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Sramana Majumdar Dr
Ambedkar University, New Delhi, India, m_sramana@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The long-standing political conflict in the Kashmir Valley has resulted in identity based polarization and subsequent displacement of communities. Reconciliation between Hindus (also known as Pandits) and Muslims is viewed as an important step in any sustainable effort towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Valley. This paper begins by examining the much debated territorial and cultural concept of 'Kashmiriyat' and instead proposes an alternative lens that emphasizes on shared history as opposed to common identity. We approach reconciliation through a socio-psychological lens by examining the role of a shared cultural past and historical coexistence- or simply put as shared history, as a positive resource that can be appraised by facilitating intergroup contact through certain channels. The possible impediments are discussed and future directions have been outlined. The conclusion emphasizes on the need to focus on intra-communal reconciliation in populations suffering from ongoing intractable conflict, and the necessary need for future research to focus on elements like shared history and collective memory that can be essential in post conflict recovery.

Keywords: *Reconciliation, Intergroup Contact, Shared History, Collective Memory, Kashmir*

Author Bio(s)

Dr. Sramana Majumdar is Adjunct faculty at the Department of Psychology, School of Human Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi. She completed her PhD from the Department of Psychology, Jamia Millia Islamia where she worked on exposure to political conflict, collective violence and youth in Kashmir. She has also been interested in looking at gendered aspects of exposure to violence, collective memory, intergroup reconciliation and the role of identity in protracted conflict. A Fulbright- Nehru Doctoral Fellow and a UGC Senior Research Fellow, she has headed the research team at Outline India, a Research start up based out of Gurgaon, on national and international projects related to education, health and sanitation, across states in India. She was also a part of the UGC and United Kingdom Indian Education and Research Initiative team that has been working on Intergroup Contact and Collective Action in Educational settings in India. She was selected as the only representative from India to participate in the Advanced Research Training Seminar on Community Psychology, held as part of the International Congress of Psychology in South Africa, 2012. Drawing from political-social psychology, history and conflict studies, her approach to the study of intergroup conflict, violence and community argues for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary method to reintegrate psychology and highlight its essential role, within the overall discourse on conflict.

Appraising Positive Aspects of Shared History Through Contact—A Preliminary Model of Reconciliation Among Hindus and Muslims of the Kashmir Valley

Sramana Majumdar

The Valley of Kashmir has been a disputed territory since the late 1940s, when colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent was brought to an end, along with the formation of two separate states on the basis of religion, that is, Pakistan, a Muslim majority nation, and present day India with a Hindu majority. The Kashmir Valley is located between the two states and has a deeply conflicted political past that led to its inclusion within Hindu dominated India, even though it is largely a Muslim society. Irrespective of sixty years of independence and progress in this region, the Valley continues to be in a state of terror where an entire generation of people have grown up in the midst of armed violence. Over time the conflict has taken on an ethno-religious-political nature with multiple issues of identity, autonomy, state repression, militarization, economic degeneration and human rights violation. Thinking about peace and the possibilities of rebuilding a community that has been grossly affected by multiple forms of violence brings forth questions about the effectiveness of policies. It calls for innovative strategies that can draw upon the potential resources existing within a community, which may be appraised and re-appraised as a step toward instilling hope and encouraging recovery. Facilitating channels for contact that can revive a sense of shared cultural history can become a significant factor in this respect. This paper looks at relations between Kashmiri Hindus (also referred to as Pandits, who are primarily upper-caste Kashmiri Hindus) and Muslims in the present context of protracted ongoing conflict, and examines “shared history” as a positive resource for reconciliation through intergroup contact.

Background

The conflict over the land of Kashmir is historically linked to political decisions taken during the Indian Independence movement and partition of erstwhile India into Hindustan (present India) and Pakistan, an Islamic-majority state. Khan (2009) notes:

The ceasefire line agreed upon, supervised by the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, turned into the Line of Control (LOC), which became the de facto border between India and Pakistan. More than a third of the area of Jammu and Kashmir came under the control of Pakistan and is now

known as Azad Kashmir in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir in India. Likewise, the Pakistan Government refers to the part remaining in India as Occupied Kashmir, whereas in India, it is the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Vale of Kashmir was the only part of post-independence [*sic*] India that went against the overall logic of partition as it remained with India despite its Muslim majority. (p. 66)

The politics that followed were driven by sectarian vested interests that could not be integrated into a singular case for the people of Kashmir. The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was territorially carved out to include a diverse and differing political and religious demography, with Jammu being a largely Hindu region, Kashmir Valley with a Muslim majority and Ladakh, the third region of J&K, with both Islamic and Buddhist influences. The focus in this paper is specifically on the past and present dynamics in the Valley of Kashmir, the region that has been the most affected by continuous political conflict.

The post-independence era and the inclusion of the state of Kashmir within India led to a number of decisions and political choices that cumulatively escalated into a long drawn violent intractable conflict, with tensions prevailing to-date. Toward the end of the 1980s, when armed militancy was at its peak, identities and politics in the Valley became strongly polarized. Some reports suggest that an environment of fear and hostility was created in which Pandits were threatened through posters, letters, and slogans about the “Islamization” of the Valley and the possible repercussions of staying in Kashmir and/or not accepting the new way of life.

