Religion, Armed Conflict, and the Quest for "Secular": Mapping Martyrdom in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT *Religion is bivalent. It can be argued that religion is an instrument of peace and equivocally the role of religion in conflicts can be voiced as well. Religion can be a motivation to perpetuate violence; it can also be a background to conflict or it can be the means and end for parties involved in the conflict. Armed conflict has been a key feature of contemporary world politics, and its relation with religion would be interesting to probe into. Kashmir has been a festering political problem with little global attention. Intangible political positions have led to shame and humiliation. Kashmir has to resort to 'scapegoating' in the form of a 'body of a militant' as a sacrifice. The failure of the secular world to deliver on its secular promises in the form of the right to self-determination is increasingly turning the local populace to transcendental means to achieve the secular. This paper will try to contextualize the quest for "secular" while examining the construction of Muslim identity, the institution of martyrdom, and its societal basis in Kashmir.*

Introduction

I n 1947, when India and Pakistan became political realities, Kashmir remained an ambiguity. In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) the majority of the Muslim population (77 percent in whole of J&K and 92 percent in Kashmir Valley) was ruled by a Hindu Dogra ruler. If geography and religion were to determine the accession, then it would have been feasible for the *Maharaja* (prince) to accede to Pakistan.[1] Almost all of J&K's major geographical communications and economic links were congruent with the areas of Western Punjab and North West Frontier Province that were to become part of Pakistan. However, despite the Muslim majority, the political inclination of the leadership was uncertain, ambiguous, and divided. The Jammu massacre, the Poonch rebellion,[2] and the subsequent war finally forced India to refer the issue to the UN on January 1, 1948.[3] In response to the Indian complaint, the UN established the Commission for India and Pakistan to play a mediating role in Kashmir. With no respite in fighting between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the UN Security Council adopted a detailed resolution instructing the commission to proceed at once to the Indian subcontinent and establish offices and mediation at the disposal of the governments of India and Pakistan to facilitate the necessary measures by the two governments, both to help establish peace and order as well as a plebiscite, in cooperation with one another and with the commission.[4] However, no resolution has been implemented and the conflict has entered intangibility. A full-blown armed conflict started in 1989, which was preceded by the two wars fought over the territory by India and Pakistan and followed by another war in 1999.[5] The armed conflict in Kashmir has claimed more than 70,000 lives.[6] In the last decade, it has also witnessed huge protests and killings. On August 5, 2019, India abolished Article 370, which had symbolically been a source of political autonomy for Kashmir.[7] The instrument of accession signed between Maharaja and India was conditional. J&K became a special autonomous political unit within India, with only defense, communications, and external affairs to be maintained by the central government in India, while other matters would be the prerogative of the J&K government. Hence J&K had to have a separate flag, a separate constitution, and a separate prime minister and president.[8] An important provision within the J&K was that only the citizens of J&K could own property in the territory. This protected the larger autonomy and prevented any demographic changes. However the provisions of Article 370 were diluted by subsequent Indian governments and the final nail in the coffin was provided by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, which completely abrogated Article 370 on August 5, 2019.[9]

Problematizing Concepts

The word 'militant' is used to denote an armed rebel, freedom fighter, insurgent, or in local Kashmiri parlance, someone known as a *Mujahid*. The word

'terrorist' is often used by opponents of militant cause to demonize and dehumanize the individual or group of individuals. While the term 'militant' is loaded with the agency, the word 'terrorist' is devoid of any agency. The local newspapers in Kashmir often used the word 'militant' to mean an individual

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who had rebelled against the Indian state and picked up weapons to pursue the same case. The Indian state geared up for strong reprisal, particularly after August 2019, against newspapers and journalists.[10] Media was coerced to tow the statist narrative. Hence militancy became terrorism and militants became terrorists. For the purpose of this paper, we have used the terms "militant" and "militancy" to encompass a wide range of references and labels. We have used the term "militant" objectively to mean an individual who challenges the writ of the Indian state in Kashmir and has picked up weapons to pursue the cause of self-determination, plebiscite, freedom from Indian control, merger to Pakistan, or endorse the cause of Islamic polity as against Indian polity.

