

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON KASHMIR: A PEOPLE'S NARRATIVE

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The post-1947 history of Kashmir is often exclusively understood as a political and territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Moreover, following the narrative of «clash of civilizations», Kashmir is depicted as an entirely Islamic region basically at war with India according to a one-dimensional pattern, Islam vs. Hinduism. This mainstream view is not only preeminent in the media, but also among academics. Going beyond the shape of India-Pakistan relations and the considerations on security and terrorism, *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* provides a different perspective focused above all on Kashmiri people, their problems and their views of India's policy.

The book is based on ten essays supported by long-term fieldwork researches. It analyses the political, social and legal features of India's policy in Kashmir connected to different key words: democracy, colonialism and neo-colonialism, power and abuse of power, militarisation and sovereignty. The volume depicts especially how Kashmiri youth are considering the legacy of armed rebellion against India, which is perceived as a foreign body. *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* is a work based on anthropology and looks at Kashmiris as the first interpreters of their own political experiences and socio-economic conditions. Indeed, the main sources for most part of these essays are interviews collected in Kashmir.

The first chapter (Hailey Duschinski, Bruce Hoffman) considers the jurisdictional authority of the *Majlis-e-Mushawarat*, an organisation founded in Sopohan in 2009 as a community-based group with the stated target of achieving justice in the case of two Kashmiri women raped and murdered. The essay analyses the difficult relations between this organisation and the state's authorities. Initially, *Majlis* presented itself as an institutional player operating amid conditions of military power and coercion, and widespread protests to establish itself as a normative group requesting jurisdictional authority on the basis of its perceived political neutrality. However, as the authorities progressively closed off official channels for the two women's case, the *Majlis* tried to shift its requests to a global audience, issuing its claims to the international human rights' community (p. 67).

The second chapter (Mona Bhan) is dedicated to race, religion and sexuality. The essay examines the interventions of *Rashtriya Swayamsevak*

*Sangh* (RSS) to designate the Himalayas, particularly Kashmir and its border minorities, as part of Hinduism's mythic cultural geography. This narrative has been created in order to reinforce India's claims over Kashmir by presenting it as a natural extension of a cultural-religious-racial order (p. 97). In this chapter, the author has utilised the case study of Brogpas, a small ethnic minority community from the province of Ladakh. This community, identified as Aryan, symbolises the primordial Hindu, authentically pure and virile. This kind of masculinity is required also to fight India's internal enemies in Kashmir, whose struggle for independence has been depicted in Indian mainstream discourses as an exclusively Islamic *jihad*. The chapter shows different perspectives of Brogpas youth on this topic through interviews.

The third chapter (Ather Zia) offers a profile of Mohammad Afzal Guru, who was involved and sentenced for the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001. The author, by using the Foucauldian analytic of the «spectacle» and by describing the role of the media, analyses how Kashmiri bodies are fabricated as «traitors» to Indian sovereignty and marked as «deviant» and therefore «killable». Mohammad Afzal Guru has been characterised exclusively as the «killable body». According to the author, this «spectacle» has been an implicit part of the state's surveillance system that seeks to discipline bodies and crush any form of claim to freedom. Moreover, it is interesting the attention posed on the nationalism's narrative. Mohammad Afzal Guru was hanged, not to satisfy the rule of law but to assuage what the Supreme Court of India openly referred to as «the collective conscience» of the society (p. 104).

The fourth chapter (Saiba Varma) studies how Indian state domination has traumatised the population in Kashmir. In particular, the essay examines the blurring of military and humanitarian efforts in Kashmir, particularly the use of psychiatric and psychological technologies to heal populations under occupation. It shows how trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have become important tools for redressing widespread political alienation in Kashmir. The author shows how psychiatric and psychological languages are pervaded by political implications and how they are determined by highly contingent local interests. Humanitarian organisations, Indian state and Kashmiri psychiatrists seem keen to capitalise on trauma and PTSD, expanding their scope and reaching far beyond the clinic (p. 146). While the language of trauma and PTSD offers a way for Kashmiris to have their experiences of occupation recognised and legitimised, the emancipatory possibilities of trauma and PTSD are limited by the fact that it is being used as a technique of rule to transform former «terrorists» into «patients» (p. 148).

The fifth chapter (Seema Kazi) returns to sexual crimes in Kashmir. The author focuses on the cross-cutting cultural and political dimensions of rape by military forces and the relatively unaddressed albeit diffuse and

destructive influence of a military presence on women's daily lives. The author intends to illuminate, through different case studies, the relatively imperceptible, yet strongly experienced subordination inflicted through military occupation. According to this essay, it would be an error to view sexual crimes by security forces in Kashmir through a limited individual-soldier frame, for this is precisely the perspective the state seeks to promote in order to deflect attention away from its systematic abuse of power. However, Kashmir's civil society has been crucial in mobilising public discussion and action around the issue of sexual crimes by military personnel, challenging the state's narrative based on denial and obfuscation (p. 175).