(Shekhawat, 2009; Behera, 2006). Datta (2016) mentioned the breakdown of governance and selective attacks on Pandits that escalated into a hurried exodus, where Pandit families migrated with meager belongings—leaving their land, property, homes, and businesses behind. The feeling of vulnerability and insecurity was exacerbated by reported events of violence against members of the Pandit community (Duschinski, 2008; Rothbart & Rajput, 2016).

Contrastingly, Muslim accounts retell the same incident as an organized episode, wherein Pandits were removed from the Valley by the Indian state and their representatives, in view of the possibility of military violence against Kashmiri civilians (Essa, 2011). Other scholars have pointed to the suspicion and mistrust for Pandits, among leaders of some of the main political

parties in Kashmir, though the overall claim to independence was seemingly secular and inclusive (Swami, 2003).

The events leading to the migration have remained a debatable issue, with conflicting narratives of justification from both communities (Sandilya, 2009). Regardless of the differing perspectives, the migration of Pandits has remained a significant event in the overall discourse around the conflict in Kashmir, with important implications for understanding the role of identity, communal politics, and minority rights in the Valley (Hamid, 2013; Hassan, 2010). Most importantly, it is seen as an essential step in re-establishing the long held idea of Kashmir as a peaceful society that thrives on coexistence and pluralism (Mattoo, 2003).

Kashmir Today: Intractable Conflict and the Need for Reconciliation

Several confrontations between Kashmiri civilians, militants (from Kashmir and outside), and the military and paramilitary forces of India have happened since the 1990s until the recent past, creating a situation of violence, oppression, and alienation in the Valley (Dar, 2014; Jong et al., 2006; Majumdar, 2012). Estimates range between 50,000 to 80,000 reported deaths, with the possibility of the number being much greater, as many unmarked graves have been uncovered in the Valley in recent years. It is also estimated that 25,000 women have been widowed and more than 40,000 children orphaned during this time. The unforeseen migration that happened after the outbreak of violence led to about 200,000 people becoming displaced (Khan, 2009, p. 67).

On a positive note, reconstruction efforts are visible in various sectors. Employment opportunities are being facilitated, a number of non-governmental organizations with the task of providing socioeconomic and mental health support to violence-affected communities have become operative, and education and tourism have received increased economic support. However, a majority of these visible changes have happened in the socio-economic or infrastructure sector, which being as important as it is, may not be sufficient in the process of reconciliation and conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997; Nadler, Malloy, & Fischer, 2008). Lederach (1997) believed that “tasks for transition,” i.e., infrastructural changes and developments in the socio-economic sector, are important in post-conflict reconstruction, but inadequate to establish complete transformation of a society affected by large-scale conflict. He emphasized that psychosocial reconciliation (which is similar to the idea of socio-emotional

reconciliation as proposed by Nadler & Schnabel, 2008) is essential in the process of reconciliation. Present theorizing on reconciliation reiterates this multisector view by highlighting the need to deal with the past, address attitudes, emotions, and beliefs that grow out of conflict and rebuild positive relationships (Cardenas, Paez, & Rime, 2013; Hamber, 2007).

Behera (2006) has emphasized the need for dialogue and mutual understanding in the context of Hindu-Muslim reconciliation in Kashmir. The author described how political strategies and economic plans surrounding the return of Pandits to the valley, redistribution of Pandit property, and possibilities of future coexistence, have been met with resistance from both parties, resulting in stalemate situations time and again. Other contemporary accounts and evaluations of peacebuilding initiatives in Kashmir have increasingly stressed the need to facilitate intra-communal dialogue and involve local Kashmiri groups in the process of conflict transformation. Dasgupta (2015) called attention to this, when describing the India-Pakistan composite dialogues on Kashmir, which the author believed had repeatedly excluded civil society and grassroots-level voices from the Valley.

Pandey and Maaz (2015) explored several aspects of the conflict and possible avenues toward resolution in Kashmir. As part of their larger recommendations on providing economic opportunities, increasing access to education, and building government-non governmental organization (NGO) partnerships, the authors highlighted the need for cultural exchanges, regular dialogue, discussion forums, and recreational (such as sport) activities involving youth from different communities in Kashmir.

Sonpar (2015) reviewed the work of some of the most prominent organizations in Kashmir that have been involved in providing psychosocial assistance to conflict affected populations. While some of these interventions have included both Kashmiri Muslim and Hindu participants, and have facilitated dialogue and contact, the emphasis has been on particular livelihood-based themes such as income generation for women, education and healing, and legal redressal for families of men who have disappeared or are untraceable. The majority of these projects have also been targeted at specific groups, to include women, youth, or children separately (Sonpar, 2015; Suri, 2013). Fazili (n.d.) examined the possibilities of Hindu-Muslim reconciliation in the Valley through inter-faith dialogue, emphasizing the similarities between Hindu (Bhakti) and Islamic Sufistic thought. The amalgamation of these two traditions has

been very unique to the Kashmir Valley, with shared and common spiritual figures and folklores among the two communities.

