Framing women’s terrestrial and online discursive landscapes in Jammu and Kashmir

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Summary

Recently digital media have proven to be of great relevance for social and political movement formation in Muslim majority spaces. Furthermore, the gender dimensions of Muslim spaces have become sites of intense research into more emancipatory Islamic discourses. Islamic feminism is a Quran centred discursive category that seeks gender justice from within an Islamic framework and which increasingly frames Muslim women’s online knowledge production and activism around the Muslim world.

The northern most state in the Indian Union is a conflict zone with a Muslim majority population. In Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir, women’s activism does indeed exist but its terrestrial cohesion is plagued by the intense militarisation of the state and further restricted by women’s inability to unite their agendas and form a movement.

This research examines women’s online discourses in cyber Kashmir, focusing on the digital spaces, which have opened up wider and freer vistas for women led activism and activism on women’s agendas by men. In this, the web portals and blogs were central in providing the discursive landscapes. Islamic feminism is also present as a discursive framework, albeit in its infancy, in these digital spaces.

The discursive content analysis undertaken has shown that conflict, violence, gender public spaces and healthcare are the most frequently referred to themes. The web portals and blogs analysed indicate that there is a discernible framing of a social reform movement based on the core concerns of participants to this research. These concerns centre on violence against women and multiple healthcare crises in J&K.

From the results and conclusions drawn, it is hoped that this research may provide an insight into where the connectivities between women’s agendas lie. From this examination of women’s digital discourses one can also highlight perspectives that are internal and intrinsic to the Kashmiri discursive landscape.
In memory of Dinah Begum and Ghulam Fatima.
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A brief insight into Jammu and Kashmir

Figure 1 Map of Jammu and Kashmir

According to Census 2011 report, Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir (hereafter known as J&K), has a population of 12,548,926; 73% of which live in rural areas. The average family size is 5.7 members and the Census 2011 also reveals a disturbingly skewed sex ratio of 883 females: 1000 males, which has worsened since 2001. The

literacy rates have gone up in the past 10 years to 68.7% and increase of 13.18% from figures in 2001. Furthermore, as media access is an important aspect of social movement framing processes, it is interesting to note that only 51% households own a television. (Sazawal 2011) Highlighted in Aijaz Hussain’s article, access to digital media (Facebook and Youtube are mentioned here) is limited to 40,000 residents in the state. (Hussain 2010)

Jammu and Kashmir is the northern most state in the Indian Union with three regions Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh (orange area). J&K was part of a larger state which is highlighted as the red border in the image above and before 1947 included Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Poonch and Mirpur (green areas).

In 1820 for exemplary military services rendered, the then minor Hindu Raja Ghulab Singh acquired the fiefdom of Jammu. Today, Jammu province accounts for around 45% of the total population of J&K and consists of six districts: Doda, Poonch, Rajouri, Udhampur, Jammu and Kathua. Muslims form the majority of the population in the first three districts, and Hindus in the remaining three districts. Overall, the Hindus form a majority in the province, with Muslims accounting for a third of the population. (Sikand 2010)

Interestingly, before 1947 Jammu had a population, which was 61% Muslim according to census figures for 1941 (Snedden 2001:116) and therefore what happened to the other half of the Muslim population of Jammu region is a pertinent question. There are scholars such as Snedden who suggests that ethnic cleansing the region may have occurred but that the evidence is inconclusive (Snedden 2001). Chatta on the other hand asserts, with the use of survivor testimony, that massacres of Jammu Muslims and ethnic cleansing of the area was carried out by a collaboration of the Maharaja’s Dogra soldiers, local RSS and Patiala state troops under the direct leadership of the Maharajah himself. (Chatta 2009:126 also see Bhasin Jamwal 2011: 73) This should also be the subject of any future ‘Truth’ Commission established in the State of J&K.

In 1834 Raja Ghulab Singh annexed Ladakh (Zutshi 2004:9), which as the northern-most part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir occupies two-thirds of its territory and consists of two districts: Kargil and Leh. Ladakh constitutes just 2.7% of the J&K population. The majority of the population in Kargil 85%, are Shī’a Muslims of Balti ethnicity and in Leh, the majority of the population is Buddhist. (Sikand 2010)

In 1846 the Kashmir Valley was sold by the British to Raja Ghulab Singh for the sum of 75 lakh rupees and an indemnity of fixed amount payable to the real sovereign, the British, in
pairs of Kashmir goats and Kashmiri shawls. The treaty of Amritsar of 1846 sealed the fate of the separate regional entities for the next 100 years; effective suzerainty remained with the British but de facto rule lay in the hands of now Dogra Maharajas and their male heirs. (Bose 2003:15-16)

Kashmir’s ‘accession’ to the Indian union occurred under circumstances that are still contested today by rival versions of history. It is not within the remit of this research to look into the origins of the dispute, which has been the subject of research conducted by many reputed scholars (see Lamb 1992, Ganguly 1997, Bose 2003, Jha 2003, Rai 2003, Schofield 2003, Zutshi 2004, Behera 2006) and from varying perspectives.

J&K has survived war in 1947-8, 1965, a proxy war in 1971, a nuclear showdown in 1999 and the on-going low-intensity conflict, which commenced in 1990. (Bose 2003:154-155) In what one Kashmiri journalist described to me as ‘the forced marriage of very diverse political/ethnic/linguistic entities' was completed in 1947 and the Line of Control established a partition, which has continued to be contested among Kashmir’s populations (Interview Sami Ahmed 2012). The very question, as well as its persistence, of the right to self-determination serves to obfuscate the fact that a movement had sprung from the masses of largely Muslim peasants in 1931, which protested against the discriminatory rule of the Maharajah.

In 1947 having ‘won’ Kashmiri leadership for the first time in centuries, it took a further six years for the people to realize that democracy was not going to be their reward. In 1953 Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah (Jammu and Kashmir’s first premier) was arrested and jailed, remaining imprisoned for the following 22 years. His removal from political office ushered in an era of puppet governments with a distinctly pro-union and pro elite position. The question of a plebiscite to determine the final status of J&K resurfaced in the 1960s when the movement was suppressed by the state. It was not until the 1980s that the infamously ‘rigged’ elections relit the powder keg of stored up contentions hinging upon the question of ‘self determination’.

It is my aim to show that a movement, which is historically grounded in J&K, has many terrestrial and online frames of reference in women’s discourses. The literature available, although addressing women in the region quite comprehensively in relation to the conflict and its impact upon women’s roles and how these have changed over time, fails to address religion and women adequately. Despite the terrestrial milieu of conflict zones or heavily militarized zones like Palestine and J&K, conflicts translate to the ‘hybrid spaces’ or online spaces (Castells 2011) created through the discursive efforts of journalists,
academics, lawyers, activists, retired and working professional and students. In these
discursive terrains this research has been able to uncover frames of reference, which
could indicate the beginnings of a social reformative movement in online communities,
collectively named cyberKashmir.
1. Introduction

The increased role of mass media and communications in societies around the world has led to the emergence of new fields of research into (trans)national knowledge production and its ability to redefine and shape cultures, gender relations and discursive categories (Hepp 2009). At this time of transition in the Muslim world, research is increasingly focusing on change in Muslim societies (Esposito 2008). Of particular interest is the mobilising of online websites, social networks like Facebook and blogs as public spaces for young Muslim women and men to articulate themselves freely in (trans)local and (trans)national spaces. Research into processes of opening up online democratic spaces is focused on the movement formation in Muslim spaces and even more so since the ‘Arab Spring’ and it’s aftershocks (Schneider 2011:9-26).

