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"Survival Is Now Our Politics": Kashmiri Hindu Community Identity and the Politics of Homeland

Haley Duschinski

Kashmiri Hindus are a numerically small yet historically privileged cultural and religious community in the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir Valley in Jammu and Kashmir State in India. They all belong to the same caste of Sarasvat Brāhmaṇas known as Pandits. In 1989–90, the majority of Kashmiri Hindus living in Kashmir Valley fled their homes at the onset of conflict in the region, resettling in towns and cities throughout India while awaiting an opportunity to return to their homeland. After their migration, the community became caught up in highly politicized national debates about secularism, governance, and the state's responsibility to its citizens in India. In this article I consider the construction of Kashmiri Hindu collective identity through community discourse in the 1990s, with special attention to the way in which this discourse framed the issue of return to the homeland. My discussion of Kashmiri Hindu community discourse draws on a number of resources, including articles in daily newspapers and weekly magazines, community publications such as white papers and human rights reports, collections of essays written by Kashmiri Hindu scholars, and personal interviews with community leaders during the period of my anthropological fieldwork in New Delhi in 1998–2000.

Communities and Political Life in India

In order to make sense of the political discourse of the Kashmiri Hindu community in the 1990s it is necessary to understand the workings of power in Indian political life in the last few decades. Many academic and popular works focusing on "the state" are based on the assumption that modern state institutions exercise power over traditional societies through interventionist programs of modernization and development, while social institutions exert influence back upon the state through strategies of resistance. The binary opposition between state and society corresponds to a spatial model of verticality in which the state acts "from above" upon social institutions that are rooted "close to the ground" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). This ideological framing has the effect of reinforcing state power (Mitchell 1991); it also leads to a tendency to evaluate states, especially developing ones, in terms of their

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successes and failures in implementing modernization in their societies (Li 2005). Recent attempts by anthropologists to rethink state-society relations have problematized this binary opposition by re-examining the taken-for-granted boundary between state and society and by focusing attention on the way in which communities enter into the workings of political power through strategies of intervention and mobilization.

Any study of power in contemporary India must consider the political position of communities. In India, government allocation of resources is typically conducted at the level of communities, as segments of the population make collective claims against the state through the politics of group representation.[1] In the 1970s the proliferation of developmental policies of welfare provision and populist techniques of political mobilization coincided with new patterns of governance, as state agencies increasingly sought to administer rehabilitation, relief, and protection to population groups through the medium of representative community organizations and associations (Gupta 1998). The intensification of political mobilization, particularly among poor, minority, and disadvantaged population groups, led to an expansion of political participation and also a reification of political communities, as more and more categories of the population presented themselves as stable and unchanging collectivities in order to legitimize their claims against the state (Hansen 1999; Khilnani 1999: 49–50). Through these processes, communities emerged in India's political culture as distinct political actors that employ practices such as the institutionalization of a homogeneous collective history, the implementation of alternative constitutional and legal systems, and the performance of violence and control over dissent (Das 1995: 16–17). In these ways, communities as political formations ultimately reproduce the logic of the state that they are trying to contest. Veena Das makes the point that such communities reproduce the illusion of a boundary between society and state by casting themselves as protectors of tradition acting in opposition to an oppressive modern state structure. Attention to these communities, not as institutions apart from state and society, but rather as sites of powerful symbolic and cultural production like imagined states, allows consideration of the irreducibly contested nature of identities, collectivities, and constituencies in modern India.

The emergence of the Kashmiri Hindu migrant community as a powerful political actor in the 1990s was framed by the rise of Hindu nationalism, as the Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliate members of the *saṅgh parivār* increasingly articulated a conservative, populist form of political mobilization associated with the "saffron wave" of Hindu nationalism. This was a period of significant shifts in Indian political life through the expansion of political participation among non-elite classes and also the opening up of the market economy through neo-liberal economic policies that facilitated the rise of consumerism and the exposure of the middle classes to global market flows. As many scholars have described in detail, Hindu nationalist parties operated through a discourse of majoritarian politics, combining a jingoistic discourse of xenophobia and intolerance with a populist discourse of rights and entitlements (Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar, and Sen 1993; Hansen 1999, 2001;

Jaffrelot 1996). Through its brand of conservative populism, the Hindu nationalist majoritarian movement attracted privileged groups that felt themselves vulnerable to encroachment from empowered minorities as well as impoverished groups seeking inclusion in the rhetoric of national pride, order, and strength (Hansen 1999). The *saṅgh parivār* situated itself in opposition to the political establishment by identifying the secular nationalist position as a partisan form of religious appeasement that provided minority groups, particularly religious minority groups, special privileges and advantages over the majority. In this way, Hindu nationalism tapped into the anxieties of the middle classes and aspiring middle classes at a time of significant political and economic change in the country.

In political manifestos, speeches, and slogans, Hindu nationalist parties highlighted the plight of the Kashmiri Hindu migrant community, arguing that secular political leaders had implemented policies to appease Kashmiri Muslims for decades in order to demonstrate their commitment to the principles of secular nationalism, but had failed to provide adequate protection to the minority Kashmiri Hindu community simply because they shared the religious affiliation of the Indian majority. In this way, Hindu nationalist rhetoric presented the anxieties of the Kashmiri Hindu migrant community as a mirror of the anxieties of the Indian middle classes, who felt themselves vulnerable to increasing mobilization among minority and impoverished classes. This position also enabled Hindu nationalist political parties to strengthen their claim as the defenders of national boundaries and national interests in India.