The sixth chapter (Gowhar Fazili) is a critique of India's policing in Kashmir through the account of a Kashmiri police officer. This essay presents an analysis of a long conversation between the author and the policeman, focusing on the police officer's representations of three different stances: police, the people of Kashmir and his own personal self. The author analyses also the shifts between these three positions, what each one exposed about the policeman and how a researcher might be affected by his account. The chapter demonstrates how Kashmiri policemen present themselves as faithful to the interests of the community from which they are often excluded. Such self-presentation and self-belief require substantial social and psychological work (p. 185). This essay observes that being «occupied subjects» necessarily implicates for this policeman a degree of collaboration and resistance simultaneously.

The seventh chapter (Ershad Mahmud) studies the effects of India and Pakistan policies and analyses the experiences of inhabitants from villages and towns along the Line of Control (LoC) that have faced the devastating effects of the conflict. The author examines the ways in which the 2003 ceasefire between India and Pakistan and the subsequent Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) have dramatically impacted the lives of communities living along the LoC by helping displaced people return to their homes and begin new lives. Chapter 7 considers also how the failure of the political settlement of the Kashmir issue in 2007 gradually undermined the peace process, threatening to demolish not only the ceasefire but also the cross-LoC community dialogue and exchanges. The political deadlock between Islamabad and New Delhi and ceasefire violations along the LoC have led to a resurgence of violence in Kashmir (p. 212). The essay reflects also the governance issues that the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) confront on a daily basis.

The eighth chapter (Farrukh Faheem) is an account of the *Azadi* independence movement's organisation in Kashmir from 1930 to 1975 and beyond. The author argues that *Azadi* mobilisations were a part of the ordinary and everyday routine of the people (p. 231). The essay analyses how the *Azadi* movement in the early 1990s provided a context through which individual narratives of broken promises and betrayals connected with other

narratives, producing a collective narrative and thereby giving birth to a sustained collective action. A series of field interviews were conducted with Kashmiri leaders and political activists as well as archival material such as films and underground literature produced in Kashmir.

The ninth chapter (Mohamad Junaid) includes an examination of the relationship between commemoration of martyrdom and the formation of symbolic places such as martyrs' graveyards in Kashmir, in particular the case of *Mazar-e-Shuhada* in Srinagar. The chapter explores what constitutes «martyrdom» as a sociopolitical phenomenon and describes those distinctive features of martyrs' graveyards that indicate their symbolism and separate them from ordinary graveyards in Kashmir. The essay shows how martyrs' graveyards, Kashmir's «condensed content», are archives that incessantly signal/beckon Kashmiris to return to them (p. 269-270) and describes how they are linked to critical political struggles in Kashmir and examines commemorative and burial practices associated with martyrdom. The chapter shows that martyrs' graveyards are memorials built by the defeated, which help to reformulate the core elements of Kashmiri counter narratives against the Indian state's attempts at rendering invisible the history of violence in the region (p. 251-270).

As explained by Cynthia Mahmood in the concluding essay, «the collaboration reflected in this volume represents an attempt by Western and Kashmiri scholars to reclaim and rebuild Kashmir's academic narrative. Grounded in the face-to-face methods of ethnography [...], we transect the classic insider-outsider polarity to write from positions of solidarity with the people we study and learn from» (p. 286).

In conclusion, the image of a «body», violated or depicted as a powerful symbol, can be utilised as a *fil rouge* that links the essays of *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir*. Indeed, it's a recurring representation: first of all the «body» of Kashmir, which is desired by Islamabad and New Delhi, by rewriting borders considered as sacred representations; Kashmir's vision of the inhabitants, whose life is completely different from the narrative of the state; the idea of the Aryan «perfect body» and the search for pure seed in Kashmir by Hindu organisations; the «killable Kashmiri body» of Afzal Guru; the sexual crimes against Kashmiri women and violence against the traumatised, whose bodies have been considered by authorities as instruments to be used for coercion and the expression of power; the policeman between collaboration and resistance; the bodies of Kashmiri martyrs (the cases of Maqbool Bhatt and Afzal Guru, whose bodies were interred in Tihar Jail in New Delhi).

Although very critical of India's policy, *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* is fundamental reading on contemporary Kashmir, considering the inter-disciplinary methodology as a core element of these studies and the region's knowledge of contributors, many of whom were born and raised during the peak of the conflict in the 1990s. It's important to underline

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the use of interviews as sources in order to hear Kashmiris' voices and understand their perspectives. Therefore, this book is a significant source for scholars specialising in South Asian studies.