The processes that enable women to open up new communicative spaces for themselves will be scrutinised to establish what impact media fora such as internet web portals/blogs and Facebook have had on creating spaces to disseminate womanist discourses in J&K. Moghadam argues that internet use amongst Transnational Feminist Networks (TFN) is a ‘key medium’ in feminist discussions, which is particularly advantageous when sensitive topics such as religion, gender and conflict are discussed. This can lead to activists ‘overcoming biases and creating new bonds of solidarity’. Furthermore, she insists that the internet has enabled TFN ‘to retain flexibility, adaptability and non-hierarchical features’ and allowed them to avoid excessive bureaucratization of these organisations. (Moghadam 2009:87-89) This freedom from bureaucratization has meant that funding constraints on activism, in the case of J&K affecting some of the organisations examined in this research, can be removed and women do not need to cater their agendas towards governmental/external aims but to their own agendas. (Interview Nyla Ali Khan 2010)

In scrutinising the framing of their agendas this research attempts to ascertain not only what the issues are but also what role/position Islam occupies in the priorities of women in J&K? There has been no research on the discursive category of Islamic feminism conducted specifically in the context of Jammu and Kashmir. This research aimed to avoid the imposition of a category by exploring women’s discourses, whatever their nature or main themes and then asking if the discursive category of Islamic feminism is present.

In order to achieve this aim the research needed to focus on if there was already a Muslim (or indeed any) women's movement to speak of in J&K. However, as Ayesha Ray has
stated, ‘the absence of a robust women’s movement in Kashmir is quite conspicuous.’ (Ray 2009: 14).

**Positionality**

As important as it is to speak of the category of ‘Muslim’ women it is first incumbent on any researcher to locate themselves both in terms of position and location. This researcher considers herself a subaltern Muslim woman whose familial origins can be traced to the Poonch region of J&K. This region, as with other ‘border’ areas, is sliced in two by the LoC and the researcher’s family migrated from Pakistani Administered Jammu and Kashmir (green area on the map above) to the UK in the early 1960s. Furthermore, it is important to raise the issue of nationalism; this researcher does not consider herself an adherent of Indian, Pakistani or Kashmiri nationalism. Access to the territory of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) was complicated by the fact that even less is known or has been written about women in this region, it is also a highly militarised zone, centrally controlled from Islamabad (Asif 2006 and Human Rights Watch 2006 ‘With Friends Like these’) and the researcher does not have any reliable connections to the region.

**Muslim Women**

For the purpose of this report, ‘Muslim’ women as a category is not used to analyse women’s activism in Jammu and Kashmir. The reason for this is that this researcher wanted a category that contained no value judgement about levels of piety, caste, sect or ethnicity, as they are highly divisive categories in current political discourses in J&K. Defining and being defined became an issue. Theoretically, I chose to use an inductive approach and allow women from the region to define themselves or not, as they saw fit. The question then became what are women in the region articulating as agendas terrestrially and through online-media.

As I believe that the subaltern can and indeed does speak in many voices and from many locations, so the heterogeneity of Muslim women and their visibility cannot be denied. (see Narain 2008: 3-33 and Sarkar 2008: 48-77) Given the space to define, women are capable of defining themselves when necessary. Research reveals that most women respondents are from the Kashmir Valley, living in and around Srinagar. They are urban, highly educated and politically aware. It is from this understanding that a ‘Muslim’ identity could
be inferred as most Muslims in the state live in the Kashmir Valley, which is around 95% Muslim.

Due to the on-going conditions of militarisation of J&K and suspicion of ‘outsiders’, this has been a slow process, which has also stalled on occasion. However, it has revealed interesting representations, which makes for comparison between young women’s discursive terrains and that of older women in the 30 and older category articulating their discourses in other online spaces. This juncture reveals convergences and divergences in women’s discursive terrains in online spaces.

**Access to Indian Visa**

Street protests in Srinagar, J&K summer capital, became confrontational and led to the death of over 120 teenagers and young men in 2010. Free movement of civilian personnel was not possible under conditions of curfew and therefore the conducting of contact interviews would have been rendered too dangerous for both interviewer and more importantly potential interviewees. This caused a delay in the application of the visa by the researcher until later in 2010. Officially, the visa has never been denied and at the point of writing remains pending with the Indian Consulate in Munich.

A closer examination of international news indicated that researchers, human rights activists and others whether of Pakistani, Indian or Kashmiri origin, can fall foul of stringent and often discriminatory security-centered visa policies. Whether researching in conflict zones such as J&K or not, differential visa provisions are applicable to some people. U.S. based academics working on human rights issues such as Angana Chatterji have been intimidated and received threats when they have been working in the State. The visa authorities can also target relatives of researchers; Angana Chatterji’s partner Richard Shapiro was refused entry into India. Prominent Indian human rights activists such as Gautum Navlakha have been refused entry into J&K and others such as American writer and broadcaster David Barsamian have been refused entry because they are critical of the Indian government’s policies in J&K and elsewhere in India. Arundhati Roy has had an

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3 [http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1481](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1481)


FIR registered against her for the crime of sedition for sharing a public platform with a Kashmiri separatist leader and questioning the legitimacy of the union of Kashmir with India.

Discussing Islam in J&K

Discussing religion in a conflict zone like J&K is prone to difficulties, as in the rest of India the spectre of ‘communal’ violence hangs over all contentions between different communities. In J&K, it has particular connotations for those who aspire to one type of nationalism or another whether religiously or ethnically espoused or indeed both simultaneously. The opponents of Kashmiri nationalism suggest that religion/Islam has played a primary and significant role in the politics of J&K for at least the last one hundred years and Kashmiri nationalists maintain that this has been a secular peasant struggle that has been thwarted by the centre in India and therefore is not Islamic.

In this research the position taken is that neither secularism nor Islamism are free from dogmatic or monolithic interpretations and therefore different perspectives on Islam should be heard. It is therefore important that Muslim perspectives on the importance and role of Islam in the region are foregrounded. Yoginder Sikand is the most prolific Indian writer to have written on the importance of Islam in J&K (Sikand 2001; Sikand 2006; Sikand 2008), however, his perspectives on religion have alienated him from the discursive terrains of cyberKashmir. Rekha Chowdhury has also highlighted the importance of religion as well as caste, ethnicity and gender as categories for identity formation in J&K. (Chowdhary 1998; Chowdhary 2010)

Historically, the 1940s had seen politics divide the Muslim population into secular and religious camps and according to Chitralekha Zutshi: ‘they (the Muslim leadership) refused to allow simultaneous allegiance to both religious community and regional homeland, seeing the two as mutually exclusive affiliations…… religion continued to unite as much as divide the Kashmiri Muslims for the remainder of the century.’ (Zutshi 2000: 21)

The inability to address more than two versions of Islam/Muslims in the post 9-11 world has led to imagined Fifth Columnists lurking within Muslim minorities in secular states the world over. Islamophobia is on the increase as is the concurrent rise of right wing anti-

immigration agendas in Europe (Esposito 2011), and therefore images of Muslims/Islam are highly charged with local/geo-political concerns of more powerful States. It is these images constructed discursively through film, print media, TV, and academic discourse, which serve to unquestioningly construct binary Muslims good vs. bad, liberal vs. traditionalist, modern vs. conservative, Sufi vs. Muslim. They are constructed via media discourses whether mass corporate media or online media in many countries with Muslim minorities and India is not an exception. This work intends to complicate the idea of Muslim/Islam in the context of J&K.
2. Methodology

The main questions examined in this research were:

1. How are women articulating their agendas since 1989/1990?
2. What are the different frames, which are at work in women’s online discourses?
3. Is Islamic feminism one such discourse being framed in women’s discourses in online Kashmir?

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in order to collate and analyze data partly due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study, and because of its discursive nature. As the research focuses primarily on discursive content analysis of a variety of online fora, this was considered the most effective in the framework of this project. According to Wiktorowicz “the reliance on network-based activism amongst many Islamic activists makes the topic relatively opaque for research. Even those well acquainted with Islamic activism encounter difficulties accessing these networks for study, since access is contingent upon a degree of trust and familiarity that takes time to build.” (Wiktorowicz 2004: 23).

This researcher was aware of these issues and the research design was adapted accordingly. First, a thorough literature review has been conducted, paralleled by conference visits, expert interviews and online research to establish history, state of and challenges to Kashmir women’s activism.

Then in addition to this, a blog discourse analysis has been undertaken – namely researching and collating data from blogs and web portals on the Internet dealing with Kashmir. This process was made difficult by the fact that some of the web portals/blogs were often inaccessible after a while of operating online, making data retrieval more difficult. The data sample included texts by journalists, ‘diaspora’ writers, scholars, students, working and retired professionals, filmmakers, social activists, and was territorially nonetheless mostly limited to the Kashmir Valley. This was due to lack of contacts with women’s groups in Jammu and Ladakh and to an identifiable presence of a ‘hybrid space’ which became cyberKashmir.