In the 1990s, Kashmiri Hindu community organizations positioned themselves within this framework through their own forms of community discourse. In the following sections I outline the key points of Kashmiri Hindu community discourse from that period, with special attention to the way in which community organizations expressed and framed the critical issue of the migrants' return to their homeland. This community discourse operated in the domain of public culture, which may be defined as the social field within which individuals imagine, represent, and recognize themselves (Hansen 1999). In her analysis of Sikh militant discourse, Das demonstrates that political language in the public culture of community serves to create a "we" group out of a heterogeneous community "to function as an effective political agency within the context of the modern state structures in India" (1995: 118). Similarly, Kashmiri Hindu discourse casts the dispersed community as a unified *birādarī*, a term that refers to a group of separate lineages of the same caste spread over many villages. This *birādarī* coheres as a moral community with a common purpose and common platform through the illusion of consensus, constituted in the domain of public culture through discursive moral stories that frame the experiences of the migrants in particular ways. As this article demonstrates, Kashmiri Hindu community discourse articulates with Hindu nationalist discourse by emphasizing the superiority of Hindu religious and cultural tradition, the decline of Hindu culture, the loss of Hindu homeland, the fear of encroachment by Muslims and other poor and plebeian classes, and the desire for special recognition by the state. As I discuss in the conclusion, this community discourse has framed the ways

in which migrants imagine homeland and their relationship to it, with implications for the perceived possibilities of return to the homeland.

A Brief History of Kashmiri Hindu Associations

As Mridu Rai (2004) and Chitralekha Zutshi (2004) have recently demonstrated through their exhaustive historical examinations of Kashmiri political culture, Kashmiri community identities have been significantly shaped by the interplay of regional, religious, and class divisions that shifted in relation to one another throughout the colonial period from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century. By the late eighteenth century, Kashmiri Pandits, the small minority that had become established as the clerical caste of revenue administrators and office holders, enjoyed privileged access to educational and occupational opportunities in relation to the Kashmiri Muslim masses. In the early twentieth century, Kashmiri religious identities became mobilized through a series of processes, including the practices of the Dogrā State, the state's contact with British India, and the rise of a newly educated Kashmiri Muslim leadership (Zutshi 2004). These shifts produced a collective sense of vulnerability for Kashmiri Hindus in light of their dependence on employment in state administration. As Rai and Zutshi both argue, these religious identities have continued to exist in tension with one another into the post-colonial era, through what Zutshi refers to as "the ongoing dialogue between religious identities, community definitions, and a deep longing for a homeland with just rulers that continues in Kashmir to this day" (2004: 322).

Kashmiri Hindus migrated out of Kashmir Valley in significant numbers during the colonial period, with migrant communities engaging in considerable self-conscious reflection on the preservation of cultural identity, values, and traditions under conditions of political adversity and social change. As Henny Sender (1988) has shown, Kashmiri Hindu community associations flourished outside the Valley in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among community members living in the areas that were then known as the Northwestern Provinces and Oudh, the British province of Punjab, and some of the princely states of central India, Rajputana, and the Punjab. As urban elites who had worked in government service for generations, Kashmiri Hindus in these areas formed Kashmiri *mohallā*s (enclaves) in the northern towns, such as Amritsar, Allahabad, Agra, Lahore, and Lucknow, which were the centers of the former imperial and princely courts. These towns "were the nerve centers of Kashmiri Pandit life, linking Kashmiris in these cities through kin, *biradari*, and marriage relationships with their caste-fellows scattered all over northern India" (Pant 1987: xv). Community members, through the work of community associations, made self-conscious efforts to preserve their distinctive identity as Kashmiri Brāhmaṇas while participating in the world of the Urdu-speaking elite in northern India.

As the British Rāj replaced the Mughal imperial rule as the source of administrative employ and political authority after 1857, Kashmiri Hindus, finding themselves

poorly adapted to their new administrative environment, engaged in collective discussions on issues concerning tradition, authority, and unity in the community. These discussions focused on the concept of social reform. Reform was problematic because it forced consideration of the values and practices that were part of the community's identity. Sender (1988: 131–43) identifies the emergence of three alternatives in the articles that appeared in community magazines during that time: anglicization and westernization, reaffirmation of Hindu Brāhmaṇa religious identity through Sanskritization, and a turn towards Kashmir. The controversies and debates on issues such as student boarding houses, ritual expenses, diversification of livelihood, and female education demonstrate the community's strategic evaluation of these three alternatives. The suggestion of a turn towards Kashmir was the least practical of the three; some community leaders floated the idea of purchasing land in Kashmir, but the plan never developed. Kusum Pant (1987) notes that Kashmiri Hindus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not have a strong urge to return to Kashmir and did not participate in social and political movements taking place there. At the same time, however, "the romantic view of Kashmir and the sense of being exiles or expatriates which it bred reinforced a feeling of separateness from non-Kashmiri Pandits and strengthened the bonds that linked members of the Kashmiri community together" (Pant 1987: 8). In this way, the community cultivated an attachment to Kashmir as a land of common origin but not a place of current connection.

New associations emphasizing preservation of the social values and cultural traditions of the dispersed community emerged among these urban elites after Indian Independence. One of the earliest of these new associations was the Kashmiri Pandit Association at Varanasi, founded prior to Independence, in 1946, by students and faculty affiliated with Banaras Hindu University (Dhar 1995). Another prominent association was the Kashmir Sabha Calcutta, which formally adopted its constitution in 1955 and pursued regular activities in the 1960s, including festival celebrations for Navreh, Śivrātrī and Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, children's functions, community outings, and publication of a monthly newsletter. These local associations were brought together under an umbrella organization called the All India Kashmir Samaj (AIKS), formed in Allahabad in 1979 under the leadership of Justice P. N. Bakshi, who had also founded the Uttar Pradesh Kashmiri Samaj (Dhar 1995). These AIKS *birādarī* units in the 1980s fostered and preserved a sense of cultural identity by holding meetings, functions, picnics, and celebrations. They also addressed community concerns, including the dowry system, education and employment problems, preservation of cultural heritage, and propagation of the Kashmiri language.

Delhi, known as the oldest and largest Kashmiri Hindu center outside Kashmir since the Mughal period, became a focal point of *birādarī* activity after Indian Independence. A group of Kashmiri Hindus in Delhi founded the Kashmiri Cooperative House Building Society in 1950, purchasing 26 acres of land in South Delhi, at Kalkaji, in order to develop an enclave for community members "with the definite objective of maintaining and perpetuating their culture and traditions" (A.

Raina 1995: 552; see also Kachru 1995: 564–65). This area developed into Pamposh Enclave, with approximately 150 plots, ranging from 200 to 700 square yards, for residential purposes (A. Raina 1995: 553). The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi emerged in the 1950s, with many of its members located in Pamposh Enclave, and began circulating a community magazine, *Koshur Samachar*, in the 1970s.

