals (Geelani, 2019). Despite their disillusionment with certain leaders of Kashmiri nationalist movements and the Indian government, the majority of Kashmiris are inclined to view the rigid Wahhabi ideology espoused by these radical groups as futile and contrary to their cultural and religious heritage, however minute and minuscule as a way to empower their Islamic identity (Siyech, 2018). This sentiment of "azadi" is deep-rooted in the essence of "Kashmiriyat," a core value that embraces the region's distinct and indigenous culture, emphasising peace and secularism (Jha, 2019).

Furthermore, the discourse in Kashmir continues to be steeped in nationalism, rooted in the Kashmiri identity, and often views the adoption of radical Islamist ideologies as counterproductive to its nationalist aspirations, particularly in light of international geopolitical dynamics such as the United Nations resolution of 1948 (Jadoon, 2018). This underscores the limited sway of radical ideologies, which tend to wield symbolic rhetoric and imagery to morally contest the oppression imposed by the Indian state. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that Kashmir has historically espoused a nationalist vision, advocating for political autonomy, freedom, and the right to self-determination (Haksar,

2015; Bose, 2021; Akbar, 2002). Moreover, according to a poll conducted by Reuters "87 pct in Kashmir Valley want independence" (Reuters, 13 August 2007) while another poll conducted by Chatham house stated "44 percent of Pakistani Kashmiris in Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) wish to see full independence. The vast majority of others want to see some type of independence, either more powers within their state or combined with India-controlled Kashmir" (Ahmed, 21 September 2010) Hence, the struggle in Kashmir has been primarily political, infused with a nationalist essence. Moreover, Pakistan's sponsorship of armed militancy in Kashmir since 1989, albeit imbued with religious overtones aiming to align Kashmir with Pakistan, remains rooted in nationalist sentiments (Siyech, 2018). This stance holds considerable sway and is unlikely to yield ground to the rhetoric of radical Islamist ideologies which further implies an absence of resources and an appropriate battlefront of radical Islamist organisations. Such a shift would be deemed counterproductive for Pakistan, as it does not support the idea of an independent Kashmir and seeks to integrate the region into its territory. Therefore, the nationalist fervour in Kashmir is expected to continue overshadowing the narrative of radical Islamist ideologies (Siyech, 2018).

The concept of Azadi

 To comprehensively grasp the lacklustre and unsupportive reaction of a certain segment of the Kashmiri youth towards the change in rhetoric towards extremist Islamic values, a detailed analysis of the sentiment of "Azadi" (Freedom), which constitutes the core of the conceptualization of a Muslim Kashmir, becomes imperative (Ali, Bhatt, Chatterji, Khan, Mishra, and Roy, 2011). The notion of "Azadi" holds a profound nationalist significance for every inhabitant of Kashmir (Haksar, 2015). Muqbool Butt, the founder of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), elucidates this sentiment as not merely liberation from foreign occupation but also the eradication of hunger, poverty, ignorance, disease, and socio-economic deprivation from the land (Haksar, 2015). The indigenous identity of the Kashmiri populace emerges from the historical convergence of two significant civilizations, Hindu, and Islam (Zutshi, 2018). This historical juncture

witnessed a succession of dynasties and rulers implementing varying degrees of oppressive policies towards the Kashmiri Pandits, resulting in a proliferation of diverse narratives and perspectives concerning religious identities within the region (Snedden, 2015). This dynamic has contributed to the emergence of a unique identity characterised by a blend of inclusivity and exclusivity, liberalism, and traditionalism, which finds expression in the concept of "Kashmiriyat" (Hangloo, 2021) as analysed in detail in Chapter 1. This concept underscores the coalescence of Hindu and Islamic elements in a harmonious manner, reflecting the Kashmiri people's aspirations for peaceful coexistence and ingraining in Kashmiri people's mindset and cultural fabric (Geelani, 2019).

It's important to note that since the inception of independent India in 1947, a significant portion of Kashmiris have embraced the philosophical underpinning of "Azadi", thus dissociating themselves from integration into the Indian Union (Snedden, 2015). According to insights shared by an academic from Kashmir University, ██████████ notes:

> "The sentiment of Azadi is deeply embedded in the mindset of ordinary Kashmiris, who resist the notion of India's jurisdiction and their domination" (2022).

To corroborate the aforementioned interview Geelani (2019) explains that the emergence of a revivalist Hindu movement manifested through the combination of key events such as the killing of Burhan Wani in July 2016, the formation of the PDP-BJP alliance in March 2021 and the proposals including the establishment of colonies for soldiers and migrant Pandits and the resurgence of Hindu practices have all acted as triggers that galvanised the populace at various junctures, propelling them to voice their collective political demand (Devadas, 2019).