The web portals/blogs were chosen on the basis of whether they carried articles and entries by or about women and women’s issues in Kashmir. These were chosen in order to highlight the discourses of mainly urban educated Kashmiri women from across the generational spectrum that have chosen to take their articulations online.
Finally, a number of young female university students have been interviewed that had been contacted through Facebook. Since 2010 the online activity in cyberKashmir has expanded significantly compared to initial research phases when this project started. The idea of using a Facebook account was in order to have a transparent and open approach to research, which would identify the nature of the study, the identity of the interviewer and necessary links to websites used for research purposes. This researcher Facebook ‘friends’ were equipped with this knowledge so that they could decide whether or not they wanted to participate in this research and allow themselves to be interviewed.

By mainly focusing on women activist’s agendas, scholar’s writings, and blogs about and by Kashmiri women this research attempts to identify and critically analyze discursive streams present and the frames constructed by them. The focus on the younger ‘conflict generation’, i.e. those, now in their twenties who were small children and in some cases born after the beginning of the conflict in 1990 has been lacking and it is this researchers view that younger Kashmiris and particularly, for the purpose of this study, young women are a vital stakeholder group which has been omitted from dialogues around conflict transformation and peace-building.

In looking into establishing person-to-person contact with young women in Kashmir this researcher enlisted the assistance of two fellow researchers at Kashmir University. With their assistance this researcher set up a Facebook account in order to share elements of my research with young people and to be transparent about wanting to interview young women. This method of sharing knowledge provided some women with the ability to scrutinize this researcher as well as the research project before agreeing or not agreeing to be interviewed. Bearing in mind the sensitivities and security concerns of individuals all the names of participants who have contributed to this study have been changed.

This research utilized semi structured open-ended Interviews in order to ‘Skype’-call women respondents who had agreed to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative tool for the creation of ‘conversations with intent’ or informal interviews that were not formal and rigid, which give the participants space to establish ground for conversation. This was vital in order to try to initiate trust with strangers who often only had a basic idea about my research. Furthermore, trust deficits with strangers must be expected even in cyber-conflict environments; the fact that this researcher is a Muslim woman, made some interactions easier.

The calls were recorded with the permission of the women to make it possible to make transcriptions of them easier and allow for smoother flow of conversation at the time. This
type of data can provide the researcher with a rich and nuanced texture of meaning that
 can only come from the perspective of women actors who have direct situational and
cognitive experience. It is this lived reality of women, which they are creating and
constructing as knowledge or discourse.
3. Theoretical Framework

Social Movement Theory

From the 1960s onwards there has been research focused on the origins of the formation and the impacts of social movements at the individual and societal levels. Initially, social movements were linked to relative deprivation theory, which sees movement formation as a result of disappointment in society and political institutions. At the time, Social Movement Theory (SMT) was rooted in functionalism and focused on the psychological and structural causes of mass mobilisation. Since the 1970s researchers dealt with the influence of the institutional politics on new social movements such as the women’s liberation, environmental, peace and anti-nuclear movements.

In the 1970s the resource mobilisation theory had an epistemological focus on the process mechanisms of the social movements and saw social movements as “organized contention structured through mechanisms of mobilization that provide strategic resources for sustained collective action” (Wiktorowicz 2004:10). The Theory of political opportunity structures, which also emerged in the 1970s, understood the political environment as decisive influence on social movements. The identity framing process was now seen as one variable next to the resource mobilization.

In the 1980s SMT dealt with the question of how individual participants conceptualise themselves as a collectivity by looking at social interaction, meaning and culture. Until recently SMT research has focused on western, democratic states but some scholars/researchers have tried to look at the relevance of social movement theory outside of the ‘west’. Wiktorowicz (2004) analyses Islamic Activism as a form of social movement and although his approach is highly relevant to this research, it is his view of what constitutes Islamic activism, which this researcher finds problematic as the definition seems cover all contention by Muslims.

Social Movement Theory (SMT) is not a concrete and well-defined theory but rather based on a selection of criteria, which provided the researcher with a set of conceptual tools to enable them to give description to and provide a comparison of contentious political episodes and the ability to question and refine explanations of the same. Broadly, there are 4 criteria according to Tilly cited in Wiktorowicz:
1. Mobilization structures
2. Political opportunities
3. Framing
4. Repertoires

SMT is useful in that it allows the researcher to come up with the explanations of contentious political episodes even where no real theory explains the how and the why of the interactions between these criteria. This leaves space for this researcher to look at the mobilization of women’s contention in hybrid spaces (cyberKashmir). If terrestrial social movements possess the above features then it would be possible that social movement formation in digital spaces would also fulfill some, if not all, of these criteria. The utilizing of SMT is also useful as it can bring the study of Islamic activism out of its isolated position into a more complete understanding of contentious politics and social movements in Muslim spaces (Wiktorowicz 2004).

For the purposes of this research Manuel Castell’s distinction between social and political movements is utilized to analyse movement formation in the discursive landscapes of cyberKashmir. He defines political movements as being those aimed at changing government and which advance political agendas and differentiates social movements as being formulated on the basis of collective action aimed at transforming the way people think. (Castells 2011) Whilst this suffices for analytical purposes, political movements can exist, which are based on a social and political justice or as this researcher believes the case to be in the context of Kashmir that a political movement with strong basis in socially transformative agendas has morphed into what could now be seen as a social reformatory movement with a distinct political agenda but, which is concerned predominantly with social reform from within.

Framing as a specific and necessary process of meaning construction, which is based upon common interpretations of contention, constitutes the ideological basis for the formation of social movements. McAdam et al. define the framing process as ‘the conscious, strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’ (McAdam 1996). Snow and Bedford outline three tasks which framing processes seek to accomplish:

- Problem diagnosis
- Remedies/solutions posited
- Rationale promotion with the call to collective action (Wiktorowicz 2004:15-16)
Social movements and their ‘frames’ give us the ability of identifying and interpreting a problem, its dimensions, causes, and probably potential remedies.’ (van der Donk 2003:12)

Lessig suggests that freedom cannot be guaranteed through access to cyber terrains and that there are mechanisms whereby ‘we already accept, without thought a series of invisible constraints on digital associations and transactions that have never been publicly debated’. Although we are seduced into believing that new media is the key to greater freedoms, there is an ‘anti-democratic potential of cyber space’ (Jenkins et al 2003: 6) Roger Hurwitz in ‘Who needs politics? Who needs people? The ironies of democracy in cyberspace’ warns of over stating the democratic credentials of internet spaces, claiming that although internet activists have excelled in providing greater information about the workings of government and other politically significant subjects, they have been unable to create discourse which has engaged policy makers. Furthermore, as is also the case in this current research, ‘the demographic profile is skewed heavily towards the educated, affluent, and urban.’ (Jenkins and Thorburn 2003:101-2) Whilst it is true that Internet activism is important and that almost ‘all transnational activist campaigns now use the Internet there are reasons to question their ultimate impact on authoritarian rule’. (Kalathil and Boas 2003)

Media have a great influence on the framing processes both on the local level and even more so at the transnational level. Therefore the question of SMT application to women’s creation of ideological/religious frameworks can be formulated as: In cyberKashmir what are the frames that women are employing and why are they framing in this way?
4. Literature review

Much of the current research on women in the conflict-ridden state of J&K focuses on their disempowerment as a result of conflict. Women have been categorised and essentialised as immobilised victims of an on-going geo-political struggle between the two regional nuclear rivals: India and Pakistan. “Kashmiri women are absent in dominant narratives of Kashmir, reclaiming women’s experiences is a step towards the larger project of challenging such narratives”. (Kazi 2009: xvii) To shed light on women's agendas and their subjective experiences is, therefore, an innovative and potent area of research that seeks to move beyond the well-trodden path.