The Militancy and the Migration

In 1989, Kashmiris, feeling themselves increasingly frustrated with longstanding patterns of misgovernment in the region, took to the streets in Srinagar and other towns in Kashmir Valley in an open revolt against Indian state rule. This popular campaign identified its objective as self determination on the basis of Kashmiri regional identity; however, an explicitly religious tone gained prominence in the early nineties, as groups supporting accession to Pakistan rose to ascendancy and marginalized secessionist organizations (Sikand 2004).[2] Kashmiri Hindus felt an increasing sense of vulnerability and insecurity in response to what they perceived as a threatening atmosphere in the region (Behera 2000; Evans 2002). These feelings were exacerbated by a series of actions directed against their community, including attacks on prominent Kashmiri Hindu politicians and advocates, displays of hit lists with the names of specific Kashmiri Hindu individuals, and acts of violence in Hindu localities in Srinagar and elsewhere in the region. Community members were particularly affected by the selective killings of prominent community members, such as high profile politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, and judges.[3] Two Srinagar-based newspapers, *Al Safa* and *Srinagar Times*, carried direct threats in April 1990, ordering Kashmiri Hindus to leave the Valley or be killed. More than 100,000 individuals left the region in a few months, and the rest followed sporadically over the following decade.[4] Although different groups with a stake in the Kashmir conflict dispute the number of Kashmiri Hindu migrants, Alexander Evans (2002: 23–26) estimates on the basis of census data and demographic figures that 155,000–170,000 Kashmiri Pandits have left the Valley as migrants since the onset of violence in 1989, and T. N. Madan (1989: xviii–xix) uses the same figures. Fewer than 7,000 remain in Kashmir Valley today.

Most Kashmiri Hindu migrants settled in temporary arrangements in Jammu, the major city in the predominantly Hindu southern region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.[5] Migrants arrived in Jammu to find that the state had made no preparations for their accommodation, relief, or rehabilitation. They talked about being shocked, upon their arrivals in Jammu, to find that problems of overcrowding severely limited their options for housing or employment. Many followed family networks or job opportunities to New Delhi, making the capital city the second largest relocation site. There were generational differences in these relocation patterns, as individuals described Delhi to me as "the city of youths and jobs" and Jammu as "the city of parents and depression." As Kashmiri Hindu migrants began arriving in Delhi, they found that their strongest supporters included established Kashmiri Hindu families

who had relocated to Delhi generations earlier, political figures with vested interests of their own, and Hindu nationalist sympathizers who identified the migration as an act of religious persecution. These advocates worked through powerful community organizations to provide medical care, education, and moral and financial support to migrant families (Duschinski 2007: 93).

The *sabhās*, *samitis*, and associations in towns and cities outside of Kashmir Valley responded at the local level to the migration of 1989–90. As one community leader told me:

> Whenever KPs [Kashmiri Pandits] have left Kashmir and ten or twelve families have settled in a place, they have formed a society among themselves. In Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad, Agra—large groups settled there, and these associations formed. First they formed the Kashmiri association and the Kashmir Bhawans, through a plot of land for the community center. You will find these Kashmir Bhawans before 1990, if there are just 50 families, a Kashmir Bhawan is bound to be there, in all cities. Before 1990 these *samitis* were more or less dormant. People would assemble on Navreh perhaps, and the *samiti* would issue a newsletter with births, deaths, marriages. But in 1990, with the influx of 350,000 people to each and every part of the country scattered, now these *samitis* got activated to come to the relief of people coming out of the Valley. They were purely social and cultural societies before that and social and cultural since.

The AIKS, as the Apex Body of Kashmiri Hindu associations, became "activated" in this way by functioning as the connecting and coordinating link among the local associations. In 1992, it consisted of thirty affiliated associations functioning in different parts of India, one in the UK covering Europe, and one in Michigan covering the United States. The affiliates were autonomous bodies, each working for the "social and cultural advancement and welfare of the community" in its area. The AIKS represented the interests of the community members by meeting various authorities in the state and Central governments, organizing seminars, participating in demonstrations, and bringing the plight of the community to the attention of the general public (Bakaya 1995).

In the 1990s, the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi emerged as the most influential community organization in the country by managing the large numbers of migrants who migrated to the capital city and also by negotiating with elected leaders at the city, state, and national levels for relief. Beginning in late 1989, the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi opened the community hall of the Kashmir Bhawan to individuals and families who had nowhere to stay in the capital city, providing temporary shelter for hundreds of Kashmiri Hindus before the municipal government granted the migrants community halls as migrant camps in neighborhoods throughout the city. Families lived in these camps temporarily, for months or years, before finding rental accommodation elsewhere in the city. Families chose to live in them as long as possible in order to save money, in some cases, and participate fully in the political life of the

community, in others. The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi also coordinated relief efforts by appealing to the Delhi municipal government and the Central Government for the establishment of transit camps, the provision of cash stipends, and the distribution of rations to the migrants. It became recognized by the Union Government as the nodal agency for displaced Kashmiri Hindus.

The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi pursued these activities through the language of cultural identity, values, and traditions, thereby carefully maintaining its concern with social and cultural matters as opposed to political ones. However, the distinctions between social and cultural concerns, on the one hand, and political concerns, on the other, were not so sharp. Chaman Lal Gadoo, president of the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi at the time of the migration (and also at the time of my fieldwork), reflects on these issues in a published interview entitled "Survival is Our Politics":

> Q: What change do you see in Samiti activities in last ten years.
>
> A: Role of Kashmir Samiti was basically social and cultural. But the year 1989 onwards was a disaster for the entire community. Our existence is threatened and we had to change our priorities....
>
> Q: Some people say that Kashmiri Samiti has now been made political Akhara [literally "martial order"].
>
> A: I do not agree with such statements. I feel community leaders have a responsibility. If I see my people dying for want of basic necessity education etc, I cannot remain a silent spectator. I will fight for every needy Kashmiri Pandit. Survival of my community members is now our politics (1999).

By using the phrase "political Akhara," the interviewer was suggesting that the organization was attempting to assert political force in pursuit of a particular moral and spiritual order. Gadoo, in response, emphasized the efforts of the organization in terms of relief work to ensure the survival of the community. If this is politics, he seemed to say, then so be it.