Another concept that needs elaboration is the concept of secularism. The realm of this paper does not dwell on the genealogical approach adopted by Talal Asad. It focuses more on the benign approach in locating contradictions of Islamism and its confrontations with secularism in the Kashmir context.[11] Secularism has been negotiated by Kashmiris to cater to different frames and references. Secularism is the antithesis of religion in the framework in which secularism is seen as an ideology outside Islam. Secularism is a neutral value in the frame where it is a value that is Universalist. Secularism is used by apologists to survive in Islamophobic frames. Secularism is embraced when the perceived secular powers need to be turned in favor of a cause. The concept of secularism in Kashmir is thus used as a slur, abuse, a virtue, a value, an unnecessary evil, or even a utilitarian construct. The people interviewed during this research also adopted a similar line.[12] Some wanted to be identified with secularism to counter Islamophobia, while others saw secularism as entrenched in the institutions of the modern international system. Others saw it as a utilitarian construct used by those in power, needing to be negotiated by the weak and oppressed. The goal of self-determination entrenched in UN resolutions is an ambivalent concept in Kashmir. Here the paper also introduces the concept of structural or institutional secularism. The legitimacy of the "right to self-determination" is often attributed by militant leaders to the UN resolutions.[13] The invocation of the UN and its resolutions in speeches, pamphlets, and propaganda material of militant leaders signifies the trust and reliance on the concept of "secular," which is often labeled structural secularism. While talking about self-determination and UN resolutions, Kashmiris take on the

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role of international lawyers to build a case for themselves in international society. While invalidating international society and the UN as failures, Kashmiris step in the shoes of skeptics and victims of the international system, which brags and boasts about justice, peace, and freedom. In general, the use and abuse of secular structuralism stem from the desperation of being weak and oppressed or the strategic need to use everything as deterrence against a powerful enemy.

Militancy in Kashmir

Since its inception in 1989, militancy in Kashmir has been a "symbolic military engagement" rather than a hardcore guerilla military movement. Almost all popular militant commanders in Kashmir establish their charisma in socio-political domains rather than the militant arena. Mohammad Yousuf Shah, aka Syed Salahudin, the supreme commander of the United Jihad Council, has the charisma of a holy saint and is known as *pir baba* (revered saint) by most of his followers. He is a political science postgraduate and former *Jamaat-e-Islami* member in charge of the Srinagar district. He was also one of the Muslim United Front (MUF) candidates in the "rigged" elections of 1987.[14]

Burhan Wani, a popular militant commander killed in July 2016,[15] too banked upon what could be termed as "sacred sacrificial charisma." The term "sacred sacrificial charisma" has not been used in its anthropological sense here. When young boys join a militant group in Kashmir, they are not trained for any specific guerrilla warfare, nor do they possess any special weaponry and at times have been devoid of any weapons. The sole stress is on sacrificing life. The rhetoric of martyrdom surpasses the rhetoric of fighting with valor. Thus, the charisma that one would attribute to the militants and their leaders can be classified as sacrificial charisma, and the word 'sacred' is added to it to give it religious attire in the Weberian sense. Burhan Wani was not perceived as a military leader but as a rebel who romanticized militancy, chalking out no special military strategy but using social media to his advantage. The element of sacrifice in his charisma is evident from the 'romanticizing of death' by the breed of militants that he recruited. Huge funerals and last phone calls became more important than military actions. Often when some militants are trapped in encounters, they make phone calls from their mobile phones to their family

or friends, which are recorded and shared on social media. In 2015, Burhan Wani had become the face of militancy in Kashmir. The use of social media became a novel mode of recruitment.[16] Photographs of the young Hizbul Mujahideen commander and his group began to be shared on social networking sites. Burhan and his group became household names. Rather than being active participants, like their predecessors, these militants laid back as if waiting for their turn to embrace 'martyrdom.' Most of them died without incurring severe damage to the 'enemy.' The stature and popularity of militants weren't measured by their military actions but gauged by the magnitude of crowds that swelled at their funerals. Certain myth-making machinery began to run and produce loads of sanctity and sympathy for Burhan and martyrdom. The funerals of many of these boys attracted huge crowds. Burhan Wani posed for a photograph with his comrades in 2015, which was shared widely on social media. The photograph was followed by video messages by Burhan. In these video messages, Burhan appeared as a soft-spoken, young boy inviting youth to join him in what he perceived as the righteous path of *jihad*. In fact, after one such video message, a policeman, namely Naseer Pandit, joined Burhan along with his service rifle.[17] Zakir, an engineering student, joined Burhan after leaving a letter for his parents that read: "Don't try and look for me. Jihad is the only way forward. It is the only way to deal with the atrocities faced by Kashmiris."[18]