In this context, it is pertinent to acknowledge the multifaceted interpretation of the concept of "Azadi," which is intertwined with indigenous Kashmiriyat and Sufism ideologies, and its varying degrees of extremism contingent upon subjective

perspectives (Bose, 2021). In other words, the utilisation of Azadi can serve as a tool to pursue diverse objectives depending on the ideological lens through which it is perceived. Within the framework of Islamic revivalism, the concept of Azadi is often exploited to its extremist and fundamentalist extent as a means to assert and safeguard Kashmiri Muslim identity against external threats and perceived domination, while also addressing issues of inequality deprivation and oppression (Geelani, 2019). As implied in Chapter 3, In this scenario, militants and youth perceive the tolerant and harmonious tenets of Sufism as inadequate in addressing the challenges posed by the turbulent socio-political milieu of Kashmir. Consequently, an orthodox and radicalised utilisation of Azadi aligns more closely with their agenda, serving as a mechanism to articulate their frustration, resentment, and anger towards the perceived oppressors (Geelani, 2019). On the other hand, this extremist interpretation of Azadi may engender counterproductive repercussions among another significant segment of the Kashmiri populace (Geelani, 2019), who espouse a more moderate and inclusive interpretation of Azadi aligned with the tenets of Sufi Islam, characterised by its peaceful and harmonious ethos (Puri, 2008). In such a scenario, the concept of Azadi serves as a primary impetus driving the rejection and resistance among Kashmiri Muslims against the propagation of fundamentalist and orthodox Islamic ideologies imposed by certain militant factions in the region (Geelani, 2019). Furthermore, the dominated and deeply ingrained nationalistic sentiment among the Kashmiri population from history to present time, despite the growing transition towards Salafist/Wahhabi school of thought as analysed in Chapter 3, can also finds its rationale in the adoption of this harmonious Azadi interpretation, hence, the rejection of radicalised Islamic values among the majority of Kashmiri citizens. The multifaceted interpretations of Azadi associated with the reaction of the corresponding segments of population are demonstrated in Figure 2 as below.
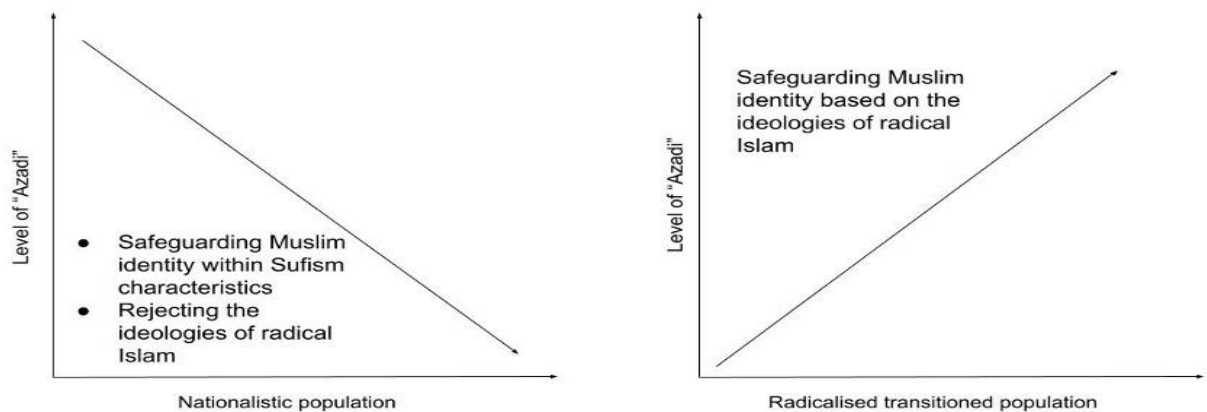
Figure 19 and Figure 20: Interpretations of Azadi by two different segments of the

Kashmiri population:

[As the aspirations for Kashmiri autonomy, or "Azadi," rise, the Kashmiri population

gravitates towards Sufi principles, rejecting radical Islamic ideologies. Conversely, when

aspirations for autonomy decline, there is an augmented perceived threat to the

Kashmiri Muslim identity. In response, to safeguard this identity as a strategy individuals

seek solace and strength from religious sources while embracing exclusivist tendencies.

This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among younger Kashmiri demographics.]