Homecoming as Patriotic Imperative

The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi discursively constructs the Kashmiri Hindu community in particular ways through its articles, editorials, white papers, appeals, and reports. This discourse is circulated among community members through *Koshur Samachar*, a monthly magazine published by the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi and circulated among approximately two thousand subscribers at the time of my fieldwork. *Koshur Samachar* changed dramatically in tone, format, and appearance after the migration of 1990 in response to increasing attention to the plight of the Kashmiri Pandit migrant community. Every issue contained a preliminary editorial statement address-

ing a current matter of significant concern to the community, followed by a series of articles discussing various aspects of the cultural heritage and political battles of the Kashmiri Pandits. Other regular features included a summary of news "from the president's desk," a brief cultural/religious commentary on the current calendar month, a series of poems by young and old, a selection of letters to the editor, and a roundup of the *birādarī* news from cities throughout India. There were also sporadic reports on the activities of the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, summaries of community conferences and symposia, copies of relevant articles published in daily newspapers, printings of first-person reflections and reveries on life in the Valley, short stories and folk tales, and reprints of important memoranda and appeals. The magazine is financed in large part through the matrimonial section, which provides the opportunity for families to advertise for "wanted brides" and "wanted grooms," as well through space purchased by community members for family memorials, marriage announcements, and holiday greetings. Businesses and companies, ranging from small entrepreneurs in Jammu to the Times of India Group in Delhi, also purchase advertising space in the magazine's pages.

The discourse presented in *Koshur Samachar* highlights the importance of protecting the distinctive identity of the community against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, which is cast as the enemy of Kashmiri Hindus and, by extension, the Indian nation. Through a series of discursive slippages, Kashmir Valley and Mother India map onto one another as interchangeable homelands, such that the protection of one necessitates the protection of the other. In this way, the community discourse casts the preservation of Kashmiri Hindu identity as the moral responsibility of the Indian state.

The primary claim of the community discourse is that the militant movement in Kashmir Valley is an expression of fundamentalist violence set within the context of regional politics in South Asia:

> The militant violence in Kashmir is an ideological struggle which is fundamentalist in outlook and basically communal in character....The terrorist violence is not a local eruption of political dissent or discontent, nor is it a political movement geared to objectives which involve change in the instruments of power or processes of political participation. It is a religious crusade, the continuation of the Muslim struggle for the separate Muslim homeland in India, to complete the partition of India by securing the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir for the Muslim State of Pakistan (Teng and Gadoo 1991: 31).

All community discourse is premised on this claim, which rejects the suggestion that the militant movement resulted from the political alienation or economic deprivation of Kashmiri Muslims. Cast as a religious crusade, a striving for *nizām-i-mustafā*, and a campaign against the *kāfir*, the militant movement is seen as the pursuit of the Islamization of Kashmir Valley in an effort to complete the "unfinished business" of Partition. The source of the fundamentalism thus lies outside Kashmir Valley and

outside India, across the porous national border. Pakistani agents, through diabolism and subterfuge, are luring impressionable Kashmiri Muslim youths across the Line of Control into terrorist training camps, where they are receiving instructions to torture and torment Kashmiri Hindus. In this framework, fundamentalism operates as a force moving into the Valley, brainwashing and indoctrinating Kashmiri Muslims, especially youths, into supporting its cause.

Kashmiri Hindus are represented as a small and innocuous community whose very presence in Kashmir Valley obstructs the movement of fundamentalist Islam. This representation suggests that the militants have directed their violence against the Kashmiri Hindus because the Kashmiri Hindus represent the secular values of the Indian nation. "Pakistani rulers realize that as long as Kashmiri Hindus even though miniscule in size stay in Kashmir, their dream of Islamization of Kashmir will remain unrealized," one article states. "A Kashmir without Hindus, whatever their numbers, would be a Theocracy ripe for the Fundamentalists to establish their command post for further forays into the very heart of India" (O. Trisal 1991). The conflict in Kashmir thus emerges as the inevitable culmination of the clash between Hindus and Muslims, India and Pakistan, and secularism and fundamentalism in South Asia, with Kashmiri Hindus as its victims.

In this formulation, the plight of the community becomes an issue of national concern. If Kashmiri Hindus represent the values of the Indian nation, then the state bears a responsibility to protect their lives and properties in the Valley, to provide support for them in exile, and to facilitate their return home. The state's failure to fulfill this responsibility constitutes an act of heartless neglect, deliberate indifference, and even "inexplicable and ignoble conspiracy." This moral failure is a betrayal of the nation and its people.

This community discourse is nationalistic in tone, casting Kashmiri Hindus as true patriots who have sacrificed greatly for their devotion to the Indian nation. One contributor to *Koshur Samachar* notes that the Kashmiri Hindus ironically "have become refugees in our own country, our only fault having been to hold the tricolour instead of joining hands with separatists in their so-called freedom struggle" (Bazaz 1992: 28). Another writes:

> The forced exodus of the blameless Kashmiris and its unspeakable aftermath is not only a shameful blot on the Indian government and the people responsible for bringing about this situation. It portends the death of secularism and the tearing to shreds the country's fabric of integration so tenuously held together against the rapidly increasing ferocity of the assaults on it from within and outside India ("A Tangled Affair," 1992).

Abandoned by the state to which they have demonstrated their allegiance, Kashmiri Hindus occupy the paradoxical position of refugees in their own country.

This discourse claims that the salvation of the Indian nation can only be achieved through the return of the Kashmiri Hindus to their homeland. The eventual return

of the community members to their homes emerges as a patriotic imperative to preserve the honor and dignity of the nation. This return requires a radical transformation in the national vision of India and the position of Kashmir Valley within it. Once this radical transformation occurs, the community will be able "to fulfill the sacred task of securing the integrity of India which has been our historical role in the face of continuing oppression earlier and especially since Independence" (Munshi 1991).