Isaac, popularly known by his classmates as Isaac Newton for his intelligence and knowledge of physics, too joined Burhan and was subsequently killed within one year. During an encounter, he had inscribed the following cou-

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plet in his handwriting on the wall of the house where he was holed up, which loosely translates as: "Struggle with religious conviction, let your love conquer the world, As these are the only tools left with a true believer."[19]

The funerals of these militants were celebrated rather than mourned. Women used to shower the body of the militants with flower petals and sweets. Multiple rounds of funerals were witnessed with several thousand people attracted to the perceived sacred body of a militant. On multiple occasions, charged crowds in villages fought with each other for performing the last rites and burial.

There is a pattern to the cycle of militancy. A young boy joins militants. His gun-brandishing photographs are circulated on social media. Thousands of government forces set up barriers and search operations in a location and the militant is often trapped. He makes a phone call to his family, asking them to pray for him. The family puts on a brave face, often asking the militant to embrace martyrdom. These phone conversations are then circulated on social media.[20] Occasionally the militant's family is bought to the site and motivates the militant to surrender. But more often than not, the surrender offer is refused. There is a sporadic exchange of fire and soon the house hosting the militant is blasted. The body of the militant is recovered and occasionally government forces mutilate the body. The body is then handed over to the family for a funeral ceremony. Huge funerals are witnessed.[21] Crowds swell up and on occasion, multiple rounds of funerals are offered. Often militants appear to present a gun salute to their departed comrade. Soon another boy(s) joins militancy and more or less the whole cycle is repeated. Lately, since the breakdown of the coronavirus pandemic, the bodies of militants killed in encounters have not been handed to families but buried in secluded locations to prevent the assembly of crowds at funerals. Several analysts view the refusal of government forces to handover the bodies of militants as a tactic to break the cycle of militancy recruitment.[22]

Militancy in Kashmir often caters to three facets. On one front, it makes a desperate appeal to an international audience, and on another front, it tries to gain social roots in Kashmir. On the last front, it tries to achieve its territorial goal of 'self-determination.' While catering to the international audience it assumes its audience is a liberal secular world and its institutions. In trying to

gain social roots it tries to sway opinions with the concepts of 'sacred sacrifice' and 'martyrdom' and build on a 'puritan consent' that would reproduce militancy every time it is under threat. While talking about its goal of the right to self-determination it invokes its victimized past and constructs its victimhood as people marred by authoritative regimes in past.

Seeds of Militancy in Kashmir

In 1947, Sheikh Abdullah took over as the head of the National Conference regime, under the ultimate sovereignty of the Indian state. Under the terms of the accession, the government of J&K retained jurisdiction on all matters except foreign affairs, defense, and communications, which were ceded to the government of the Indian Union. Kashmir's autonomy was subsequently codified in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, adopted in 1949. According to this article, the power of the Indian Parliament to make laws for the state would be limited to defense, external affairs, and communications. The government of J&K had complete jurisdiction over other areas of governance, including its own flag, legislative assembly, and constitution. Meanwhile, the government of India was continuously pressuring and influencing the state government to accept more and more provisions of the Indian Constitution. Abdullah was, however, in favor of a plebiscite, the idea that by now was an anathema for the Indian government.[23]

Sheikh Abdullah was sent to jail for 11 years and a new regime was implanted in J&K. In the aftermath of the dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953, Mirza Afzal Beg took over the reins of politics in Kashmir. Patronized by Sheikh Abdullah, he founded the Plebiscite Front in 1955.[24] The ruling National Conference headed by Indian protégé Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad became for all practical purposes the Srinagar branch of Jawahar Lal Nehru's Indian National Congress. The slogan of the Plebiscite Front "Our Demand Plebiscite" helped it to reduce Bakshi's National Conference to a non-entity in Kashmir's political arena.[25]