The available academic work on Kashmir has largely concentrated on regional, political, strategic, and economic aspects of the conflict (Behera, 2013; Habibullah, 2009). The increase in interest and research on reconciliation in the recent past is encouraging, and indicative of an inclusive and people-driven reconciliation in the Valley. What is however amiss in these reports is an engagement with a conceptual understanding of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations and their implications for reconciliation in Kashmir today. There is also not much evidence to suggest that alternate frameworks (drawing from community based psychosocial and socio-emotional understandings) toward reintegration and reconciliation have been attempted, along with policy-based initiatives.

Moreover, there has been a distinct difference in approach between theoretical research-based papers exploring the political, sociological, and psychological aspects of the conflict, and policy-driven work, coming out of organizational (mostly non-governmental) initiatives, that has specifically examined reconciliation, ongoing dialogue, and provided recommendations based on the same. To the author's knowledge, there has been no research exploring the specific role of collective memory or shared history and its possible relevance as a model for reconciliation in Kashmir. Thus there seems to be a gap when it comes to a holistic framework examining how aspects of history, memory, and perspectives on community (such as common or shared identity) can be applied to policy-relevant measures for reconciliation and on-ground realities in Kashmir today. Lastly, there is limited work from a social-psychological framework that applies contemporary perspectives on intergroup relations (intergroup contact and reconciliation) to this unique cultural and political context of Kashmir.

As a step in this direction, and to fill the gap in the existing literature on reconciliation in Kashmir, this paper explores socio-emotional paths to reconciliation (Nadler & Schnabel, 2008) by focusing on shared history and contact. I begin by examining the dominant ideas related to Kashmiri Hindu-Muslim reconciliation and the issues within these pertinent discourses. Thereafter, I examine *shared history* as a positive resource in the re-establishment of past friendships, by facilitating a range of possible channels for inter-communal contact. Wolfe (2011) pointed out that different religious groups in Kashmir (including Hindus and Muslims)

continue to uphold a sense of shared history and are willing to reconcile on the basis of the same. He emphasized the need to establish truth (through acknowledgement of guilt, apology) and have dialogue between communities, as well as with the national and international powers involved in the conflict. The paper builds on the same idea and focuses on a possible route to reconciliation, where positive aspects of shared history and culture are reappraised through contact. The establishment of contact is seen as a legitimate step towards facilitating mutual dialogue, encouraging sharing of experiences, and building trust.

Examining reconciliation between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims is uniquely problematic because of its deviance from a general frame of reference that has been used in reconciliation literature so far. Most studies have focused on assessing methods, possibilities, and strategies of reconciliation between groups who are the primary participants, that is, the main perpetrators and victims in a conflict situation. This article talks about reconciliation between communities within a society affected by violence, who are necessarily not the main parties to it. The conflict in Kashmir has multiple discourses surrounding it, with the most dominant being that of the occupation and separation of the Valley from the Indian state. The conflict has seen a complicated network of participants including Kashmiri youth and civilians, Indian armed forces, the Indian State, the Pakistani State, and cross border movement of militants. Thus, the estrangement of erstwhile neighborly relationships and friendships between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims of the Kashmir Valley is looked at as more of an outcome of the larger conflict between the Indian state and Kashmiri separatists, which is often why it is not taken up as a singular case of discussion either politically or by intervening humanitarian and social organizations. However, by focusing on reconciliation between these two communities, this paper argues that large-scale conflict has many ripple-down effects that disturb systems of social relationships in the region affected by violence, and it is indeed essential to include these narratives in the overall conflict resolution discourse. Interestingly this departure does not limit the generalization of this theoretical framework to other contexts. The lack of attention paid to relationships between groups within a community or nation affected by large-scale violence makes it essential to understand and explore issues addressed in this paper. The differences that exist within a community and are exacerbated by conflict often get marginalized in the post conflict narrative, making international- and civil society-based peace building initiatives

misplaced and piecemeal (Pouligny, 2005). Most recent conflicts around the world have been between territorial neighbors, or have resulted in divides within a particular physical space (for instance the Balkans), creating a constant threat perception among minorities who are part of these larger states. Where the conflict resolution framework is directed solely at re-establishing bonds between erstwhile antagonistic groups and ignores strengthening the networks and relationships between members of diverse communities within those groups, reconciliation and transformation may not be successfully achieved.

It is important here to clarify the positioning of the author, and the background to the development of this theoretical paper. The exploration of a shared past and a shared territorial and cultural space in the course of reconciliation has been lacking in the context of Kashmir. This realization emerged while exploring the literature on Kashmir, as part of another project (Majumdar, 2015). Adding to that, constant references to the migration, past Pandit-Muslim relationships and expectations for the future, were observed during field work (as part of the same project) in Srinagar, Kashmir, and among Pandit participants who had migrated to Delhi. The conceptual framework is enlightened by these observations, information, and reflections—along with inferences from past studies supported by other theoretical and cross-cultural work on shared history and collective memory. The paper is an effort to explore the possibility of future dialogue and thinking, given the directions presented here. The paper hopes to encourage future efforts in research and policy in Kashmir by putting forward this framework that is culturally relevant, yet draws from contemporary international discourses.