To further understand the syncretic identity of Kashmiris when encountering extremist

Islamic values, it is also crucial to delve into the historical instances, thus drawing the

parallel between contemporary resistance movements and those of the past. One of the

examples is a militant group "Allah Tigers", which attempted to enforce a specific set of

regulations associated with extreme Islamic teachings (Crossete, 21 December 1989).

Allah Tigers launched a campaign against the prohibition of the sale and consumption of

alcohol and the operation of cinema halls calling it un-Islamic resulting in the closure of

the majority of liquor stores in Srinagar and other towns in the Valley due to fear of retaliation. (Bose et al., 1990, 651-659; Dhillon, 20 January 2019). In addition to these efforts to ban films and alcohol, the group imposed a dress code on women, including the mandatory wearing of burkhas, abayas, and headscarves (Shabir, 20 September 2023; Geelani, 2019). However, all of these actions were met with strong opposition and rejection by the majority of Kashmiri's local population as Geelani notes:

> "This attempt at enforcing a certain code of conduct and thrusting a particular lifestyle on Kashmiris wasn't received well by the locals. The stated aim of the diktat appeared to be to shut down popular public hangouts. Most households in Kashmir own a television and family members watch Hollywood and Bollywood movies, popular television series and drama serials. Young boys and girls watch all kinds of movies on their smartphones, laptops, and tablets. That is why stereotyping Kashmiris as conservative or radical is neither a fair assessment nor helpful." (25 June 2020).

Therefore, due to the lack of social acceptance and endorsement for undemocratic practices, such militant groups attempting to enforce specific dress codes for women quickly abandoned such efforts (Geelani, 2019). Kashmir, while predominantly a conservative society, does not strictly adhere to a particular form of Islam (Geelani, 2019). The vast majority of Kashmiri Muslims, both men and women, engage in the practice of visiting shrines as part of their spiritual journey and faith, largely following the principles of Sufi spirituality. Kashmir has historically been recognized as the cultural blend of Sufis and saints as discussed in Chapter 1 while their shrines and Kashmiri identity hold significant cultural, social, and communal importance within Kashmir's rich tradition of harmony among diverse communities (Zutshi, 2018).

Consequently, it is easy to understand that the Wahhabi ideology as understood in Chapter 3, characterised by its rigid and hostile stance towards religious liberalism and Sufism, faces a challenging reception among the majority of Kashmiris who hold Sufism as the normative expression of their Islamic faith and commitment. However, this is

penetrating inside Kashmir on a very minuscule scale as discussed earlier (Taneja, 2018). This clash underscores the unpopularity of extreme Islamist ideologies among a significant portion of the Kashmiri populace. As a result, the people of Kashmir take great pride in their Kashmiri identity and their distinct culture, which they assert is separate from both, Pakistan, and India (Akbar, 2002). Based on the different interpretations of Azadi as presented earlier, the exclusive religious and political identity of Kashmiri people associated with Sufi Islam propels them to resist the brutality of Delhi's authority and the threat posed by Hindu India. Moreover, at the same time, their ethnicity and unique culture involving "Kashmiriyat" values such as peace and inclusivity do not necessarily push them towards aligning with Pakistan as well as the extreme and radicalising tendency propagated by these militant groups (Zutshi, 2018; Geelani, 2019). This duality is articulated by Geelani (2019) as Islam mobilises people in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, serving as a unifying factor either in Kashmir itself or in its relationship with Pakistan.

Based on the analysis and findings presented, this research suggests that individuals influenced by radicalisation often utilise religion as a potent tool to frame the Kashmir conflict as an Islamic struggle rather than solely a political one. While it can be argued that the political dispute in Kashmir contains underlying religious dimensions, the region historically identifies itself with nationalism, aspiring towards the concept of a Kashmiri nation rooted in its distinct identity. Furthermore, figures such as Zakir Musa, despite espousing extremist rhetoric, at the same time demonstrate a transcendent Kashmiri religious identity by refraining from targeting innocent civilians and non-Muslims in their assertions. Additionally, individuals like Eisa Fazli and others who have been radicalised provide evidence indicating that none have at the same time adopted the extreme ideologies of groups like the Islamic State and engaged in the targeting of civilians or non-Muslims. This suggests that while individuals may adopt rhetoric espousing the supremacy of Islam, they have largely abstained from incorporating puritanical philosophies into their actions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter elucidates the rise of radical ideology in Kashmir, notably epitomised by militant figures like Zakir Musa, reflecting a departure from previous narratives of self-determination towards Islamist principles. Musa's advocacy for Shariah law and rejection of nationalism resonated with disillusioned youth, leading to increased religiosity and support for radical Islamist ideologies. This shift, accompanied by the black flag waving in certain regions in Kashmir, the proliferation of mosques, an increase in attendance at religious activities and the adoption of religious attire among the youth, underscores a broader socio-political discontent and a transition towards more confrontational approaches. The strategic deployment of religious symbols and iconography to those utilised by radical groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, in an endeavour to emulate their identity, assumes a pivotal role in disseminating these ideologies, orchestrating audience attention, legitimacy and acceptance while fostering a more fundamentalist stance.