Panun Kashmir and the Homeland Resolution

A new organization known as Panun Kashmir (Our Own Kashmir) came into existence at the end of 1991, as one representative told me, "to work toward a cultural revival of the community and, since the Kashmiri Hindus were at the receiving end of persecution, to articulate a course in the political realm. Thus there was a political objective as well." The work of Panun Kashmir is explicitly political. In December 1991, Panun Kashmir convened a large gathering, known as Magdarshan-91, in Jammu. At this convention Panun Kashmir staked the claim of the political community to be an equal party to any future deliberations in the process of normalization and the development of an ultimate solution to the conflict in Kashmir. They did this by issuing a resolution proclaiming their commitment to the processes of secularism and democracy in India and their demand for a separate homeland for Kashmiri Hindus within Kashmir Valley. The resolution had four specific points: (*1*) the demarcation of a separate homeland for Kashmiri Hindus in the Kashmir Valley, comprising the regions of the Valley to the east and north of the river Jhelum; (*2*) the application of the Constitution of India in letter and spirit to this homeland, in order to ensure right to life, liberty, freedom of expression and faith, equality, and rule of law; (*3*) the placement of the homeland under the Central administration with a Union Territory status; and (*4*) the extension of the right of resettlement to all Kashmiri Hindus, including those who had left Kashmir for various reasons in the past and wished to return. The Margdarshan-91 effectively established a division of labor between the social and cultural work of the Kashmiri *samitis* such as the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi and the political work of the emerging organizations such as Panun Kashmir.

The political demands of Panun Kashmir prompted much discussion and debate within the community. In February 1992, Kashmiri Samiti Delhi hosted a two-day meeting of the Executive Committee of the AIKS, including representatives of its affiliated units, at the Kashmir Bhawan in order to evaluate the situation facing the community and develop a consensus on the future course of action.[6] Chaman Lal Gadoo, president of Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, opened the meeting with an address entitled "KPs at the Crossroads of History" (1992). "There is an urgent need," he said, "more than ever it was, for the community to evolve a plan of action for the future rehabilitation and return of our people to our motherland" (5). He continued by outlining the Kashmiri Hindu community's right to their motherland:

> I want to make one thing very clear. The Kashmiri Pandits will not renounce the right to their motherland. Kashmir belongs to us. Kashmir is our history, Kashmir is our home, Kashmir is our tradition. Our temples are in Kashmir and our entire past is associated with its soil. We will not allow to be dispossessed and our culture to be destroyed (Gadoo 1992: 8).

He also directed the AIKS Executive Committee to consider the resolution demanding a homeland as proposed by Panun Kashmir at Jammu. Some of the members of Panun Kashmir, who participated in the deliberations as observers, outlined the strategic benefit of having this kind of political slogan "in the fluid political situation" in the country and the subcontinent. The AIKS Executive Committee decided that each member organization would decide separately whether to endorse the demand.

Community leaders circulated their perspectives on the political value of the Homeland Resolution through *Koshur Samachar.* The Kashmiri Hindu Samiti Kathua endorsed the demand for a separate homeland, warning the Government of India that "any act of underestimating Kashmiri Pandits will be counterproductive as the Biradari is fully aware of the acts of sabotage and suppression being engineered by the Govt. to harass Kashmiri Pandits and make them helpless" ("Kathua Samiti Endorses Demand," 1992: 19). The community leader Pamposh Koul also endorsed the agenda of Panun Kashmir, writing that "Our homeland must be for all Kashmiris who have left Kashmir since 1400 AD lakhs and lakhs of them. Our brethren in the U.S.A and European countries can also exert pressure on the leaders and lobbyists there for such a proposal so that if Kashmir is surrendered by India we can have a territory to call our homeland" (1992: 18). Other community leaders, however, urged caution on the development of these political agendas. At a meeting held in March 1992, several of the AIKS Advisory Council members emphasized that the community organizations should not pursue hard politics, such as making political demands relating to Article 370, but rather soft politics, such as activating Kashmiri journalists to project community viewpoints and sending delegations for private meetings with national leaders. These views also appeared, albeit with little elaboration, in *Koshur Samachar* (M. Koul 1992). As these comments demonstrate, community leaders responded to the political call for a separate homeland on the basis of its perceived strategic value.

The Homeland Resolution gained momentum over the next few years, as Panun Kashmir developed political slogans, coordinated protest rallies, issued press statements, developed video documentaries, and produced booklets and pamphlets. Through all of these efforts, Panun Kashmir articulated its political agenda in terms of the cultural identity, values, and traditions of the community.

The Discourse of Recovery

After the re-establishment of democratic elections in Jammu and Kashmir in the

middle of the decade, the state government began to formulate rehabilitation schemes that would enable Kashmiri Hindu migrants to return to their homes in the Valley. Through their discourse, community organizations responded strongly to these plans, rejecting them as empty forms of political posturing that would endanger the community by placing its members in harm's way while the conflict was still ongoing. Echoing the political language of Hindu nationalist political parties, community leaders called for more fundamental shifts in forms of political governance throughout the country in order to resolve the situation in Kashmir and establish safe conditions for the return of the migrant community. In this section I examine the treatment of the issue of homecoming within the Kashmiri Hindu community discourse in the mid-to-late 1990s.

In March 1996, the Indian Election Commission announced that Jammu and Kashmir State would participate in the country's parliamentary elections scheduled for the spring of that year. This decision to hold the first parliamentary elections in the state since 1987 constituted one aspect of a larger project of establishing conditions of normalcy in the Valley. The election was closely tied to the issue of rehabilitation. In March, the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir constituted a rehabilitation council to encourage Kashmiri Hindu migrants to begin the process of rehabilitation by moving into security zones created in the Valley. Kashmiri Hindu organizations, including the AIKS, Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, and Panun Kashmir, among others, convened at Kashmir Bhawan to discuss the situation. The participants agreed that the conditions in the Valley were not conducive to the return of the migrant community and that ground realities should change before the migrants considered the possibility of return. Expressing concern over the council's public claim that representatives of some migrant groups had expressed a willingness to return, they asked such members of the *birādarī* to desist from their involvement in such government plans ("Official Plan on Return," 1996). "The plan of the government to send them back to obtain a political mileage at the time of parliamentary elections is another attempt to use this community as pawns before gun totting terrorists," wrote several senior community leaders in a letter to the editor of *Koshur Samachar* (Vaishnavi, Khosa, and Kumar 1996: 52).