Secondly, the paper brings to light difficulties and possibilities of reconciliation in ongoing conflict as opposed to post-conflict situations. It has now been widely accepted that protracted ongoing conflict situations present specific challenges in analysis and intervention that need to be addressed separately from the dominant post-conflict framework (Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer, & Higson-Smith, 2013). Thus, the article hopes to expand the general discourse by revealing shared history as a source of reconciliation between smaller communities (majority and minority groups who are both part of a larger community affected by violence) in ongoing conflict.

Multiple Narratives of “Kashmiriyat” as a Common Identity

The identity of belonging to Kashmir has been closely associated with the movement for self-determination and claims for separation. For the Muslims of the Valley, it remains a salient reminder of the unique and exclusive identity of the people of Kashmir, with specific claims to ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural roots. This regional identity has often been upheld as inclusive of all people of Kashmir, irrespective of ethnic and religious orientations (Aggarwal, 2008). Many socio-political and historical accounts reiterate a composite and multi-religious essence of the Kashmiri society prior to the conflict. Bamotra (2012) describes “Kashmiriyat” as that collective living between all people of Kashmir that accepted and respected religious differences. Reports also suggest that initial leaders of the movement for self-determination viewed the Pandits as an integral part of the state of Kashmir, and the communalization of the movement was not supported (Behera, 2006).

On the other hand, scholars have challenged the common perception of an integrated shared identity, pointing to the historical, religious, and political discrepancies in this narrative (Hassan (2010; Tak, 2013). Studies report on the power dynamics between the two communities prior to the migration, where both saw the other as privileged and favored by the State (Sudan, 2007). Such multiple and opposing accounts of a common identity is not peculiar to Kashmir. Bikman (2013) points out a similar feature in Bosnian narratives of pre-war Yugoslavia, where stories of coexistence were intermixed with fear and threat.

The idea and understanding of Kashmiriyat has been challenged further through the years of conflict, where communal identities have been increasingly politicized and polarized (Bamotra, 2012; Hamid, 2013). Behera (2006) talks about the growing independent identity among displaced Kashmiri Pandits, some of whom have been demanding a separate land within Kashmir exclusively for Hindus. Hassan (2010) points out that among the migrated Kashmiri Pandits, there is a gradual alignment with ideologies and political identity of the larger Hindu majority of India, which was not the case prior to the mass migration. Akhter (2012) presents a lucid description of Islamic radicalized symbols that have been increasing in Kashmir by pointing out that:

Religious dynamics within the Valley are currently in a fluid state with rise in radicalisation. While there has been an increase in the construction of mosques, changes

in its architecture are to be noted as well. Whereas earlier mosques had stupa-type ceilings, resembling Buddhist or Hindu temples, they now feature domes and minarets. The radical factions have also started to adhere to certain archaic traditions, such as forcing the womenfolk to observe purdah (wearing of the veil). Some places named after Hindu culture, such as Anantnag and Gulshan Nagar, have been renamed as Islamabad and Gulshanabad. (para. 8)

This brings us to two points of consideration. First, there is a need to understand and establish a sense of community, commonality, and shared-ness among the distressed and disassociated fractions of the Kashmiri society (in this case specifically Pandits and Muslims) as part of the efforts toward addressing psycho-social aspects of reconciliation (Pouligny, 2005; Wessells, 2007, 2009). However, doing this within the existing discourse on Kashmiriyat has been increasingly viewed as contested and redundant. In the following section, I discuss shared history as a second consideration—an alternate framework of reference to the past, its validity apart from the concept of inclusive or common identity, and how it may become a resource for reconciliation in the Kashmiri context.

Shared History as Opposed to Common Identity

In view of the fact that the migration of Hindus not only created physical distance between the erstwhile co-existing communities, but has eventually developed into contradictory narratives (Behera, 2006), the path toward a common identity will only be gradual and cumulative. Nonetheless, we need to consider ways in which an inclusive identity, or sense of community (if not common identity) that may have existed before the religious polarization, can be re-established. The appraisal of positive aspects of a shared history can facilitate a sense of shared suffering and loss, and re-establish mutual trust.

Shared history includes experiences and memories of belonging to a community within the land of Kashmir, as had existed before the mass migration, and is shared by members of both groups. The advantage of dealing with shared history, over common identity, is that accepting the idea of a shared history does not dismiss differences within the communities, and how they identified themselves with respect to each other. It only focuses on the commonalities of shared experiences of culture, language, history, as well as day-to-day interactions within the community. It is based on the idea of coexistence and is closely related to collective memory.

Secondly, it does not immediately call for the consideration of alternate narratives of victimization, but focuses on memory of a pre-conflict time, where both communities shared public and cultural spaces and had day to day interactions in business, trade, and through cross communal friendships.