Moreover, as a rationale, this chapter asserts that radicalization derives from the disillusionment and threat perceived by the Kashmiri Muslim identity from the Hindu Indian identity. Within this paradigm, the evolving notion of India propagates an offensive Hindu nationalist discourse, conceptualising India as a nation primarily of Hindus. This narrative fosters an Islamophobic disposition, casting Muslim individuals in a negative light, sensationalising events regarding Muslims and portraying Kashmir as an existential threat to the Hindu identity. In response, the Kashmiri Muslim identity employs cultural self-defence mechanisms to assert itself resolutely and shield against the encroachment of Hindu nationalist identity and other external forces, including oppression and human rights violations perpetrated by Indian armed forces and perceived betrayals by separatist factions. This endeavour to safeguard their identity entails the adoption of radicalised Islamic rhetoric—a fundamentalist religious identity—as an efficacious defence mechanism against those external forces. The confluence of these factors, compounded by a dearth of proactive political initiatives, engenders a

dynamic interplay between the resurgence of Hindu India and the resurgence of Islam, wherein one serves as the catalyst propelling the growth of the other.

Furthermore, both disillusionment stemming from Hindu nationalist ideologies and mainstream politics, facilitated by the internet and social media, create a vulnerable environment conducive to the rapid and efficacious proliferation of radicalised ideologies. A segment of Kashmiri youth, exposed to radical literature disseminated by extremist groups or individuals, finds solace in religion as a solution amid the oppression and adversity endured by Kashmiri Muslims. However, research evinces a notable disparity between the fundamentalist version of Islam adopted by these individuals and the original framework of Islamic laws promulgated by genuine radicalised organisations. This dichotomy manifests in differing levels of theological knowledge, operational structures, target selection, and degrees of brutality and extremism. The militants frequently demonstrated a notable deficiency in profound religious awareness. Moreover, they exhibited a strategic and rational preference for targeting governmental entities and police officers over innocent civilians. Despite professing allegiance to their purported parent organisation, they lacked substantive evidence of a direct physical connection with it. Conversely, radical groups opportunistically claimed responsibility for certain incidents orchestrated by these militants, thereby amplifying the perceived threat and bolstering their presence across different geographical areas, even in the absence of direct physical presence showcasing the symbolic presence of radical groups so far in the region. Moreover, it emphasises that those individuals appropriate radicalised Islamic narratives to articulate grievances towards mainstream politics, instil a sense of threat and peril therein, and garner public support to legitimise their religious cause, primarily aimed at safeguarding their Muslim identity, rather than being devout adherents to radicalised Islamic principles advocated by extremist groups.

In summation, the transformation towards radicalization among a minority of Kashmiri youth manifests primarily as a symbolic and emblematic shift, prominently characterised by the display of symbols and imagery emblematic of radicalised ideologies, rather than

a genuine pivot towards a more fundamentalist, extremist, and violent disposition. Nonetheless, the allure and appeal of these radical ideologies and figures persist, indicating a potential albeit minor growth trajectory, owing to enduring disillusionment and resentment among the youth. Despite the limited number of militants operating in ISJK and AGUH, this environment exhibits a propensity for nurturing the proliferation of more radicalised cases similar to Zakir Musa, Mohammed Sirajuddin, Eisa Fazli, or Ahtisham Bilal Sofi, thus engendering a cyclic reinforcement of symbolism and radicalization. Conversely, it is imperative to note the formidable resistance of the majority of Kashmiri citizens against the burgeoning trend of minor radicalization. This resistance emanates from the incongruity between the predominant nationalistic ethos associated with Kashmiriyat values and Sufism, extolling inclusivity, peace, and harmony, and the fundamentalist, extremist Islamic laws propagated by militants. This profound conflict finds expression through divergent perspectives of Azadi adopted by disparate segments of the Kashmiri populace, constituting a substantial impediment to the traction of radical ideologies in Kashmir and rendering the realisation of an Islamic state therein arduous.