In the last ten years there has been a surge in scholarship on a range of topics related to women and conflict in J&K including women's perspectives on the conflict and how it has affected them through personal narratives and an exploration of women as a constituency for peace. In Urvashi Butalia’s *Speaking Peace: Women’s voices from Kashmir* (2002) women's narratives both from the perspectives and narratives of Indian activists working in Kashmir and Kashmiri women from Pandit and Muslim communities are presented. Islam is addressed in many of the articles including Sikand's contribution to Women’s role in Kashmiri Rishism (for a greater appreciation and understanding of the role of Tasawwuf (Sufi) masters from Central Asia and Persia in Kashmir’s acceptance of Islam see M.I. Khan *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The role of Muslim Rishis*, 1994). The book has been criticised for not including many Kashmiri Muslim perspectives (see Hamida Bano at p.171, Farida Abdulla at p.262) but it is a sincere attempt to include other perspectives including those of internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs of Kashmir. So much needed to be and was addressed in the book as it was an innovative text which sought to show how the violence of the previous 12 years had impacted women in the different parts of the region and how women saw their present and future. Outside of the state and in the International community the perspectives of women in J&K were an unknown quantity initiative and largely still are. (Oxfam, VMAP: Violence Mitigation and Amelioration Project) (Butalia 2002). Although not a peer reviewed academic text this book signified a discernible and important attempt to change the tide regarding women, women’s voices and their perspectives.

Farida Abdulla Khan’s contribution gives a detailed insight into Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit women’s pursuit of education in the last century in *Other communities, other histories* (2002) and shows the lack of availability of education in the Kashmir Valley at its
advent in the early 20th century. This right was campaigning for and won by Kashmiri Muslims later than their Muslim counterparts in India. Due, in no small measure, to the efforts of Christian missionaries and women like the highly respected Mahmooda Ahmad Ali Shah who became the first woman college principal of Women’s College in Srinagar, education began to spread among the previously uneducated Kashmiri Muslims. This is vital historical research into Muslim women and education in the Kashmir Valley, which is missing from narratives of Muslim women’s activism in pre-independence South Asia (Khan 2002: 135). The stalwarts of the Quit Kashmir Movement (QKM) and the National Conference women’s wing went on to spearhead the reforms after they had achieved legal and constitutional guarantees of equality for women in J&K under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah.

Shazada Akhter in Kashmir: Women Empowerment and National Conference (2011) is another more recent publication of, which adds more detail to Khan’s research into the beginnings of Muslim women’s educational and social reform activism. In this work the author tries to highlight discrimination between men and women and the processes of empowerment of women in J&K giving particular, if sometimes uncritical reference, to the role of the National Conference party. The role of Begum Akbar Jehan (wife of Sheikh Abdullah) in the post 1947 period is not very noticeable although her efforts are recalled as founder of the first and longest standing women’s organisation in J&K (Behboodi Khawateen Markaz) for the welfare of destitute women and girls. (Akhter 2011: 124-127) This organisation is still run by her daughter Suraiya Abdullah Ali. (Interview Suraiya Abdullah Ali 2010) The author has added many facets to the more recent history of women in the state. This is commendable work, which could be an inspiration for those wishing to research a corresponding history of women’s development in Jammu and Ladakh regions of the state.

The gendered effects of displacement on Kashmiri Pandit and ‘border displaced’ women and the conditions of those who remain in ‘temporary’ camps is analysed in detail by Seema Shekhawat in Conflict and Displacement in Jammu and Kashmir: The Gender Dimension (2007). In this book, the author examines the plight of those Kashmiri Pandits forced to flee the Kashmir valley in 1990 and the little known flights of more disparate populations of J&K border areas on the LoC who live within IDP camps in Jammu region. The study is primarily based on field survey undertaken along the border and in the camps of the displaced during the period 2001-2004. The book aims at providing an alternate approach to study in this area and the authors’ analytical framework emphasizes conflict,
displacement and gender. The Pandit community has been organised and vocal in their stance against their current situation, united they secured financial assistance and shelter to deal with some of the more tangible aspects of their displacement. Those constituting the ‘border displaced’ seem, in turn, seem to be from poorer, ethnically disparate communities of these areas, with little political clout, they are not helped by the state. The non-Pandit border displaced live in temporary accommodation, not allowed to live on their own lands and are prone to health, educational and social problems in adjusting to displacement. This book is restricted to an analysis of these communities in IDP camps in Jammu and does not look into the religious aspects of women’s identities or deal with the simultaneous flights of Muslims both from border areas and from the Kashmir Valley. (Shekhawat 2006) For a picture of the problems faced by Muslim IDPs or refugees who have crossed over the LoC into AJ&K see Akhtar 2006.

Veteran scholar and Head of Sociology at Kashmir University, Bashir Ahmed Dabla provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of gender discrimination in the Kashmir Valley and the socio-cultural effects of this on women in the Budgam and Baramullah areas of the Kashmir Valley. The survey is detailed and gives valuable insights into social problems and problems associated with education. Social problems practice of dowry, non-payment of mahr (Islamic marriage gift), status of wife, polygamy, divorce, remarriage of divorcees and widows, denial of women's share in parental property, post-marital relations, spousal violence, role of working women, childcare problems, socialization of children and its implications are the areas analysed by Dabla, Nayak et al. (2000: 36)

In analysing the data on education the researchers found that in response to a question asking to what level should women be educated: 26% postgrad level, 22.2% graduate level, 17.8% to 12th class. In Budgam, the rural area, 80% of women favoured education from class 12 upwards whereas only 50% of urban women from Baramulla favoured the same. Generally 63.6% of respondents thought that the impact of education on marriage practices was helpful and when respondents children were asked why they and/or their parents did not favour education; 87% of the children responded that poverty and economic circumstances of their families accounted for their lack of schooling (Dabla, Nayak et al. 2000: 92-99)

Professor Dabla has also contributed another more recent study on women in the Kashmir Valley, which covers all 6 districts of the Kashmir valley; Anantnag, Baramulla, Budgam, Kupwara, Pulwama and Srinagar, The Multi-Dimensional Problems of Women in Kashmir (2007). This research was undertaken by the professors’ research team under
extremely difficult circumstances. Safety and security problems were faced by the team in all districts except Srinagar district. The research team were followed and watched in cases and harassed in others. Two were abducted by militants but later released after interrogation. (Dabla, 2007: 66) Despite the problems of research in a conflict zone the team prevailed and a much more detailed picture of women and their problems emerges. In terms of education 30.14% said facilities such as school buildings, teachers, equipment, libraries and laboratories normally available in schools were either partially or wholly absent. In the family girls face least resistance to their education at primary level and contrary to widely held belief, the difference in male: female dropout rates up to metric stage is not so great: 21% boys and 22.33% girls. (Dabla 2007: 28-9)

In terms of women’s health, the research found that there was dearth of health institutions and facilities available. This lack of facilities affected rural and urban areas—whereas before 1990 there were many such centres they had been destroyed or closed during the decades of militancy. This was also reflected in the finding that only 53.5% women have any pre-natal or post-natal care and only 58.43% of their children were fully immunized. (Dabla 2007:30) Whilst both are very detailed analyses of the many social, health, educational, problems faced by women in the Kashmir valley they do not provide a detailed analysis of Jammu or Ladakh and conflict affected women in these regions.