I chose to emphasize *shared history* rather than collective memory here, due to the exploratory nature of this paper. Collective memory encompasses a subjective aspect of meaning-making and is closely related to identity (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Palmberger, 2010). How past experiences of a shared community (in pre-conflict Kashmir) are incorporated into the memories of individuals belonging to the two groups—the meaning attributed to these memories, and their implications on identity—requires further investigation. Therefore for the purpose of this initial exploration, I begin by looking at shared history, focusing on the *shared-ness* of space and experiences of the past.

Literature in this area has consistently reported that Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims shared a variety of community, public, and personal spaces in the past. Emphasizing this, Bamotra (2012) explains, “going to Sufi shrines together, celebrating various festivals, participation in marriage functions, and supporting each other in problematic situations, explained the nature of social relationship that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits shared in the past” (p. 90). This shared history holds meaning for individuals, especially in its close association with the land of Kashmir, and the identity of being Kashmiri—which seems to be salient for both communities (Behera, 2006). During previous work in Kashmir, the author of the present paper also observed similar references among Kashmiri Muslim residents, along with a sense of continued hope of reconciliation, wherein participants spoke about how they expected the return of Hindu neighbors and friends who had migrated out of Kashmir (Majumdar, 2015). Datta (2016) reports similar nostalgic references to the harmonious life, relationships, and landscape of Kashmir, by his Kashmiri Pandit participants who were living in Jammu after the migration. While talking to Kashmiri Pandits in Delhi, the researcher informally observed similar accounts of shared experiences, though the present narrative for the Pandits was significantly different from the Muslims living in the Valley. While Kashmiri Muslims have a dominant narrative about the long years of violence and political unrest, the Pandit participants spoke about the displacement and related accounts: living in refugee camps,

losing property, starting from scratch in a new place, and difficulties in adjusting to a starkly different geographical and cultural space (personal communication, June 16, 2013). Therefore, while the narratives of both communities seemed to have bifurcated at the point of the mass migration, there continues to be a narrative of the pre-conflict times that encompasses accounts of shared spaces, experiences, friendships, coexistence, and history. These range from accounts of school interaction with classmates, neighborhood and play, to participation in marriage ceremonies, business interactions, and common cultural festivals (personal communication, September 11, 2012). Importantly, these memories seem to represent a time and space of coexistence, unmarked by the violence of following years. Datta (2016) notes that his Kashmiri Pandit participants refer to these memories of shared space in local terms that closely symbolize brotherhood and friendship, thus indicating that past relationships of shared spaces and history continue to be viewed positively, even when present relations are severed.

Collective Memory, Past Friendships, and Reconciliation

A rich existing body of literature on the role of collective memory, interpretation of the past and perception of the *other* in intergroup attitudes and emotions, informs us about the positive role *past intergroup friendships* can play in post conflict settings (Bikman, 2013; Biro, Ajdukovic, Corkalo, Djipa, & Milin, 2004; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2012). Biro & Milin (2005), while exploring factors contributing to reconciliation, found that readiness to reconcile was significantly predicted by “absence of xenophobia, feeling of not being discriminated against by members of the opposing nationality, having positive stereotypes of the opposing nationality, having friends from the opposing nationality, and having positive experiences with members from opposing nationality” (p. 141). Bikmen (2013) reports on the role of collective memory and shared interpretation of the past in predicting attitudes toward outgroup members among diasporan Bosnian Muslims. The author points out that for many of the participants, experiences of hostility and betrayal were mixed with the narrative of coexistence. This hostility was more pronounced toward Serbs who were seen as the main aggressors, than toward Croats. Protracted conflict and related displacement can create victim narratives representing the other group as dangerous and violent, which through time become instrumental collective beliefs—causing extreme anger, humiliation, aggression, and retaliatory behavior (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005; Vollhardt, 2009; Wessells, 2007). Displacement also

creates physical and emotional distance that may contribute to the maintenance of hostility and fear. Datta (2016) notes a similar sense of hostility among Kashmiri Pandit migrants settled in Jammu, who held their Muslim neighbors responsible for their displacement and dispossession. Facilitating contact in this context can then create spaces where positive aspects of the *shared past* are renewed and relived, which can in turn help in re-assessing the source of the current hostility, by considering alternative and inclusive narratives.

Facilitating Intergroup Contact in the Present Kashmiri Context

Shared history and past friendships maybe revived or revisited by facilitating intergroup contact, at both a collective and personal level. Intergroup contact (traditionally defined as face-to-face contact between members of two groups—which has now been extended to larger understanding of contact, including extended, mediated, and para-social contact)—has been a widely studied topic of interest in social psychology (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wagner & Hewstone, 2012). Much evidence today still supports Gordon Allport's (1954) exploration of contact as a means of reducing prejudice between opposing groups, as it is considered a constructive step toward reconciliatory action, increasing intergroup trust, and manifesting a willingness to forgive in a post conflict context (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Durrheim, Jacobs, & Dixon, 2013; Hewstone et. al., 2008; Wagner & Hewstone, 2012). Research has also highlighted the need to look beyond a *collective lens* and focus on personal decisions and experiences that can play a significant role in how individuals perceive and relate to members of the out group (Palmerberger, 2010; Franovic, 2008). A change in the negative attitude that may have crystallized during violence will not only create more room for peace, but it may also strengthen the core identities and preexisting value systems of both the groups (Kelman, 2008).