CONCLUSION

Through an in-depth examination encompassing four chapters, each delving into distinct cultural, historical, and theological themes, this study has yielded significant findings.

· The identity of Kashmiriyat reflects long-standing nationalistic values, consistently showcasing the collective desire of the Kashmiri identity in the pursuit of a homeland pre-dating the concept of nationalism.

· Deeply seated in the cultural milieu of the Kashmiri society throughout history, the enduring cultivation of Kashmiriyat has shaped the contemporary socio-political landscape of Kashmir in their pursuit of Azadi (freedom).

· Kashmiri society is fundamentally in contrast with the essence of Umma as it embraces a nationalistic vision and the idea of a Kashmiri nation throughout history.

· Kashmiri youth are increasingly disillusioned with mainstream politics, separatist leaders, and ineffective governance due to the violation of human rights and the violence perpetrated by the Indian state. This has nurtured an environment for the radicalization of vulnerable individuals.

· The rise of Hindu nationalism, including assertion of a superior Hindu identity and offensive policies against Muslims, leads Kashmiri Muslims to employ cultural self-defence mechanisms known as the revivalism of Islam.

· The adoption of religious symbols similar to those used by radical groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda such as the waving of black ISIS flags is a way to present the youth's resentment and frustration towards the state and that they do not accept the militaristic Hindu India rule. It plays a crucial role in amplifying fundamentalist ideologies, attracting public support, and increasing religiosity in the region.

· There are significant differences between the fundamentalist version of Islam adopted by Kashmiri youth and militants and the original framework of Islamic laws propagated by genuine radicalised organisations.

- The Internet and social media are significant facilitators in amplifying the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims and disseminating Islamic fundamentalist literature, thereby fostering an environment conducive to the proliferation of radicalization.

- The transition towards a more extremist Islamic propaganda is a manifestation of an exclusive side of Kashmiri religious adherence to echo their underlying aspiration for the preservation of a self-determined, autonomous Kashmiri identity.

- The changing image of the Kashmiri insurgency towards Pan-Islamism appears as a symbolic shift, characterised by the display of symbols and imagery associated with radicalised ideologies, rather than a sincere transition towards more fundamentalist and violent tendencies.

- There is a strong resistance from the majority of Kashmiri citizens against the trend of radical extremist ideologies in Kashmir finding it counterproductive to the nationalistic visions, presenting challenges for the realisation of an Islamic state in the region.

This research contends that the deeply ingrained identity of the Kashmiri society, known as "Kashmiriyat", infused with Sufi mysticism and promoting unity, liberty, and interreligious harmony, embodies long standing nationalist values that predate modern concepts of nationalism. Furthermore, it posits that the enduring cultivation of this value throughout history has significantly shaped the contemporary socio-political landscape of Kashmir, particularly in its pursuit of Azadi (freedom). This assertion builds upon the findings of Akhter (2017), Khan (1994) and Zutshi (2003) and addresses a gap in Hussain's (2018), Ahmad (2017) and Pandya (2019) examination of the concept of Azadi in present-day Kashmir, which lacked a comprehensive analysis of its essence and implications for the current Kashmiri populace that finds the current adoption of radical ideologies as counterproductive to their deeply ingrained rhetoric of an independent Kashmir. Moreover, this research contributes a thorough exploration of Kashmir's historical evolution across different time periods, tracing the development of Kashmiri

Muslim identity since the introduction of Islam and linking it to the current adoption of religious narratives in the region. This critical investigation reveals that Kashmiris employ the sentiment of Azadi under the banner of religion as a means to assert their desire for independence and freedom whenever threatened from the Indian state which is distinct from its intrinsic religious beliefs and adherence, a sentiment that is also overlooked in research presented by Routray (27 September 2018), Jadoon (2018) and Shah (2020).