The following writers and their articles fall under the broad category of women and their roles in the current conflict (1990 - 2012). Kavita Suri, *Women in the Valley: From Victims to Agents of Change* (2006) examined the role of women in peace-building efforts. She writes even-handedly of both Indian security forces and armed opposition Groups (AOG or Militants) excesses of violence in the state and the consequences of this for women. She is also one of the few writers to address women’s situation outside the Kashmir Valley in the Jammu region. ‘By 1999, in Mahore tehsil, situated in the Pir Panjal range in Jammu there were 65 forced marriages among a population of 2,000. Parents tried to cope by marrying off their daughters very young or sending them away from Kashmir. Hundreds of girls and women kidnapped by militants simply disappeared. Many became pregnant and were abandoned by their kidnappers.’ (Suri 2006: 84) Furthermore, she examines the work of women’s groups other than the two political stalwarts of women’s activism Asyia Andrabi and Anjum Zamrooda Habib such as APDP, HELP and Aathwas (see section 8) and concludes that what women mean by Aman or peace is ‘...not just the absence of physical violence, but a system based on social security, equal opportunities, access to resources, distribution, economic rights and accountability: and a society where there is
social justice, progress, and development for all groups'. (Suri 2006: 92)

Anuradha M. Chenoy Resources or symbols? Women and Armed Conflicts in India (2007) conducts a comparative analysis of the development of women's agency in two of the North eastern conflict zones of Nagaland, Manipur and the state of Jammu and Kashmir. 'Women's agency is undervalued as their identity is held hostage to militarist values and they are subject to greater control than at normal times. Women are symbolic and easy victims of violence perpetrated by state agencies, factional groups, and domestic violence that intersect and sustain each other. Women derive their identities from feminine roles and accept patriarchal hierarchies for the sake of nationalism and liberation.' (Chenoy 2007: 210) Furthermore, it is cultural and social factors, which seem to determine the intensity of activism among women, when comparing Nagaland and Manipur with Kashmir, it is the lack of such which separates Kashmir. The author also posits 11 recommendations in order to prepare for peace in the region. (Chenoy 2007: 212-213)

Rita Manchanda wrote about Kashmiri Women and the Conflict: From Icon to Agency (2008). In this article the changing and multi-faced roles of Kashmiri women since 1990 are examined in the context of the wider Kashmiri nationalist struggle: 'the image of the Kashmiri insurgency fixed in the world's eye is that of Kashmiri women militants in protest and loud lament' (Manchanda 2008: 653) The author stresses that female activists who have participated in politics since 1990 have been side-lined by those whose platforms they shared. DeM and Asiya Andrabi have but marginal presence and 'guest' membership of the Hurriyat. With no effective decision-making power 'Bhenji', leader of MKM until 1996, left the political arena 'bitter and betrayed'. This seems to have been at the instigation of the Hurriyat (conglomeration of different parties committed to independence for J&K) leadership among whom Bhenji's outspoken manner did not find acceptance. Raising the issue of a place on the executive council of the Hurriyat in 1998 MKM leaders were again denied and sidelined by the male leadership as it was thought to expose women to greater risk of arrest and detention. (Manchanda 2008:710) Parveena Ahangar's APDP (see section 8) are also criticised as lacking 'a clear political vision of peace, the sole fact of being suffering women will not be enough'. However, it is the male leadership of the 'azadi movement which has 'had an instrumental relationship with Kashmiri women, boxing them in the roles of martyr's mothers and raped women, using them for propaganda purposes but denying their contribution to the struggle or providing space for their empowerment.' (Manchanda 2008:712)

Manisha Sobhrajani in Jammu & Kashmir Women's Role in the post-1989 Insurgency
(2008) highlights the four ways in which women have played a supportive proactive role in the agencies. The first is as motivators extending psychological support to their kinsmen. In this scenario jihadi’s were almost worshipped and women felt great honour from their status as mother’s or other female relatives of a jihadi. Women were also known to provide food and shelter to militants and protecting them from the security forces and when men were killed 'mothers were often heard making statements which glorified the dead men and how lucky they were to have given birth to a martyr.' The author also argues that women’s roles in organisation of protests and demonstrations was also part of their role in the insurgency. Asserting that women not only registered false FIRs for missing men who were actually militants but also made false rape allegations against the Indian security forces, Sobhrajani states, ‘\textit{In fact they were encouraged to give testimonies against violations committed by the Indian security forces, and were exploited as victims and targets of the Indian agenda. Kashmiri women have picketed the streets of Srinagar and other towns and villages to voice their agitation about rape and killings by the Security Forces, and have been an important part of the well-oiled propaganda machinery of the militants}.’

The next section of the article describes the agendas of the main political activists groups Dukhtaran-e-Millat and Muslim Khawateen Markaz. This includes the issue of the burqa diktat of DeM supported by an obscure group Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LeJ) but 'Despite DeM's support, even the most militant of Kashmiri separatists condemned LeJ's actions', Asiya Andrabi has been implicated in the murder of photographer Mushtaq Ali in 1995 and has organised protests and agitation against those involved in the sex scandal that rocked the Kashmir Valley in mid-2006. The author further examines MKM mistakenly describing, Anjum Zamrooda Habib, if other sources examined here are correct, as Behenji, who 'got immense mileage and became a household figure after she saved the life of JKLF chief Hamid Sheikh.' MKM activists also kept lookout and alerted militants when Indian security forces arrived allowing militants to escape, they also supported militants by providing 'food and clothes to jailed militants and would even collect money for bails.'

The author then outlines the banning of DeM in 2002 and charging of Asiya Andrabi under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) for receiving funds from the Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The same charges of receiving funds lead to charges against Anjum Zamrooda Habib and Asiya Andrabi on different occasions. She also suggests that women in Dardpora, Kupwara District, also known as the village of widows, 'make some easy money even now by showing shortcuts in the mountains to militants'. By the author’s
own admission these are unconfirmed reports and she sees survival as the most important factor which ‘contributed to women getting swayed into supporting the insurgency….Education, or the lack of it, helped various agencies at work to influence women and mould their thinking and subsequent behavior in their favour.’ The author does not seem to approach the point that women might be able to conceive of their own political stance vis-a-vis the insurgency and may not have to be 'swayed' by others into supporting the insurgency.

Francesca Marino *An Islamic Feminist: Asiya Andrabi and the Dukhtaran-e-Millat of Kashmir* (2010). This article is a portrait by journalist, Francesca Marino, is based on two previous meetings with the infamous leader of the DeM, Asiya Andrabi in 2000 and 2006. The author describes Asiya's transition from disappointed student in her youth to political activist to 'soft' terrorist leader. As the only woman activist in J&K to call herself an 'Islamic feminist…she fights for equal rights within the frame of Islam.' A woman who recently served the latest of her jail sentences, she is a political entity who has hijacked the discourses in the mainstream media: she calls press conferences, is media savvy in her use of digital media and she has organised strikes and demonstrations. She has tried and failed to institute an Islamisation process of women's dress by issuing edicts, which have brought violence not just in the form of green paint but the resistance of Muslim women to this imposition has cost them their lives at the hands of militant groups.

Whilst other writers speak of the dwindling membership and influence of the DeM, Marino asserts that Asiya Andrabi is on the political ascent again (she was released from prison at the end of 2011). The claim is that she and her husband joined the Muslim League whilst in prison and she was behind the planning of summer 2010s stone throwing protests in which Indian security forces and local police killed more than 100 young people.

Swati Parashar *Gender, Jihad, and Jingoism: Women as Perpetrators, Planners, and Patrons of Militancy in Kashmir* (2011). In this article the author seeks to highlight the multiple roles of women in the conflict and how they have been unacknowledged by little more than lip service from the Kashmiri male leadership. ‘While popular support for the militancy seems to have waned, and several former militants (men) have taken the political route, the political voices of women have not found their due place in discourses about the conflict and Kashmiri nationalism. This is despite the widespread knowledge that women have not only suffered the most in the conflict but have also contributed significantly in the emergence of the nationalist/separatist narrative and the armed insurgency.’(Parashar 2011: 298)
In pursuit of this the author asks two questions: Whether women were or still are involved in active militancy? How are women excluded and marginalised in the political spaces in Kashmir. In the case of the first question the author suggests that 'some women are' undergoing religious indoctrination and arms training in the madrassas and camps of various militant groups.' One newspaper in 2007 cited an Indian intelligence report claiming 21-day training for the Lashkar's Women's brigade.' (Ibid at 302)

She then posits that there is scant evidence of this 'trend' in Kashmir and adds 'it is also worth noting that female militants and operatives include women from both sides of the Line of Control' however, journalist Praveen Swami (Ibid at 306) is quoted as being dismissive of these allegations. The author’s interest in women actively participating in the armed militancy leads her to describe the case of Yasmeena who blew herself up near Awantipora in 2005. Whilst some militants claimed responsibility many believe that she was a courier who 'accidentally' blew herself up. (Ibid at 307) She concludes that 'Women in Kashmir have not been radically transformed during their participation in the militancy which has in many cases been an extension of their traditional gendered roles but they have impacted local politics, gender relations and have negotiated spaces to articulate their concerns. However, they are not represented in any peace talks or political processes to address the conflict. The patriarchal leaders of the mainstream political parties and the separatist Hurriyat Conference determine and dominate the political agenda in Kashmir.' (Ibid at 312)

In Seema Kazi's book, In Kashmir: Gender, Militarization and the Modern Nation State (2009), the author examines the militarisation and nuclearisation of the Indian state, the subsequent militarisation of J&K and uses gender as an essential component of analysis. In utilising women's subjective experience of militarisation as a central component of her analysis, the author shows the link between national level militarisation and societal changes in gender norms.