Sheikh Abdullah signed an accord with the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. Many people both within the Plebiscite Front and outside saw it as a betrayal of what was conceived as a struggle for the right to self-determination. Though Sheikh announced the dissolution of the Plebiscite Front, fringe elements began to look for alternative ways of dissent. Student organizations like *Jamiat-e-Tulaba*, the Young Men League, the Revolutionary Front, etc. began to sprout and were opposed to both Sheikh Abdullah and his politics. *Jamiat-e-Tulaba* acted as the student wing of *Jamaat-e-Islami* and attracted middle-class college students, driven by religious zeal and fervor. Though *Jamaat-e-Islami* as a socio-political organization had shown its considerable

presence in Kashmir since 1947, it never really translated into an electoral victory.[26] In 1972, Jamaat managed to win five seats in assembly elections, which was the highest since it entered into the electoral fray. *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kashmir, however, functioned as a separate organization as such, not merging or even coalescing with *Jamaat-e-Islami* Hind, but maintained connections with *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan. Jamaat also ran a number of schools in the valley and was increasing its mass base despite occasional bans on its programs. Jamaat was emerging as a chief rival to Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference. Thus, what was unfolding in the valley, and how political realignment had taken place in it could be explained and examined by the events of April 4, 1979. On this day, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the head of the Pakistan People's Party and ex-prime minister of Pakistan, was hanged by Zia-ul-Haq –the military dictator who had dismissed the civilian government. In Kashmir Valley, as the news of the hanging reached the people, mobs in frenzy convinced by the role of *Jamaat-e-Islami* in the hanging attacked and burnt the property of the members and sympathizers of Jamaat.[27] This generated political sympathy for it in the Pakistani regime led by Gen. Zia-ul-Haq. Jamaat became the de facto representational institution that represented secessionism and Pakistan in Kashmir. Jamaat replaced the older parties and institutions like Mirwaiz as the foremost pro-Pakistan party in Kashmir.

In 1980, a proposal to organize an international Islamic conference was propounded by Jamaat and its allies, and although efforts were being made by the state government to thwart it, finally a large number of international delegates were sent an invitation for the conference in Srinagar, including Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdullah –the then head clergy in the holy mosque of Mecca. This was the first attempt to bring Kashmiri Muslims on the map of global struggles that were becoming popular in the Muslim world. This phase has been termed by many insiders of Jamaat and its sister organization as a phase of awakening. Many individual efforts had already begun to organize Kashmiri Muslims motivated by the global happenings of the Muslim world. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Palestinian struggle, and the beginning of the Afghan jihad could be traced as the key events that had a marked influence on young Kashmiri Muslims. The sheikh-led government ordered mass arrests of Jamaat members and activists, prominent among them were student leaders like Sheikh Tajamul Islam and Dr. Ayub Thakur. Fearing arrests, many of these activists went underground and participated in closet meetings rather than public gatherings; some of these meetings advocated armed struggle against the Indian state.

By 1984, more than a dozen Jamaat members crossed to Afghanistan via different routes and ended up in camps of *Hizb-e-Islami* –a Jamaat-backed, Pakistan-supported militant group that was fighting during the Soviet Union occupation of Afghanistan and was comprised of many *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan members, led by Gulbudin Hekmatyaar.[28] After training, these Jamaat

members headed back home to Kash-
mir but kept waiting for the final nod
from their leaders to wage an armed
struggle. In continuation of the plan,
a group named *Hizb-e-Islami* Kashmir
organized a secret meeting of 25 indi-
viduals who were already associated
with different political formations that
advocated the right to self-determi-

In 1987, the parties that had been advocating liberation or plebiscite decided to contest elections under an umbrella organization, the Muslim United Front

nation. This two-day meeting culminated with a proposal to form a mother
organization with *Jamaat-e-Islami* at the forefront to lead an armed struggle.
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their predecessors kept waiting for the green light from leadership.[29]