Moreover, this research also observes that Kashmiri society fundamentally contradicts the essence of Umma as it embraces a nationalistic vision and the idea of a Kashmiri nation throughout history is different to the tenets of radical Pan-Islamism. This proposition further enhances the findings concluded by Geelani (2019), Devadas (2018), Taneja (2018), Pandya (2019), Routray (27 September 2018) look at the changing imagery but overlook the aforementioned concept. By bridging the temporal gap between past and present, this study significantly contributes to the existing literature, addressing a gap in the scholarly discourse represented by Zutshi (2003, 2018), Akbar (2002), Snedden (2013), Walter Lawrence (1895), Geelani (2019), Devadas (2018, 2019), Dixit (2020), Tomilson (12 May 2019), and Jadoon (2018). These works have examined various themes and topics between the history and contemporary landscape of Kashmir in a fragmented, non-systematic manner. In contrast, this research adopts a holistic approach, delving into recurring patterns in the development of Kashmiri identity and examining the competitive identities coexisting in the region. It thus elucidates the discrepancy between the inclusive nature of Kashmiri identity deeply ingrained in the region and the fundamentalist Pan-Islamist vision. Additionally, it underscores the substantial role of Kashmiri ethnic nationalism in leading the development of the society, overshadowing the influence of other identities such as secular Indian nationalism and religious Muslim Pakistani identity. Consequently, it offers valuable insight into the contemporary pursuit of Azadi, suggesting that it is not solely rooted in a religious awakening or genuine commitment to Islam. Rather, it is grounded in the preservation of the unique and indigenous Kashmiri heritage against external threats, oppression, or forceful imposition of values.

Besides, this research underscores a growing disillusionment among Kashmiri youth with mainstream and separatists' politics due to the deprivation of human rights and violence perpetrated by the Indian state. Furthermore, the erosion of credibility of the mainstream political parties and separatist politicians, resulted in political alienation among Kashmiris. Factors such as corruption, perceived disloyalty, nepotism, and governance failures have contributed to this loss of faith in political institutions, leaving a vacuum in credible leadership. This environment of anger and resentment, compounded by perceived militarization and the use of force to address issues, created fertile ground for radicalization among susceptible individuals. This finding aligns with arguments advanced by Devadas (2019), Geelani (2019) and Bose (2021) which highlighted the Indian government's mistreatment and denial of Kashmiri self-determination as primary sources of frustration and resentment among Kashmiri citizens. However, testing the work of Jadoon (2018), Dixit (2020) and Fayyaz (21 November 2017), Routray (27 September 2018) and Singh (28 June 2018) this research concurrently challenges these perspectives by linking this sense of disillusionment and alienation to the burgeoning trend of radicalization in the region, enhancing the contribution and positing them as catalysts for the adoption of Pan-Islamic narratives. Furthermore, it expands upon this argument by encompassing broader grievances beyond mere dissatisfaction with the Indian state, including ineffective governance, rampant political corruption, and the perceived betrayal of separatist leaders who have failed to deliver on promises of advocating for Kashmir's merger with Pakistan. Collectively, these factors contribute to the proliferation of fundamentalist ideologies and the escalating radicalization among Kashmiri youth and militants.

In addition, this study highlights the perceived threat of the Hindu India identity to the Kashmiri Muslim identity, contributing to the emergence of radical Islamist ideologies. The changing idea of India into a Hindu nation, including assertion of a superior Hindu culture and negative portrayal of Muslims in the media as a threat to Hindu identity, led Kashmiri Muslims to employ cultural self-defence mechanisms. This reactionary

mechanism involves the adoption of radicalised Islamic rhetoric to safeguard their Muslim identity and rights from external threats, causing the need for revivalism of Islam. This assertion challenges the work of Devadas (2019), Katoch (26 June 2018), Taneja (2019), Aggarwal (2023), Shah (2020) and Tomilson (2019) who look at the imagery of jihadism but overlook the aforementioned concept. This finding, however, resonates with the research conducted by Pandya (2020), Bose (2021), George (2017), and Bjørgo and Mareš (2019). However, while these scholars have primarily examined the resurgence of Hindu nationalism and the impact of vigilantism against minorities in limited and isolated studies, they failed to establish a cohesive link with the ongoing ideological shift in Kashmir. Therefore, in its assertion, this research contributes and finds that the ascent of Hindu India, characterised by its confrontational principles and policies towards Muslims, serves as a significant impetus for the resurgence of Islam and the rise of the Wahhabi/Salafist movement in Kashmir. This engenders a symbiotic relationship where each ideology fuels the growth of the other in a bid to assert their respective identities in the face of perceived religious threats further possessing as cultural defence mechanisms, a reason for symbolically adopting an Islamist narrative. Thus, it is imperative to interpret the revivalist movement within Islam as a reactive response to the challenges posed by the ascendancy of Hindu India to the Kashmiri Muslim identity.