Kazi begins by defining the concepts of militarism and gender, and then moves on to describing India’s militarisation and its ascent to world power through the nuclearizing of its foreign policy. She then focuses her analysis on militarization of Kashmir for which she holds India primarily responsible with Pakistan in a secondary role and its effects. The heart of her thesis is in the gender dimensions of militarisation in Kashmir and how women's roles became politicised for the freedom movement. The paradox here which Kazi shows clearly is that despite women's multi-faceted roles in the militancy/insurgency they have not been created by the male leadership of the 'azadi' movement but rather
marginalised by it.

‘In sum I argue that Kashmir’s gender dimensions illustrate how militarization in Kashmir is a process mediated through constructions of gender in ways that reproduce and/or reinforce social hierarchy’ (Kazi 2009: xxviii).

Kazi’s concise analysis gives us a clear picture of the de facto power of India in Kashmir and its legal obligations under both the constitution and Intentional laws, however the limitation of the study is that it does not deal with other regions of the state, which are also militancy affected.

Shabnum Qayoom *Kashmir Mey Khawateen Ki Behurmati (Rape of Kashmiri Women, 2010)*. In this book the author holds not just the Indian security forces responsible for rape, but also AOGs. Qayoom describes and documents the rapes, which were committed by Ikhwanis (renegades), who have even been implicated in the supply of women to high-ranking police officers, bureaucrats, politicians by the exposure of VIP Sex Scandal in 2006. On the pretext of government jobs, girls and women (some of whom were destitute widows) were exploited by officials including security forces and politicians in J&K. This could also be viewed as a case of the collusion of differing patriarchies whose nexus reveals the extent of the impunity afforded to all who would commit violence against and exploit women. Ikhwanis have also been implicated in the procuring of their ‘own’ female kin for this purpose. Girls and women who visit their detained male relatives in army camps, torture centres are at particular risk.

Many male family members have been killed attempting to save their female kin from being raped, which only adds to the suffering of women who survive. Of those who do survive most suffer from severe depression and psychological trauma whilst a lack of sympathy in their community and the perpetrators impunity from prosecution (see section 7) can also lead survivors to commit suicide. To date not a single member of the Indian security forces or AOGs has been prosecuted and many of the survivors such as those in Kunanposhpura and Shopian have been denied justice. Due to these circumstances many do not even report cases when they occur. (Qayoom 2010)

In journalist Afsana Rashid’s book *Widows and Half widows: Saga of extra-judicial arrests and killings in Kashmir* (2011) she describes the effects of enforced disappearances, ‘accidental’ killings and extra judicial killings on the widows and half widows (name given to those who do not have proof of the death of their husbands) left behind. As an attempt to provide a more detailed and comprehensive perspective on a problem, which is barely
understood in its gravity, the book’s critique is not focused exclusively on those who commit these crimes but rather on society as a whole and its failure to support these women. Due to India’s Iron Fist policy, instituted under Jagmohan, to quell the insurgency in 1990, thousands of men and teenage boys have been ‘disappeared’ by security forces. It was this that led to the formation of Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) which contrary to its name also takes widows and half widows and their children as members.

The fight for justice sees ordinary Kashmiris pitted against hesitant police personnel who do not want to file First Information Reports (FIR) against the security forces. Often victims’ families are subject to intimidation to drop a case and Rashid highlights cases of killing/maiming of members of victim’s family as well as the pauperisation of entire families whose financial resources are drained by having to travel to find information and pay bribes at every instance.

Half widows are not allowed to remarry, as no consensus exists among Islamic schools of thought as to the time a woman has to wait before her husband can be declared dead. The J&K government has decided that the waiting time should be seven years but this has not helped women as widow remarriage rarely occurs in Kashmiri society. Half-widows are often reduced to serving their in-laws as maids and/or forced to leave their marital homes. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental illnesses are common for families of the disappeared and widows are at especially high risk of suicide.

Families are affronted when campaigning politicians use the issue of disappearances and promises of justice to get elected and successive governments contradict each other as to the numbers of victims. The book provides outlines of various plans for a solution of the Kashmir problem and recommendations to halt the practice of enforced disappearance. (Rashid 2011).

References to women and Islam in most of the works cited are essentialised, if Islam is referred to at all, and provide an almost wholly ‘secular’ perspective on gender relations. Nyla Ali Khan is the only writer to specifically address Islam in the title of her book Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir. (Khan 2010) As the granddaughter of Begum Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah she is also uniquely positioned to write about her personal and familial history in this book. She ventures further to analyse the effects of patriarchal nationalist, militant and religious discourses on gender relations in the state and provides an overview of the women's scene since 1947. (Khan 2010:114-124) Utilising eye
witness accounts of those who served in the Women’s Self Defence Corp such as Krishna Mehta, Khan creates a rich tapestry of oral evidence which is interwoven with her analysis.

The concept of Kashmiriyat is used a tool to foreground Kashmiri identity utilising “selected cultural fragments from an imagined past that would enfold both the Pandits and the Muslims” (Khan 2010: 37). Furthermore the author writes about the perseverance of this potent cultural syncretism (Kashmiriyat) and the unifying power of Shaivite/Sufi mystic and feminist icon Lalla Ded or Lalla Arifa. She analyses the Kashmiri vernacular verses of the poet who was also the spiritual mentor of Sheikh Nooruddin or Nund Rishi. She was/is revered by both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims as a seeker in the truest sense. Her rejection and critique of structural injustices, religious hypocrisy as well caste, and pre-assigned gender roles makes Lalla Ded a unique character in Kashmiri history.

In writing about Islam, it is the ‘syncretic Sufism’ of Kashmiriyat which is outlined in what some have embraced as a Kashmiri nationalist standpoint to position Kashmiris from the Valley as distinct from other Muslims in India. There is an exclusionary aspect to Kashmiriyat, which is not scrutinised to uncover why it was utilised by the National Conference leadership to refer exclusively to the unity of the Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits. Other state subjects were not addressed, the language itself makes the verses of Lalla Ded inaccessible to most and her relevance in 21st century Kashmir and in particular among young women is not explored.

Although Tasawwuf (Sufism) is not devoid of Islam, in political terms the Sufi Islam, which is posited as a key component of Kashmiriyat (Kashmiri nationalism) is an abstraction with only a shadow of Islam accompanying it. (For further discussion of the concept of Kashmiriyat see Zutshi 2004, Khan 2007, Aggarwal 2008 and Sazawal 2009 and for a view of historical role of Tasawwuf and religious conversion of the Kashmir Valley’s people to Islam see Khan 1994; Rafiabadi 2009).

Jasbir Singh and Anupama Vohra in Citizenship Rights of Women in Jammu and Kashmir: An Uncertain Future (2007) discuss the highly controversial Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill 2004. Also referred to as the Daughters’ bill, this piece of retrograde legislation sought to legally deprive the women of J&K of their permanent resident status and the benefits that this status brings. This potentially includes the right to buy property, seek government employment or vote in J&K except for ‘parliamentary polls’ but the Bill does not affect the right to inherit property in the state if they marry a non-state resident
i.e. from outside J&K. (Ibid at p.167) The same does not apply to male residents who marry out of state citizens. The inconsistency of this legislation with precedent forming case law of the past is highlighted by the authors through a gendered perspective. The gender disparity resulting from the passage of such a law would undermine the basic constitutional provisions laid down in J&K for women’s equal treatment as well as Indian constitutional guarantees. The reasons given for the introduction of such legislation show a fear of opening up real estate markets to foreigners (read Indians). The bill has been put aside for now (Maqbool 2012) but women’s vigilance is required if it is to be permanently defeated. In an interview with Professor Rekha Chowdhary about this issue she expressed the following, ‘this was an important issue for all women in the state not just because it was against international human rights law or against the Indian constitution provisions but also against the basic principles of the constitution of J&K one would imagine that women would be united and not be ready to be treated as second class citizens. But on this issue women have been divided along political lines and there was no mobilisation in the state’. (Interview R. Chowdhary 2012)

Although not an academic text, the prison diary Qaide No. 100 The Story of My ordeal in an Indian Prison detailing the experiences of a Kashmiri Muslim woman activist Anjum Zamrooda Habib and ‘separatist’ politician sentenced to 5 years in Tihar Prison is a harrowing account of the sacrifices made by women who venture into and refuse to vacate the public domain of male dominated politics in J&K. (Habib 2011) This together with Sudha Koul’s The Tiger Ladies: A memoir of Kashmir (2002), Basharat Peer’s Curfewed Night (2010) and Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator (2011) provided rich terrain for this researcher to appreciate the cultures of violence, which have accompanied the militarisation of the state and the damage caused to families, friends and communities in Kashmir.