In 1987, the parties that had been advocating liberation or plebiscite decided
to contest elections under an umbrella organization, the Muslim United Front.
However, with rumors of large-scale rigging, people, particularly the youth
of the valley, became disillusioned and were searching for means other than
the ballot. With Governor Jagmohan at the helm of affairs adopting repressive
measures, more youth became disillusioned; people who were associated with
student activism or student wings of political parties in the MUF began to look
for 'politics by other means.' By 1988, another group of youth crossed over to
Muzaffarabad (Pakistan) for arms training; this group later came to be known
as the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). In late 1988, some groups of
these armed men began to introduce themselves by an organizational name.
Maqbool Illahi named his group al-Hamza with Abdullah Bangroo in its ranks;
Ashraf Dar named his group Zia Tigers; Ansarul Islam headed by Nasir-ul-Is-
lam and many such groups existed, which had ideological resonance but yet
functioned in isolation. Most of these groups had cadres that were ideologically
motivated by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* or its concerns. Efforts were being made to
bring these small groups under one banner. In this regard, a meeting of various
organizations took place in the last week of October1989, and by the first week
of November, these groups suspended their individual party names and the
new formation was named the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. Though a lot of delibera-
tions are said to have taken place over the nomenclature of the new formation,
the majority of the interviewees who were interviewed in the course of this
research, which includes mostly ex-cadres and Jamaat members, believe that
the choice for the name was deliberate and meticulous, keeping in view the
two armed movements. These include the movement led by Shah Ismael Sha-
heed and Saiyad Ahmad Shaheed, known as Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen,[30] and the
armed group *Hizb-i-Islami* led by Gulbudin Hekmatyaar. The fusion of the two
above-mentioned names is to reiterate the ideological character of the new for-
mation and emphasizes the struggle as *jihad*, or holy war. This nomenclature
is also about defining the 'self' and the 'other.'[31] The definition of 'self' becomes

an Islamic warrior treading an obligatory path of *jihad* while the other is defined as an oppressor or occupier.

Militancy as the New Mysticism in Kashmir

In 1992, when Hizbul Mujahideen was organizing its new military structure, there was not much emphasis on guerilla tactics, but it aimed at mimicking the age-old model of mysticism in Kashmir. A new military structure was shaped with every section comprising 11 men, a platoon comprising 33 men, a company comprising 99 men, and a battalion comprising 313 men. An interesting thing noteworthy of mentioning is that every hierarchical unit from section to platoon follows a geometrical progression of three folds in terms of numbers and by this logic; the battalion ought to comprise 279 men instead of 313. The number 313, however, is sanctified in Islamic history, as this many men under the command of the Prophet of Islam when he successfully defeated the army of a thousand men in the battle of Badr in 624 A.D. This further exemplifies the Islamic ideological pinning of a group that was trying to construct its image as an 'Islamic warrior' fighting a 'non-Muslim other' that had an army that outnumbered it but yet it sought to defeat it via guerrilla war. This could also be seen as a deliberate attempt to invoke the holy war, or jihad, in the Kashmir context and exemplify its legality in the actual or mythical 'glorious past.' Furthermore, all sections, platoons, companies, and battalions were named after the companions of the Prophet, Islamic warriors, and chapters of the Holy Quran, Islamic

scholars, and interestingly, names of mystic saints (Sufis) that were popular in Kashmir.[32] The nomenclature influenced by mystic saints of Kashmir is a deliberate attempt to give a local character to the group. Sufi saints command respect among the local populace and are revered by the majority. Their graves are visited by a large number of followers, as well as their shrines. Shrine culture is considered syncretism in orthodox puritanical Islam, but the popularity of shrines and saints is deeply rooted in Kashmir. The Kashmiri Muslim community had always relied on shrines as a source of alternate power centers, which were more transcendental and supernatural than political. Such belief was particularly prevalent in the absence of self-rule and cold policies of foreign rulers. As Kashmiri Muslims had been consistently ruled by foreigners,[33] the eruption of armed militancy was the first of its kind. Never in history had Kashmiri Muslims rebelled against existing rulers in such a magnitude. Those who lead the rebellion and took up arms thus became popular. Those who were killed became holy martyrs. Militants, martyrdom, and militancy became new transcendental spaces and concepts. Militancy thus began to creep into the space of mysticism (Sufism) in Kashmir and became the new mysticism in Kashmir.