Gadoo addressed the elections in terms of secularism and democracy:

> Though Kashmiri Hindus firmly believe in the democratic process which would ultimately lead to peaceful solution of the Kashmir problem, the manner and the undue haste in which the Government of India announced elections made the whole exercise meaningless and farcical. India needs a radical change, a shift from its dependence on Muslim communalism at the national level as well as at the international level. The present set up with its ideological commitment to Muslim communalism for power must be put an end to if India, its secular character and its democracy have to survive. The time has come for the initiation of united Hindu movements to save this country from disintegration. If Muslim Jehad succeeds in Kashmir, India will disintegrate. Our worst experience has been with most of the

> political parties in India, which have indirectly played the same game of promoting Muslim separatism to serve their political ends. Most of these parties sought to present Kashmir on a platter to the fundamentalist and separatist forces (1996: 16).

This discursive framing resonates with the Hindu nationalist political position that secular nationalist political parties have effectively promoted fundamentalism and separatism through their policies of "appeasing" Muslim minority communities at the expense of Indian Hindus.

Traditional political parties fared well in the parliamentary elections. The National Conference Party, which boycotted the parliamentary elections in May 1996, agreed to participate in the state assembly elections in September 1996 only after the new prime minister, H. D. Deve Gowda, promised "maximum autonomy" for Jammu and Kashmir. The National Conference won the polls, and Farooq Abdullah became chief minister of the Jammu and Kashmir State. Shortly after assuming power, Abdullah announced that he would coordinate a rehabilitation effort to facilitate the return of the Kashmiri Hindus to the Valley and thereby "restore the historic ethos and values disrupted by militancy" ("Rs 28 Billion Package," 1997). The new state government announced the creation of an Apex Committee to prepare short- and long-term solutions to the problem of migration and rehabilitation and a subcommittee, headed by Moti Lal Koul, to prepare an Action Plan for the safe and honorable return of migrants to the Valley. These developments occurred without the support of Kashmiri Hindu community leaders, who vehemently opposed the state government's rapid movement towards rehabilitation of the migrant community.

An escalation in violent attacks against Kashmiri Hindus living in Kashmir Valley called into question the state government's assertion that the elections had brought normalcy to the region. On March 22, 1997, suspected militants killed seven Kashmiri Hindu men in Sangrampora, a hamlet twenty miles south of Srinagar in Badgam District in the Valley. This attack left a strong impression on the Kashmiri Hindu community, especially in light of the state government's discussions of incentives for rehabilitation. Kashmiri Hindu migrant organizations in various cities—Jalandhar, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Kohlapur, Indore, Dharamsala—responded to the massacre with meetings, resolutions, demonstrations, and processions. Condemning the attacks, these various local organizations sharply criticized the National Conference government for its failure to protect Kashmiri Hindus remaining in the Valley. Gadoo issued a letter to the president of India, noting that "under these circumstances it seems that return of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits to their birthplace is impossible in the near future" (1997a: 28).

Another attack occurred in Gool hamlet of Udhampur District on June 15, when men dressed in camouflage uniforms stopped the Gool-Ramban bus, removed the Hindu passengers, and shot three of them in a nearby drainage ditch. The victims were Kashmiri Hindu schoolteachers in the Government Higher Secondary School of Gool. Migrant organizations, including the Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, the All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference, Panun Kashmir, Panun Kashmir Movement, and the

teacher fraternity, organized a condolence meeting at Rajinder Park in Jammu. The teacher fraternity demanded that the state government transfer all Kashmiri Hindu employees then posted in dangerous places in Doda, Rajouri, Udhampur, and Poonch to safer area or to the headquarters in Jammu. Both of these attacks, at Sangrampora and Gool, prompted fresh migrations of Kashmiri Hindus from those areas.

Despite these violent episodes, the Koul Subcommittee continued with its rehabilitation program, meeting with groups of migrants living in camps in late May in Delhi and in early June 1997 in Jammu. M. L. Koul told journalists after the meetings that the migrants felt that their return to the Valley could only occur when the majority community came forward "to protect the honour" of the minority and that the proposed rehabilitation package would be useless "if the majority turned their faces away" as they had done in 1989. The migrants, he said, claimed that communication was occurring at the individual level between the minority and majority communities, but that such "social dialogue" needed to be raised to the group level in order for rehabilitation to occur ("Liberal Package," 1997). Based on these meetings, the Koul Subcommittee issued its interim report in July 1997. The report recommending a series of specific short and long-term strategies for facilitating rehabilitation was offered to Prime Minister I. K. Gujral on his visit to Srinagar in July.

Kashmiri Hindu community leaders, frustrated by their exclusion from these meetings, accused the Koul Subcommittee of misrepresenting the aspirations of the migrant community, claiming that "stooges" and "henchmen" operating within the community presented statements about the desire of the migrants to return home (see *Koshur Samachar*, August 1997). Dwarkanath Munshi, the former president of AIKS, wrote in a special report:

> The [Vakil] committee went wandering around in its efforts to meet individuals and sundry. What do they go out to offer or talk about without any formal authority? And what would they be able to take back with them without having the elementary knowledge and understanding of the multi-dimensional problems of the community in exile, dispersed in widespread areas, and of each family and each individuals?" (1997: 26).

His report emphasized the importance of Kashmiri Hindu political participation in the affairs of the state, demanding six seats for the minority community in the state assembly for the next twenty-five years and three representatives in Parliament. The Panun Kashmir Movement, following an emergency meeting in Jammu, called the interim report "a dangerous trap for our hapless community" and reiterated its demand for a separate homeland in the east and north of the river Jhelum ("Reactions," 1997: 25).[7]

The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi hosted a series of special seminars to formulate official responses to the interim report specifically, and the rehabilitation proposal more

generally. An article in *Koshur Samachar* clearly stated the position of the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi:

> The Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi, is of the firm view that Kashmiri Pandits have an inalienable right to go back to their homes and hearths in Kashmir as and when normalcy is restored in the Valley. The gimmickery resorted to by the State government will not in any case inspire the migrants to go back in accordance with the government's wishes but they would definitely go back to their homes as soon as the law and order situation in the State becomes convincingly conducive to their return (Gadoo 1997b: 5).