The migration of Kashmiri Pandits has left limited space and opportunity for contact between the two communities. Efforts to facilitate movement of displaced Hindus, be it back to the Valley, or to and from their homeland and where they are currently located, can allow for more personal interactions and re-attachments between members of the groups. Bringing displaced families back to the Valley, organizing meetings with their erstwhile neighbors, and including them in local activities and decision-making structures may allow revisiting the shared history through informal nostalgic recollections. Members from both communities can

also be involved in cultural and regional forums where common stories, folklore, history, and literature are discussed as a means to reappraise the past.

Employment opportunities and organizational schemes that involve members of both groups in working toward a common goal of economic and social reconstruction can help in establishing a sense of common objective and identity, thereby catering to needs of self-esteem and belongingness, that have been found to be important factors promoting reconciliation (Pratto & Glasford, 2008). Wagner and Hewstone (2012) emphasize this point when talking about interventions programmed to enhance contact in political conflict. They refer to Kelman's *Interactive Problem Solving Workshops* that involved Palestinian and Israeli youth in discussions on political and social concerns of their region. The authors also highlight the participation of midlevel officials and government or political representatives from both groups, as they can help in forming a realistic link between efforts at the smaller organizational level and the larger political and policy framework of the region.

Involving the diaspora and youth who are settled in different cities can become an important step in the process. For instance, there is a significant enrollment of Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit students in various universities across India (some have a special reserved quota for Kashmiri Pandits), and these spaces can become opportunities for facilitating contact. The students attending university, and engaging in other networks outside of Kashmir, also need to be encouraged to participate in common discussions and activities, wherein they can get closer to out-group members and eventually become aware of the *other* narrative—which may help in breaking the dominant narrative of victimization and create a sense of shared suffering (Vollhardt, 2009). Beyond direct contact, indirect and extended forms of contact can be more practical and convenient. The possible role of virtual (via Internet for instance), extended (when a known person, friend, or acquaintance has contact with a member of the other group), and imagined contact (creating conditions where contact is imagined, for instance through intervention programs) in reducing distance and instilling positive out-group attitudes, has now been confirmed through a number of research findings (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Wagner & Hewstone, 2012). Kashmiri voices are prominent on social media sites and groups that primarily consist of youth from Kashmir and outside, debating and discussing political, social, health, and other issues in Kashmir. Similar online forums can be developed specifically for

dialogue between representatives from both Kashmiri communities, sharing of stories and memories to establish familiarity, and challenging existing notions of hostility.

The younger generations have not had personal associations with members of the *other* community, and have grown up amidst a narrative of fear and anger. Research has found evidence for the generational transmission of trauma and its effects on children of survivors (Coleman, 1999; Hirsch, 2008; Wiseman, Metzl, & Barber, 2006). While a significant amount of evidence exists to support the fact that second generation survivors are often more prejudiced and negatively inclined toward the *other* group, Hass (1990) presents a wide array of research findings on collective memory and trans-generational trauma, alternatively illustrating that the attitude and behavior of a second generation trauma survivor, or a child of a survivor, cannot be singularly determined; it is as diverse as the experiences of the parents and family, the environment in which they grew up, or the extent to which the stories of the past were openly discussed. Carmil and Brexnitz (1990) found that survivors of the Holocaust and their children showed a greater belief in a positive future when compared to a control group. Palmberger (2010) found that among young Croats and Bosniaks, a generational identity relating to a shared past is brought up in conversations by participants, even in the absence of actual exchanges and contact with members of the other group. She posited that young people form a discursive tactic about the past war that is separate from the nationalist narrative, and significant, irrespective of the general distancing from painful memories of the past (p. 123). This *generational* identity that cuts across communal lines can become a source of contact and exchange in the context of Pandits and Muslims, as well.

Kashmiri Pandits who did not migrate can form an interesting bridge between the estranged communities. They have continued to live and conduct business alongside their old neighbors, and represent a step that is closer to an inclusive identity (Essa, 2011). This small community had to face many violent attacks and was ostracized by Hindus outside, but they seem to hold on to an idea of Kashmir, in which both communities are interdependent and functional together. In an interview with Al Jazeera, one of the respondents from this community of Pandits, explicitly reported:

You cannot differentiate a Pandit from a Muslim, culturally. Even in names of people, we often have [the] same names, [the] same sense of identity, style of living, and other

things. And this is apart from India and the rest of the world. You can imagine that after a period of 22 years from migration, a Kashmiri Pandit living in Jammu is still totally different to a Jammu resident. You might have even heard it from a Kashmiri Muslim that their ancestors were Kashmiri Pandits. Any scholar would confirm that to you. They might have embraced Islam in whatever way they chose. How this happened is not the point—the point is that we belong to a single community ... and we cannot live without each other. (Essa, 2011, para. 7)

Non-governmental organizations, international, and national peacebuilding agencies can develop strategies to involve Pandits living in Kashmir in discussions and dialogues on Kashmir and the issue of reconciliation. This small section within the community can have a significantly large contribution to make, in terms of their own experiences of living in the Valley and sharing a present along with the past, with members of the other community. Highlighting the place of these Hindus in the present Kashmiri society through formal channels, such as reparations and commemorations, can be a positive message of inclusive peace.