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Martyrdom in Kashmir

The membership framework of the militant groups laid a foremost principle that any person who aspired to join the group needed to have a firm faith in 'Islam as the perfect way of life.' The goal or agenda framework laid in 1990 states the goal of the organization as the 'right to self-determination' and 'merger with Pakistan.' The right to self-determination has been reiterated as a promised destiny as guaranteed by UN resolutions. Though organizations like *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kashmir tried their best to import the concept of ideological martyrdom, they were only partly successful. The concept of martyrdom, which is seen as a monolith by Western academia, has been twisted functionally if not structurally by Kashmiri Muslims. The performativity of martyrdom in Kashmir corresponds to the patterns of slang lexicon appropriation by the African and Asian groupings in Europe. The advent of Islam in Kashmir and European languages among the African and Asian populace followed a similar path. Both communities twisted the language and religious conceptions to their functional advantage.

Rene Girard,[34] to theorize sacrifice, used violence as a central feature of his theory. Girard introduced the principle of scapegoating, which primarily states that societies tend to use a scapegoat as a surrogate victim to divert or stop

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an unending cycle of violence. This victim is lurched away from the community thus stopping it from responding to violence and diverting the violent cycle. Burkert[35] argues that sacrifice is the experience of sacred and numerous instances of sacrifice that have been used to justify violence. Violence perpetrated under the garb of sacrifice has been tolerated. Thus members of many religious traditions characterize their death as a sacrifice or in broader terms 'martyrdom.'[36] Sacrifice thus authorizes violence against a substitute, whereby the substitute bears either physical or metaphorical resemblance to the offering. The Kashmiri society institutionalized martyrdom clearly on the patterns of 'self-sacrifice.' As it is evident in Kashmiri oral history and otherwise, Kashmiri Muslims never had a military hero in their mythical or actual past, but victims. The victimhood and suffering were thus celebrated rather than bravery and valor. In other words, sacrifice and defeat were considered virtues of heroes. Yousuf Shah the last independent sultan of Kashmir made his formal submission to Akbar in February 1586[37] with an understanding that he would be allowed to retain his throne. But he was taken prisoner and eventually exiled to Bihar, where he died in 1592. His imprisonment, exile, and defeat make him a hero in Kashmiri folklore. The saints and mystics are heroes in popular Kashmiri folklore[38] because of the sacrifices that they made –ranging from giving up on worldly comforts and luxuries to self-imposed dietary restrictions. Hence what follows from logic is that in a ritualistic society like Kashmir, 'sacrifice' is the only scale to measure sacredness. Militancy, militants, and militant organizations automatically took a cue from their predecessors. They resorted to sacrifice rather than guerilla warfare. Militant organizations thus become new shrines and gun-wielding militants become new mystics. Militant and political leaders in Kashmir often boasted and bragged about the number and quality of sacrifices that Kashmiri Muslims had given. The meaning of sacrifice would often mean death or confinement in jail. While bragging about sacrifices, political and militant leaders have always maintained a romantic flowery language that glamorizes death as the ultimate sacrifice. A common parlance in Kashmiri Muslims as well, death is often seen as an ultimate success, an overarching reality, a means and goal in itself. Thus if and when we talk about martyrdom operations in the Kashmir context, we actually don't mean 'suicide attacks' on perceived enemy convoys but a treatise socially grounded in the sacrifice and death of the militant.

Iannaccone studied empirically the economic or rational model in terms of collective action in strict religions.[39] He attributed to religions a club of benefits

that they offer to individuals who are its members. Such benefits, like social support or collective security and protection, are available to individuals that adhere to that religion. Thus as is evident goods can't be sold for cheap or to everyone. Thus exclusivity has to be practiced and a strict code of rules, limits, and regulations are levied on members. If they fail, they are considered fugitives or outsiders. Thus stricter forms of religion attract more members and more benefits can be distributed among its members. Examples of said benefits include societal high-handedness, honor, bravery, and heroism. An outstanding act is often cheered and regarded as a move upon the socio-religious ladder. Violence and sacrifice are such acts that make individuals of religions eligible for availing goods that are otherwise unavailable to them. Thus individuals do weigh payoffs and adhere to strict codes and participate in acts of violence and sacrifice. Kashmiri Muslim society, in the absence of actual and perceived self-rule for centuries, first resorted to shrine worship as a means to rework powerlessness and transcendental grievance redressal. More recently, to increase collective security and lay its claim over the goods of honor and bravery, the Kashmiri Muslim society is trying to institutionalize martyrdom, which it has defined as "sacrifice."