Furthermore, this research challenges existing research of Rashid (7 January 2019), Fayyaz (21 November 2017), Mir (11 May 2019), Farooqi (26 December 2017), Tomilson (12 May 2019), Shah (2020), European Foundation of South Asian Studies (2021), Timsit (2019), Pandya (2019), Routray (27 September 2018) and Ali (10 January 2019) which primarily focus on the usage of ISIS flags and penetration of radical ideologies into Kashmir through militant leaders and the establishment of organisations like AGUH and ISJK, without delving into the underlying rationale for this phenomenon. Additionally, this study contributes to its findings by discerning the deliberate utilisation of religious symbols, encompassing flag waving, speeches, vocabulary, attire, and slogans reminiscent of those employed by extremist factions such as the Islamic State (IS) and

Al-Qaeda, as pivotal in propagating extremist ideologies, orchestrating audience responses, and fostering a more fundamentalist disposition within the region. It posits that Kashmiri youth and militants emulate the symbols, imagery, speeches, and rhetoric of extremist organizations and pledge allegiance to them primarily as a tactic to instigate fear and animosity towards the ruling government and garner public support, rather than stemming from genuine adherence to the fundamentalist doctrines advocated by such groups. Furthermore, these radical organizations predominantly operate within the digital sphere, lacking tangible presence, and leverage social media platforms to disseminate propaganda, falsely attributing attacks, and allegiance to certain individuals, as corroborated by Taneja (2020) and Jadoon (2018).

As a significant contribution this study analyses the disparity between the fundamentalist version of Islam adopted by these individuals and the original framework of Islamic laws propagated by genuine radicalised organisations, revealing significant differences in theological knowledge, motivation, operational structures, target selection, and levels of brutality and extremism. Therefore, it argues that the perceived increase in religiosity among Kashmiri youth is mostly on the surface level and lacks a profound basis in religious knowledge or genuine commitment to Islam or Sharia law. Furthermore, this argument addresses gaps in the work of Devadas (2019), Geelani (2019), Ahmad (15 May 2017), Timsit (11 May 2019), Farooqi (26 December 2017) and Mir (25 May 2019), which focus on shifts in insurgency narratives and reports of the prevalence of radical Pan-Islamic ideologies without critically examining the phenomenon or its authenticity. In contrast, this research expands upon and contributes to these findings by investigating the nature of the ideological shift and religious propaganda disseminated by militant leaders, presenting an accurate portrayal of the conflict, and contending that the adoption of radicalised ideologies is primarily driven by underlying nationalist sentiments rather than religious stimuli as propagated by these militants.

This study further posits the Internet and social media as significant facilitators in amplifying the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims amidst the perceived brutality of the Indian state, alongside the dissemination of Islamic fundamentalist literature, thereby fostering an environment conducive to the proliferation of radicalization. Notably, existing work on the changing image in Kashmiri insurgency has largely overlooked the role of the Internet and social media in the radicalization process of Kashmiri youth. This research addresses this gap in the work proposed by Mir (11 May 2019), Fayyaz (21 November 2017), Pandya (2019), Geelani (2019), Devadas (2019), Shah (2020) and Shah (20 April 2018) who have overlooked emphasising the pivotal role played by online platforms in amplifying radical ideologies within the region. challenging the aforementioned research, the analysis includes examination of online Islamic State media outlet - Amaq, and the Al Qaeda outlet - Al Qaraar, in disseminating fundamentalist ideologies. These online channels serve as crucial catalysts in accelerating the radicalization process and facilitating the dissemination of religious symbolism among the youth, consequently fuelling the rise of radicalised individuals in the region, often without clear evidence of direct association with such extremist groups. This phenomenon serves a dual purpose: first, it effectively recruits individuals into extremist groups and extends their influence beyond geographical boundaries despite their physical absence in the region. Second, it underscores the potent influence of radical ideologies and the widespread circulation of symbolic Islamist rhetoric within the populace. Consequently, both parent organisations and militants adopting such rhetoric derive individual benefits without necessitating direct physical ties, thereby establishing a dynamic mechanism that operates interchangeably.