In none of the above peer-reviewed articles is Islam addressed in more than an essentialised and monolithic way and it is sometimes positioned in binary opposition to the liberal Sufism of a mythically peaceful past. The focus is mainly on MKM or DeM political groups and their leaders and tends to ignore the work of other women activists who do not participate in the political arena. (See section 8) As for the women mentioned and their actions interpreted in the light of Jihadist Islam (Salafist), it is due time that a more nuanced understanding of Islam is permitted to enter the discursive spaces provided by academic scholarship. What is not addressed in the literature is the extent to which normative Islam (Tasawwuf included) plays a positive and/or pivotal role in the agendas of
women in J&K and if there are any discursive developments and movements centred on an emancipatory Islamic framework. In the absence of this exploration of women and religion, there cannot be a comprehensive and/or meaningful analysis of women's activism in J&K.
5. The Salience of Transnational Islamic Feminism

Islamic Feminism

Before attempting to define the discursive category of Islamic feminism and its praxis it is important to mention that speaking about Muslim women is ground where geographical location, class, caste, race are some of the variables which meet and make it impossible to essentialise such a broad category. However, in reality "the woman question in Islam," has been treated as universal and unchanging. (Ali 2000) Discourses from various locations have understood Sharia or Islamic Law, and therefore the rights pertaining to women to be firmly fixed and unchangeable (Engineer 2003). Some Muslim women have also entered into this mode of thinking and women and men seeking reform of those laws, customs and practices, which impinge on Muslim women’s rights, achieved hard won deviations from this position.

The second area, which this researcher would like to clarify before proceeding, is what constitutes patriarchy for the purpose of this research. Here it is useful to look at Asma Barlas’ definition, which is itself, two-fold in nature:

- Rule of the father – bases on a patriarchal view of God as the Father which is automatically translated as the husband’s prerogative to rule as sovereign over his wife and children. This privilege is usually inherited by brothers and sons who can by virtue of being male also dictate to and command women; from sisters to mothers to daughters.

- Politics of sexual differentiation- privileging males by ‘transforming biological sex into politicized gender, which prioritizes the male while making the woman different (unequal), less than, or the ‘Other.’” (Zillah Eisenstein cited in Barlas 2005: 4)

Defining Islamic Feminism

As an important part of identity whether one is or is not willing to accept that she or he is a feminist, gender identity is only part of the complex narrative of identity for most people; Muslim women are no exception to this and this researcher is inclined to agree with Madhu Kishwar that, ‘my gender identity is only one of my multiple overlapping and crosscutting identities which peacefully coexists with other identities.’(Kishwar 1996: 6)
Feminism is in itself a contested category as there are as many feminisms within so called secular discourses (secular is understood to mean a system which does not privilege religion with executive power), as there seem to be emerging in religious discourses. This gives feminist discourses a localised diversity, which are simultaneously its greatest strength and its weakness. Nevertheless, secular feminisms have sought to network and build alliances with other actors working for social, economic and legal justice, both locally and transnationally.

At its foundation feminism is an epistemological category, which asserts a consciousness of the deprivation of human rights, a discrimination against and the oppression of females due solely to their biology; that is being born female. This awareness leads feminism to different forms of activism based on understandings of what gender justice is and attempts to retrieve or found new ways of gaining rights in order to redress this imbalance. (Badran 2005: 58)

Islamic feminism, according to Margot Badran ‘is an affirmation of the rights Islam gave to women as human beings and an affirmation of the gender equality and social justice embedded in the Qur’an.’ (ibid at p.58)

Islamic feminism is a feminist discursive category which asserts its authority to speak for Islam (Krämer 2006; Esposito 2008) and claims this mandate from the normative sources of Islam; principally the Qur’an. Consequently seeking gender justice and claiming authority from an Islamic perspective has led to contestations as to its efficacy from both Ulema (Islamic Scholars) and 'secular' feminist discourses. This has led to ‘much misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and mischief concerning Islamic feminism. This new feminism has given rise simultaneously to hopes and to fears.’ (Badran 2002)

The efficacy of Islamic feminism is in its awareness that Islam plays an important and pivotal role in the lives of Muslims and therefore cannot be ignored. It also acknowledges that changes to family laws governing the institution of marriage are vital to improving Muslim women's status in society. Islamic feminism is valid category both for Muslim women living in diaspora communities in Europe, USA and the world over as well as those living in Muslim majority states. For Muslim women living in diaspora communities the discursive category allows and enables them to ‘untangle patriarchy and religion; it gives them Islamic ways of understanding gender equality, societal opportunity, and their own potential.’ (Badran 2002)
Islamic feminism is a relatively new form of discourse based on the feminist or womanist re-interpretations of the normative sources of Islam. It is precisely these re-interpretations of the Quran and the seminal works of exegesis that have been carried out by feminist scholars such as Amina Wadud, and Asma Barlas, among others, which constitute the leap made into the discursive and formerly almost exclusively male terrain of hermeneutics of the Quran.

Still a relative newcomer in discursive terms, the demands being made by scholar-activists like Mir-Hosseini and Wadud are still the same as those of their intellectual foremothers who took part in the nationalist and anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century. (see Ali 2000 for Muslim women’s contributions in the Indian context) The advent of Islamic feminism is a product of transnational processes of Islamisation throughout Muslim societies in the 1970s and 1980s. In the significantly reduced public spaces of this period, women continued to engage in empowering themselves and promoting agendas for change. According to Huma Ahmed Ghosh, the phenomena of Islamic feminism was most likely ‘the only situationally appropriate strategy for women to employ under the watchful and critical eyes of Islamic regimes.’ (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 108)

It was not until the following decade of the 1990s that Islamic feminism ‘gained currency’ and sought to give voice to those women who found themselves in the no-woman’s' land between Islamist and secular feminist paradigms. Refusing to renounce Islam, they nonetheless critiqued patriarchal authority to speak for and to women. (Wadud 2002)

As a result of these endeavours and via a return to the normative sources of Islam women have sought to break the epistemological chains that have been forced upon them by conservative patriarchal interpretations and praxis. Contesting these claims made on behalf of Islam by patriarchal tradition has allowed Muslim women to create spaces to converse with each other and others about gender and gender justice. (Wadud 2002)

Whilst in broad agreement with Ziba Mir-Hosseini that ‘any definition of ‘Islamic feminism’, rather than clarifying, may cloud our understanding’ (Mir Hosseini 2004: 3), a working definition that this researcher uses is based on the commonalities shared by those in the discursive arena. Clearly through the discursive category of Islamic feminism, Muslim women are making claims for gender justice and equality based on feminist re-interpretations of the normative sources of Islam.
Contentions and Issues with Islamic Feminism

There are many issues with and contestations of Islamic feminism from all sides and it serves as a useful aide memoir to those involved in articulations for and against its salience when Huma Ahmed Ghosh speaks of different kinds of Islamic feminists. Muslim women who are espousing gender justice from within Islam can be of a wide spectrum of opinion; “progressive, modernist, traditionalist, pragmatist, neo-Islamist, or fundamentalist.” (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 103)

While it is broadly true in the post-colonial states of the Muslim world that feminism has a bad ‘reputation’, in particular, among conservative, patriarchal elements that had previously successfully thwarted Muslim women’s attempts at gaining equal rights in the early 20th century. Those demands did not disappear but rather intensified and become entrenched in Muslim women’s vocabularies of gender justice.