Facilitating these diverse channels of communication and contact, with specific focus on reappraising the shared history and shared symbols of the past through dialogue, exchange of stories and narratives, music, texts, food, and other cultural symbols, as well as common notions on reconstruction, can become constructive steps toward a more inclusive and community-driven reconciliation in Kashmir. Moreover, the highlighting of positive memories of the past can help establish a sense of familiarity and security, and it can further dialogue and discussions on more hostile and hurtful memories related to the violence and displacement. However, while evaluating the role of shared history in reconciliation, we need to critically engage with the idea of changing constructions of history and how aspects of collective memory and a shared past are refigured, remembered, and forgotten. Collective memory may not always be objective, but instead it is configured in a way that is functional and relevant to a community's current context, and represents each group's understanding of unity, exclusivity and self-image (Assmann, 1995; Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2013). There is a distinction between autobiographical memory or actual lived experiences and collective memory that is passed on to generations, especially after an episode of collective trauma (Eyerman, 2001). Assmann (2008) refers to the previous form of memory as social memory, similar to what older generations of Kashmiri

Hindus and Muslims might continue to have, and the latter as political memory, formed through political, cultural, and identity-based narratives that seem to be more prevalent among second or third generations of survivors of collective trauma. Therefore, in examining the role of shared history, it will be essential to engage present generations of Kashmiris in seeking critical analysis of narratives that prevail and openness to the lived experiences and memories of their older family members. The displacement and conflict could have changed the meaning and images that are now prominent in the collective memory of both groups, especially the young who have not had lived experiences of coexistence in pre-conflict times. This calls for initiatives to highlight shared aspects of past life over the memories of a dominant narrative of conflict. Since collective memory is dynamic and can be reconstructed according to context (Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2013), focusing on positive aspects of shared history and reemphasizing communal coexistence might facilitate the modification of what is remembered by each group.

Secondly, the pathway through intergroup contact has had its limitations. Irrespective of repeated confirmations of the positive role of contact, researchers have pointed out that certain optimal conditions may need to be established for contact to be effective. While Allport (1954) spoke about equal status and opportunity for contact to be facilitative rather than reactionary, more contemporary work has pointed out that different groups have separate and often conflicting expectations or needs from contact situations. These have to be successfully addressed for contact to have any discernible impact (Wagner & Hewstone, 2008). Moreover, the predictive value of research in contact literature has been questioned (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005) on the basis of its failure to take into account actual scenarios of contact and intergroup relations, where optimal favorable conditions for contact may not often exist. For instance, there is growing evidence of the effects of *negative contact* (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010) and the possibility of hostility, reappraisal of negative memories, and mistrust in these settings. Nevertheless, intergroup contact as a possible route toward reconciliation still remains an important consideration, especially in view of the evidence produced by the important meta-analytic study by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006). The said study established that contact does reduce prejudice, intergroup anxiety, and the feeling of threat, even when optimal

conditions are absent. Further, this relationship is generalizable to multiple and diverse contexts of intergroup situations.

Aiken (2010) suggests on the basis of findings from Northern Ireland that “attempts to provide acknowledgement and accountability for the past needs to be delayed until at least a minimum level of progress towards distributive and instrumental reconciliation has been reached” (p. 22). As has been previously mentioned, given the larger situation of intractable conflict in the Valley, reparation policies on a wide scale often become politicized—losing the positive impact, and failing to generate reconciliatory outcomes. Kashmir Valley has been experiencing a tumultuous political and social climate where policies for reconciliation are being challenged by opposing groups, political actors, and others (Kashmir Initiative Group, 2013) making contact and communication difficult to sustain. However, given the widely acknowledged need for establishing social shared-ness and communication as essential in the discourse around reconciliation (Cardenas, Paez, & Rime, 2013) it is indeed necessary to explore the possibilities of this framework.

Impediments to Reconciliation and Way Forward

Kashmir Valley today is seen as a site of protracted conflict by many. The duration of the dispute, involvement of multiple parties, and the constantly shifting political dynamics of the conflict have resulted in a complex situation that poses critical obstacles to any strategy on peace and reconciliation. It is one of the most militarized regions in the world, where many accounts of human rights violations have been reported over the years.

The Indian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which has been operational in the State of Jammu and Kashmir since 1990, gives complete legal immunity to the military and Central (Indian) Government forces, in the dispersal of activities related to fighting insurgency in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The AFSPA has been blamed for sustaining an environment of fear and oppression in the Valley (Duschinski, 2008; Habibullah, 2013), and a collective memory of false encounters (police shootings of civilians who are mistakenly or falsely accounted for as insurgents and terrorists), sexual violence perpetrated by the armed forces, curfews, and *crackdowns* (entering of civilian homes without warrant to search for hidden ammunitions) have been passed on to present generations. The deployment of an unprecedented number of armed forces in the Valley in the post-unrest years has ensured that

fear arousing images of the past, and a general sense of insecurity and helplessness, continue to be a part of the social milieu. In fact, recent protests in the Valley have focused on such cases of sexual violence and forced disappearances that have become dominant within the overall Kashmiri narrative, making simultaneous issues, like that of the Muslim-Pandit discourse, increasingly more marginalized (Chatterji, 2011; Duschinski, 2010; Duschinski & Hoffman, 2011).