Based on the arguments presented, a solid conclusion can be established in terms of the nature of the ideological shift in the Kashmir insurgency. This conclusion posits that the shift in militants and youth's narrative towards Pan-Islamism manifests primarily as a symbolic phenomenon, mainly through the display of symbols and imagery emblematic of radicalised ideologies, rather than a genuine pivot towards a more fundamentalist, extremist, and violent tendencies. This interpretation challenges previous studies by

Bose (2021), Hussain (2018), Whitehead (2018), Tremblay (2018), Zutshi (2018), Ahmad (2017), Kashmir and Bhat (2017), George (2017), Bjørgo and Mareš (2019), Pandya (2020), Jadoon (2018), Devadas (2019) and Geelani (2019) which, while attempting to understand militants mindset and addressing various socio-political dynamics in Kashmir, failed to establish a comprehensive link between these factors and the ideological transformation among youth and militants. In contrast, this research makes a substantive contribution by employing a person-centric approach, event-based studies, interviews, and the integration of crucial themes within the socio-political framework of Kashmir. Through this methodological synthesis, the study systematically links these elements to construct a coherent argument elucidating the nature of the ideological shift. These themes encompass disillusionment with mainstream politics, the revivalism of Hindu India identity, and the role of religion amidst these phenomena, aligning them with historical patterns of Kashmiri nationalist identity formation. Consequently, the militants' transition towards extremist Islamic propaganda is interpreted as an expression of Kashmiri religious adherence, driven by the desire to safeguard a self-determined, autonomous Kashmiri identity from Indian administration dominance and the religious identity of Hindu India, rather than a genuine commitment to extremist Islamic principles. Therefore, this conflict is posited to retain its essence as a political dispute rather than evolving into a religious conflict as advocated by radicalised militants and youth.

This research significantly contributes to the existing literature by employing a comprehensive methodology, which includes a person-centred study of militant leadership and expert interviews focusing on militant leaders mindset and their organizations, namely AGUH and ISJK. By challenging the works of Taneja (2019, 2023), Pandya (2019), Jadoon (2018), Devadas (2018, 2019), Geelani (2019), Shah (2020), Mir (11 May 2019), Fayyaz (21 November 2017), and Routray (27 September 2018), which have overlooked critical assessments of militant leadership and lacked the incorporation of expert opinions in their analyses, this research provides a deeper understanding of the militant mindset and the underlying factors driving the changing nature of

insurgency which adds to more conclusive findings. Consequently, this study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of militant behavior and the evolving landscape of insurgency.

Last but not least, this research also acknowledges the strong resistance from the majority of Kashmiri citizens against this trend of minor radicalization as they perceive this ideology as counterproductive to their nationalist aspiration. This resistance stems from the disparity between the predominant values of Kashmiriyat and Sufism, which advocate inclusivity, peace, and liberty, and the exclusive nature of fundamentalist, extremist Islamic laws. This deep conflict is reflected in varying interpretations of Azadi embraced by the minor radicalised population and the major nationalistic population in Kashmir. It is noteworthy that while the concept of Azadi has been analysed in studies by Bose (2003), Faheem (2016), and Duschinski, Bhan, Zia, and Mahmood (2018), they have failed to comprehensively examine the multifaceted Kashmiri Muslim identity. Consequently, research presented by Pandya (2019), Shah (2020), Taneja (2018), Timsit (11 May 2019) and Farooqi (26 December 2017) did not adequately connect its essence to the resistance of the majority of the Kashmiri population against the rise of fundamentalist ideologies, nor did they explain the infeasibility of an Islamic state in the region on a broader perspective. This research corroborates these findings and addresses their gaps by exploring the diverse facets of Azadi and considering it from the perspectives of both radicalised individuals and the nationalistic population. This examination reveals contrasting viewpoints of Azadi and elucidates the disparities in their approaches to combating external threats. While the former attempts to safeguard Kashmiri Muslim identity using fundamentalist approaches, the latter safeguards their identity within the Sufi characteristic and rejects the intervention of radical ideologies. This substantial divergence underscores the resistance of the majority of the Kashmiri population against the penetration of extremist Pan-Islamic values, despite its incremental proliferation among the youth. Consequently, this poses a formidable obstacle to the realisation of an Islamic state in Kashmir.

Based on the findings presented above, this study accepts Hypothesis 1, positing that the transition observed in the imagery and discourse of the insurgency within the Kashmir region, from a nationalist narrative to one aligned with Pan-Islamism, is underpinned by two principal factors:

1. The disenchantment experienced by youth and militant factions with various political entities espousing nationalist ideologies.
2. The resurgence of Hindu nationalism within India, encroaching upon and threatening the Islamic identity.

Furthermore, the investigation lends acceptance to Hypothesis 2, contending that the aforementioned shift predominantly manifests in symbolic terms, rather than reflecting a genuine ideological transformation.

Moreover, this research extends its wider assertions to the evolving conception of India, which holds the potential to engender heightened radicalization among youth. This may manifest in the adoption of radical Islamist ideologies, perceived as a threat to their Muslim identity, thereby exacerbating the risk to the nationalist vision of Kashmir.

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