A study of Emile Durkheim's work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*[40] is essential to the sociological understanding of religion and violence. Durkheim's attribution of an ever-changing sacred to an eminently collective thing formed by beliefs and practices forms the basis of his understanding of religion and for us paves the way to explaining molded violence via religion. In Kashmiri Muslim society, the concepts of sacred and sacrifice overlap. Almost every sacrifice is considered sacred and vice versa. Any violence of the 'oppressor' that targets the body of the militant is sacred as is the pain endured by Sufi saints, mystics, and wanderers.

Social scientists presume that all religion is essentially about infusing order, meaning, and justification into life and thus protecting society from chaos. Most religions even provide an explanation of suffering and promise of reward to individuals.[41] The desire of an individual to remain part of a religious community that provides the luxury of meaning to life thus leads to his acceptability of violence if not participation. Thus the actual violence in a religious group is carried out by a small group within the religious setting with the overt, covert, submissive, or tacit support of rest. The number of militants in Kashmir is not alarming; a steady echo system is however in place that feeds militancy.

Violence is a sacred activity if carried out for God and the faithful.[42] Religious mayhem is strangely a necessary condition for salvation and utopian existence.[43] Strong correlations have been found between shame, humiliation, and violence.[44] Thus the collective memory of shame and humiliation is the key to the evocation of the oppressed near and far past, which in turn evokes streaks of

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violence. Thus to defend its present failure or disintegration, a religious community evokes a mythical past of military superiority and present disempowerment, and a need to relive the glorious past. The psychology of a religious commune is primarily constructed around shame and humiliation, thus justifying violence.[45] To intensify the humiliation, religious ideologies are used, and yet the induction of humiliation isn't psycho-pathogenesis of an individual, but extraordinary acts of violence are committed by ordinary people exhibiting no particular disorder or hyperactivity of the brain but shame, guilt, and burden.[46]

Another way in which the psychological threshold of individual yields violence via religion is sanctification. Sanctification justifies acts of violence that no ideology could otherwise do. The legality of just war traditions in religious traditions thus can be used imperatively to justify mass destruction and genocide. Many families, whose sons had joined militancy, who were interviewed during this research described the 'oppression,' actual or perceived, by the state forces in and after the 2008 uprising as the major trigger for youth joining militant ranks; however, at the same time they are of the view that there was no brain-washing, but the current political scenario motivated their sons to join what they describe with religious sanctity as *jihad*. One such militant, Dawood,[47] who joined militant ranks in 2015, was an active participant in the protests of 2010 and 2013.[48] He would often be called to police stations, which one of his friends describes as "unnecessary harassment."[49]

Conclusion

Martyrdom in Kashmir is becoming institutionalized. Festering political problems with little global attention, intangible political positions, and a sense of loss have led to shame and humiliation. The failure of the 'secular' world to deliver on its promises is increasingly turning the local populace to transcendental means to achieve the right to self-determination. The dead body of a young militant is used as a sacred tool to purify the ill-will and make signifying gestures to mock the secular world and its institutions. The Kashmiri Muslim society perceives these weighing trade-offs highly in its own favor. At present, the 'martyrdom operations' are neither for vengeance nor for big strikes against Indian forces but in a phase guided by 'sacrifice.' The revered cultural sacred is increasingly paving its way for the 'martyred sacred.' The perceived best is being sacrificed –a qualified engineer, a handsome boy, or a favorite boy of a village– to lay a claim over the "set of goods" promised by the religion. The

notions of martyrdom aren't typically the same in Kashmir as in West Asia or elsewhere. Martyrdom assumes a sacred nature only when the agency of 'innocence' and 'sacrifice' are imperative in it. Such meanings are prevalent because of how 'sacred' has been constructed in Kashmiri society and how 'secular' hasn't been condemned either. The quest for the right to self-determination is an ambivalent construct in Kashmir and is intertwined with sacred means of martyrdom. ◼
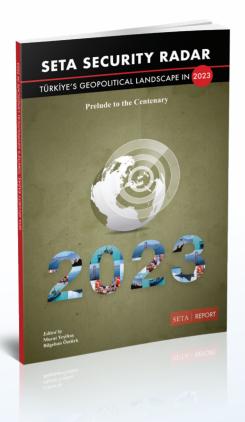
Endnotes

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