In the meantime, the article said, the migrants needed improvements in community relief, including matters of jobs, admissions to the higher educational institutes and professional colleges, and collective representation in various sectors of the administration and the legislature. In August, a group of Kashmiri Hindu associations issued a set of conditions for the return of the migrants to the Valley: (*1*) the integration of Jammu and Kashmir State into the "secular, constitutional fabric of India" through the abrogation of Article 370; (*2*) the reversal of the precedence of Muslims in the government and society of the state; (*3*) the re-establishment of demographic balance between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and Jammu; and (*4*) the restoration of Kashmiri Hindu houses, lands, and temples ("What Must Be Done," 1997).

In January 1998, the Jammu and Kashmir State government announced a twenty-eight billion rupee rehabilitation package for Kashmiri Hindu migrants who left Kashmir Valley during the militancy. The package included a rehabilitation incentive of Rs. 100,000 for each family willing to return to the Valley, a reconstruction grant of Rs. 150,000 for each house, a sustenance allowance of Rs. 3,000 to those migrants employed in the private sector, waivers of loans, and incentives for unemployed youths. It also authorized the creation of an authority of Protector General of Migrant Properties and the establishment of transit settlements at Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag for those migrants willing to return. This rehabilitation scheme, which had been under development for several years, was premised on the idea of the return of normalcy in the state. Coupled with the resumption of electoral democracy, it suggested that the time for the reversal of both the militancy and the migration had finally arrived.

The massacre of twenty-three Kashmiri Hindus in their homes at Wandhama village, near Ganderbal, on the night of January 25, 1998, the eve of Republic Day and the night of Shab-e-Qadr, the holiest night of the month of Ramzān, severely set back the state's plans for rehabilitation during this period. Kashmiri Hindu migrant organizations in Delhi responded vehemently, launching public protests against the state government. These organizations called on the Central Government to dismiss Farooq Abdullah's administration in Jammu and Kashmir and reconsider the rehabilitation schemes. Members of the community widely discussed the Wandhama

massacre, which received extensive coverage in the national media and also in community publications. The Kashmiri Samiti Delhi devoted an entire issue of *Koshur Samachar* to the massacre, featuring editorial articles as well as photographs from the scene of violence. The Wandhama massacre, even more so than the previous attacks, convinced community members that the newly elected state government had not implemented the necessary conditions for the safe and honorable return of the migrants to their homes.

Provisional Homecomings

In the late 1990s, as migrant associations continued to highlight the insecure conditions of the state, stories began to circulate throughout the community about Kashmiri Hindus who were safely beginning to visit their home villages in the Valley. Although community leaders remained skeptical, many migrants were seriously debating the notion of returning home. These debates played themselves out within the pages of *Koshur Samachar*. I present several of these examples in order to shed light on voices that ran counter to community discourse during this period and also to highlight the ways in which these alternate voices were contained by powerful responses circulating in the sphere of public culture.

In one example, A. K. Kachroo, a former executive member of Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, published a letter outlining his twelve-day visit to Srinagar, the Khīr Bhavānī shrine, and the Śaṅkarācārya temple in July. "During my short stay," he wrote, "I have not heard any gun shots from anywhere in the Valley." He closed his letter by saying, "I now hope that, with such a change in the situation, the migrant Kashmiri Pandits will be able to return to their places of birth with honour and dignity" (Kachroo 1997: 39).

In response to this letter, P. K. Raina, another former member of the Executive Council, published a letter in the next issue urging Kachroo to desist from making such unwarranted suggestions about the return of the Kashmiri Hindus to the Valley. "Shri Kachroo has been attending the Executive Council meetings and should be well aware of the sentiments of the members," he wrote.

> He should have also taken note of the whole community's rejection of the Apex Committee's report set up by the State government on the return of the migrants....Some distressed among us may conclude that his letter is politically motivated and somebody in the opposite camp is in touch with such persons to create chaos, confusion and a dent in the rank and file of the community (P. Raina 1997: 41).

Similarly, Sunil Bharti published a letter in the November issue asking why *Koshur Samachar*, as the voice of the community, would publish such a "self-contradictory and factually incorrect" account. "Shri Kachroo has, in fact, revealed his double face, when he asks migrant Kashmiri Pandits to return to the Valley," he wrote. "He

should rush to his home and hearth if ever he is a migrant. In case he does not do that, he must keep quiet and lend this advice to his family" (Bharti 1997: 39).

Similar debates were raised by an essay called "Paradise Revisited" published in the September 1997 issue of the magazine. Professor S. L. Pandit, the author of the piece, wrote that, in the context of the rapid deterioration of the situation from 1990–96, Kashmir Valley offered "a vastly improved scenario in many respects":

> Speaking personally, I felt that all who chanced to meet me at the Government College for Women or at the University Campus were pleased to meet me. This feeling of genuine welcome moved me most emotionally during my brief stay at my native village of Kulgam in the Anantnag District and my visit to the Khir Bhawani shrine at Tulamula....Obviously, the people at large are fed up with the futile recurring phases of violence prevailing for over six years. I realized this change of popular mood when on July 27 I walked all by myself right across Habbakadal up to Ganpatyar and back through Karan Nagar to my place of stay at the Ramakrishna Mission Center, Chota Bazar (1997: 18–19).

He made a final appeal to his displaced and dispersed brethren: "the process of destruction wrought by man or Nature can be swift and vast in scale. But the task of reconstruction involves time and earnest and honest efforts over a longer stretch of time by all government-controlled or private agencies" (Pandit 1997: 19).

This article prompted harsh responses from members of the community. "What does the writer want to convey?" asked one letter writer.

> That the situation in Srinagar is normalising and that a Pandit like him can walk from Karan Nagar to Ganpatyar via Habba Kadal. Is that all what a Kashmiri Pandit would need? Such a write-up may win him kudos from the Kashmir rulers but it would hardly instil any confidence in the community to return to their homes and hearths (Pandita 1997: 38).

Pandit responded in the January issue that he had merely been trying to point out some welcome changes in the Valley, which could be considered as "a symbolic beginning for future action" by rulers in Delhi, Jammu, and Kashmir (1998: 43).