There may also be a conflict in political ideologies of the two communities, whereby the majority Muslims have been aligning themselves with a separate (and for some Islamic) State, while the Pandits have not been overtly active in the movement for self-determination and may not necessarily want a separate state of Kashmir. It therefore becomes an important question whether returning Pandits can be accommodated within the present ideological framework of the Muslim majority, and if their opinions and choices can become a part of the way Kashmiri Muslims view their future in general.

It is also important to explore whether the communities want to be reconciled after all these years of separation during which many members of the Pandit community have established themselves in other cities of India and around the world, and may view their current status as economically and politically more fruitful than returning to Kashmir (Sandilya, 2009). Recent work has reported ambiguous and ambivalent responses from displaced Kashmiri Pandit respondents on the question of return to their erstwhile homeland. Both nostalgic references to the land and life of the Valley as well as deep-seated anger towards their Muslim counterparts, and skepticism about security in the region, were prevalent in these accounts (Datta, 2016; Rothbart & Rajput, 2016).

Reconciliation efforts and policy in the Valley needs to adequately engage with these contradictions, which could be made possible through inter-communal dialogue and a people-driven approach to understanding the nature of reconciliation. The discourse must be viewed as separate from the question of return, which has become the point of contestation in many political debates. The essence of reconciliation is necessary, even if Kashmiri Pandits do not return to the Valley. The objective of reconciliation is also to share the sense of suffering, to hear, understand, and if possible, accept the contrasting narratives that have remained unchallenged for each community due to distancing and continued conflict in the region.

Deutsch (2008) believes that taking steps towards reconciliation can be very helpful in *self-healing*, because it allows for the mitigation of anger, the need for vengeance, and the constant rallying for competitive victimization. Recent evidence supports attitudes among a section of Kashmiri youth who seem to be hopeful about their future while disillusioned with the present conflict (Fazili, n.d.; Majumdar, 2012). In a previous study, the author found that Kashmiri youth, many of whom had been exposed to severe incidents of collective and direct violence, reported high levels of hope (Majumdar, 2015). Hope has been found to be positively correlated with the willingness to reconcile and the support for humanitarian aid (Halperin & Gross, 2011). This positive sentiment towards contact and communication is reiterated across the Valley, extending into the other part of Kashmir—conflictingly referred to as Azad (free) Kashmir or Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (Ali, 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

As pointed out in the beginning, this paper is meant to be an enquiry into alternate paths to reconciliation in the Kashmir Valley. It is also a focused look at particular social-psychological concepts and approaches, and the possibility of their application in the Kashmiri context. The paper does not intend to, and cannot in its limited scope, examine and adequately represent all accounts of historical, political, and sociological discussions on the conflict in Kashmir.

Secondly, while shared history and collective memory are discussed as possible resources for a future relationship among Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, what needs to be examined further is whether the memories of this distant past constitute a romantic nostalgia only, or a collective memory of lived experiences that can be related at a more realistic level.

More importantly, it is necessary to note that this article discusses reconciliation between two particular religious groups belonging to the Valley of Kashmir, within the state of Jammu and Kashmir (that is the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir), which has a much wider and varied population differing in cultural practice and political stance. Further, in-depth explorations of the opinions and expectations of all these groups will help to paint a more accurate picture of the contradictory and assimilative aspects of reconciliation and peacebuilding in Kashmir.

Conclusion

Franovic (2008) points to the difficulties in deciding upon a framework for reconciliation under conditions of intractable conflict involving multiple parties. The same questions become important in analyzing the possibilities of acknowledgement and forgiveness in Kashmir. After all this time, the lines are now blurred as to who was responsible for the initiation of violence and its repercussions, who the victims were, and who is supposed to forgive. This complicated nature of ongoing intractable conflict, distance between communities, and a conflicted history of claims and counter claims, has led to the marginalization of the Kashmiri Muslim-Pandit reconciliation discourse. It continues to appear fleetingly in political discussions and debates, but has lost ground in terms of academic interest and organized efforts at the policy level.

There is a gap in research and intervention, and consequently an immediate need to engage with alternate frameworks for reconciliation. This article hopes to have done so by examining how renewing channels of inter-communal contact may help in restructuring of collective memory, to integrate and highlight positive aspects of the shared past. It is important to gradually eliminate the possibility that these memories maybe manipulated as a tool for further violence (Franovic, 2008). Also, re-appraising a sense of community through shared history can be a positive psychosocial resource in coping with, and healing from, the long years of violence. Building on what Wessells (2007, 2009) expressed, the article argues for the capacity of existing communal resources to be appraised and used for the purpose of reconciliation and societal transformation. It moves beyond a traditional approach to post-conflict work by giving agency to the community in the reshaping of its present and future, by drawing on positive shared experiences from the past.

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