In a final example, S. N. Kaul published a lengthy account of his visit to Kashmir Valley in 1997. He contrasted the turbulence, tight security arrangements, and intense sensation of danger that characterized the region in 1994 and 1995 with the crowded greetings, bursts of emotion (genuine, he says, or not), and public festivities that were taking place in 1997. He noted public festivities, traffic jams, flirting young couples, and an absence of *burqās*. His experiences led him to wonder what was happening in "the mind of the Muslim":

> In one word they are disillusioned. They seem, at last, to have realised the futility of the misadventure they are involved in. They are desperate to come out. Some of

> the people I exchange ideas with openly admit their mistake....So the man in the street—the labourer, the driver, the small shopkeeper and the farmer, whose sentiment had been used by Pakistan—is suffering from fatigue and is ready to go back to his earlier life. He needs no face-saving....The elite—the doctor, the professor, the lawyer and the bureaucrat—has adopted a friendly attitude and generally tries to avoid the subject. He needs a face-saving. Everyone has accepted the present government. Everyone says the elections were rigged and did not vote but they wouldn't care less. They are not complaining as long as someone relieves them of the menace of militancy (S. Kaul 1997: 11).

Despite his observation that "Kashmir is fast returning to normal," he continues to approach the prospect of homecoming cautiously. The Koul plan, he writes, seems sensible on paper, but it needs to be backed by "sincerity of intention and of implementation." "A non-Kashmiri cannot live in Kashmir but a Kashmiri can live anywhere. We are in no hurry to go [back]. We will go only when constitutional and political steps are taken to guarantee that history does not repeat itself for all times to come" (S. Kaul 1997: 13).

Interrogating the Discourse of Recovery

After 1990, the Kashmiri Hindu migrant community emerged as a powerful political actor through the strategic production and circulation of forms of community discourse that sought to produce a homogeneous moral community with a single form of attachment to homeland. Through this discourse, community associations emphasized the community's vulnerability as a victimized minority in ways that resonated with broader concerns among the Indian middle class about their own uncertain positionalities at a time of significant political and economic transformation in the country as a whole. Community demands for the "right to return" under specified conditions articulated with Hindu nationalist renderings of Indian pride and strength. In this way, the notion of return to homeland became caught up within the "conservative revolution" of Hindu nationalism that was premised on and also reacting to significant transformations in the fields of culture and politics in India at that time (Hansen 1999). Community return, it seemed, could only be possible through a radical restriction of national political culture and a shift from the policies of secularism to a politics of majoritarianism.

To what extent did these community discourses prove effective as mechanisms of social control within the community? The letters to *Koshur Samachar* suggest that many Kashmiri Hindu migrants were developing very different forms of attachment to homeland than those constructed through community discourse. As I have explored through reference to my ethnographic data elsewhere (Duschinski 2007), the possibility of rehabilitation was very much on the table during my fieldwork in New Delhi the late 1990s. In the midst of government-sponsored schemes and violent massacres in Kashmir Valley, migrants in New Delhi were actively

engaged in the process of discussing and debating the feasibility of return at the individual and community level by exchanging stories about short trips that they had taken to their neighborhoods and villages in Kashmir Valley to visit relatives, explore business opportunities, celebrate religious festivals, or make pilgrimages. These types of "provisional returns" (Long and Oxfeld 2004) and the stories they engendered gave community members a chance to learn what had happened to their properties and to begin the process of re-establishing relationships with their former friends and neighbors. It also gave them a chance to weigh the risks of more permanent forms of resettlement.

At the time of these provisional returns, migrant families had spent a decade away from their homeland, integrating into the towns and cities where they worked and lived. For some migrants, provisional returns directed their attention back towards home. These individuals and families considered possibilities of return under new conditions that were not contained within the discourse of recovery. They told stories suggesting that their homes had new meanings for them now and that they wished to return to the region differently and build connections to new neighborhoods, villages, and towns. For others, provisional returns highlighted the impossibility or undesirability of a permanent homecoming. Their stories indicated that they would never live in their homes again, even if they had the opportunity. All in all, these various orientations toward homeland, such as those represented in the letters to the editor, suggested the heterogeneity of stances that ran counter to the standard form of attachment articulated and circulated in community discourse at that time.

Notes

1. Freitag (1989), Pandey (1990), and others have described the way in which British colonial policies effectively fragmented Indian society into communities based on common interests with representative political leadership, thus giving rise to lasting patterns of communalism. Rai (2004) examines these processes in Kashmir during the period of Dogrā rule.

2. Bose (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of the political complexities of the Kashmir conflict.

3. Victims included Prem Nath Bhatt, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh leader and advocate; N. K. Ganjoo, the judge who issued the death sentence on account of treason to JKLF leader Maqbool Butt; Lassa Koul, the head of Doordarshan TV in Srinagar; and Tikka Lal Taploo, the vice president of the Jammu and Kashmir unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

4. K. Kaul (2002) and Khanna (2002) provide published accounts of departures.

5. Parimoo (1995) provides a comprehensive account of the situation facing the migrants at that time in Jammu.

6. The Advisory Council included many members of the national political elite. Dwarkanath Munshi acted as the president of AIKS and the convener of the

Advisory Council. Members of the Advisory Council, which was formed in February 1992, included: P. N. Dhar, former principal secretary to the prime minister; P. L. Handoo, former minister Jammu and Kashmir State; R. N. Kao, former security advisor to the prime minister; Hirdey Kaul, general; P. K. Kaul, former cabinet secretary and ambassador; R. N. Kaul, former senior executive of Air India; T. N. Kaul, former foreign secretary and ambassador; T. N. Khushoo, former secretary to Government of India; and M. M. K. Wali, former home secretary and lieutenant governor of Delhi.

7. The Panun Kashmir Movement is a splinter group that broke away from Panun Kashmir in 1993. The Panun Kashmir Movement is committed to the Homeland Resolution and to the perspective that Kashmiri Muslims, and not simply Pakistanis, are responsible for the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits. Panun Kashmir, in contrast, does not emphasize the role of the Kashmiri Muslims and maintains links to the Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which provided relief to migrants arriving in Jammu in 1990 (Evans 2002).

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