Is Islamic Feminism an Oxymoron?

Islamic discourses and those pertaining to human rights are seen as mutually exclusive categories, which can by no means exist together. As Anthony Chase reminds us ‘aside from legal limits and political crosscurrents, other powerful normative frames continuously contest human rights. Sometimes this contestation leads to interesting cross-fertilizations, as with Islamic feminisms or other ‘Islam and human rights’ models that have made various attempts to merge Islamic and human rights norms in a way that satisfies the normative foundations of each.’ (Chase 2007: 6)

In Islamic states, particularly those of a despotic nature, (as was observed in the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011), governments often contend that human rights are anti-Islamic and a ‘Western’ imposition and Islamic feminism is also bracketed in this category. To most Muslims these are instances in which ruling elites feel threatened with exposure and possibly having to account for the violation of the rights of their citizens Muslims and non-Muslims. (An-Naim 2004: 11)

If Islam and human rights are clearly compatible in the minds of many Muslims, it becomes difficult to comprehend why Islam and feminism are problematic as both gender discourses and human rights discourses are interdependent and mutually supportive. The answer lies in the fact that both secular feminist opponents and Islamist opponents of Islamic feminism view Islam as an essentialised and unchanging patriarchal religion, which
is antithetical to human rights. Although they have different epistemic standpoints from which they speak their argument is in its logic the very same; ‘Islamic feminism is a contradiction in terms’. (Mir-Hosseini 2004: 2-3)

Labelling Muslim Women

From among the ranks of Muslim women who produce, promote and disseminate Islamic feminist discourses are those who will not accept an Islamic feminist label. Naming as an act of power over a discernible entity can be seen as an act of confinement or even as an act of violence, and is better left to those who see themselves in that particular way. (Badran 2002) Labelling women activists and scholars, as this researcher has witnessed at Islamic feminism conferences, is often strongly and sometimes vehemently resisted. There also seems to be a certain degree of confusion as to the difference between Islamist feminism and Islamic feminism and this is another reason why feminists do not appropriate the label.

Whilst this researcher understands that labelling Muslim women ‘feminist’ or ‘Islamic feminists’ is unjust unless they take the label upon themselves, there are those who gladly accept it as part of their identity. It seems that, despite their actions and the way they speak about gender justice, others will neither accept the label ‘Islamic’ nor ‘feminist’ saying that the former is an adjective and weakens what is after all a stronger identification with the more definitive use of ‘Muslim’ and ‘feminism’ already has negative connotations, which can seriously inhibit the work they do. (Basarudin 2005: 59)

Margot Badran explains her acceptance of the label thus ‘like most people, I use multiple discourses, discourses that support each other, not cancel each other, and inasmuch as discourses – and activism flowing from it – define us, I am both an Islamic feminist and a secular feminist…..’ (Basarudin 2005: 62) Islam and feminism together as rights discourses was therefore inevitable for those women seeking to attain their rights but not to abandon Islam as socialist, secular understandings of women’s rights would have it.

Dismantling the Master's House with his own Tools

To paraphrase Audre Lorde once said that it was not possible to dismantle the master’s house using his own tools (Lorde 1984) and she was correct in this assertion about the
epistemological tools to dismantle racism needing to come from another paradigm. In other words when Islamic feminists are choosing to challenge conservative patriarchal authority and positioning their demands for gender justice within an Islamic framework, are they in fact legitimizing the oppression of women inadvertently by this methodology? (Moll 2009: 42)

In regards to its application to Islamic feminism, the example of master and slave does not suffice. It is this researcher’s assertion that women do not occupy the same position as either plantation slaves or house slaves. Muslim women using Islamic feminism as their discursive arena see themselves and other disenfranchised Muslim women more as usurped co-owners of the house.

A pertinent question therefore arises as to whether someone who lives in the house (as usurped co-owner) can comprehend for herself which tools are necessary in her task not just to dismantle but to renovate and if necessary rebuild the ‘master’s house’ so that she can take her rightful place as co-owner and mistress of the house.

Whilst not advocating collusion with unyielding patriarchy, there is a need to change how men view women in order to wrest even the basic rights guaranteed by Islam from their hands. This can only be done via engagement with patriarchal elements as patriarchy cannot be essentialised as monolithic just as the category of ‘Muslim’ women cannot; engagement and negotiation can also present opportunities to learn new modes of being and thinking which can in turn lead to a softening of the boundaries of patriarchy.

Elitist Discourse vs. Grassroots Praxis?

Initially, discourses almost always emanate from within the elites but are filtered through to the grassroots later. What is elitist about Islamic feminism is that it is still relatively new and therefore still in the hands of a few quite powerful players. An education and a middle class lifestyle can provide access to the discursive terrain but Islamic feminism has emerged from a perspective, which is also deeply concerned with the state of grassroots praxis and sees itself as a tool with which Muslim women can access religious knowledge and better protect themselves from encroachment of their rights. Most of the scholars who are engaged with Islamic feminism are scholar–activists or activist-scholars. (Interview Ziba Mir-Hosseini 2010)

Feminism as a whole has remained in the hands of the elites because educational development of Muslim women around the world has been abysmal; literacy rates in India
and Jammu and Kashmir stand testament to this. Most of the elite women are secular feminists who claim their rights using human rights discourses, but even they have found ‘a class and intellectual disengagement’ exists and feminism is still seen to be the domain of elite women. (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 113)

Feminism’s weakness was not in its epistemological claims but that it was/is a ‘foreign’ imposition and this is evidenced by the fact that many of the leading proponents of the discourse are either ‘Western’ educated and/or belong to established diaspora communities of Muslims in the ‘West’. Muslim women who belonged to urban elites did adhere to feminism and managed to improve their lot, but they often struggled from within secular paradigms to better the circumstances of those who were not so fortunate.

**Muslim Feminist Praxis**

It was Sa’diyah Shaikh who first coined the phrase ‘tafsir of praxis’ to describe the activism of Muslim women in understanding and interpreting their own lived realities. (Hammer 2010: 29) South African Muslim women, who have suffered domestic violence, she determines, examine and scrutinise Quranic verse 4:34 in particular, which, is a form of Tafsir that differs from methods employed by of the men of their community. Cited in Hammer she contends:

‘My approach explicitly foregrounds how a group of Muslim women think and speak in relation to the text and engage God, ethics, and religion through the realities of their suffering and oppression. What they often emerge with is an understanding of Islam that provides a very different ethical and existential vision than that of traditional male scholars, their husbands, and clerics around them.’ (Hammer 2010: 30)

It is in this sense that many Muslim women look for and seek information to understand and to solve their particular problems and dilemmas with assistance from the Quran. Women are thus engaged in the ‘tafsir of praxis’ when they want to know about and clarify their understandings of their Islamic rights. Does this then answer the charges that women are only utilising men’s traditional interpretations of fiqh to espouse their rights?

**Engagement with Islamist Women**

In looking at contexts from the Arab world, Carolyn Barnett has observed the flexibility of patriarchal boundaries in the support provided to some daughters for their education and
activism by their fathers. This support has been crucial and has allowed for these particular Islamist women to emerge onto the political arena. She further notes that the absence of a patriarch has also given women the opportunity to enter the public space and promote women's agendas. (Barnett 2009: 71)

The other common factor, which she identifies as significant, is the 'western' education of these women through missionary, (predominantly Catholic) schooling. Rather than being instrumental in creating ‘Westernised Orientals’ with its civilising mission, it has instead given women opportunities to attain professional status and allowed them to appropriate the language and education received to challenge European domination. (Barnett 2009: 73) 'They chose to use the language and theories of the West against itself in support of their alternative interpretations, just as they have used the language of Islamic renewal and reinterpretation to root their pro-woman perspectives in a discourse not easily dismissed as being of Western origin.' (Barnett 2009: 87)

The traditional conservatives among believing Muslims can be difficult to engage with but there are signs that Islamic feminism is getting the attention of Islamist women from conservative organisations that seems to be reaching out and embracing this discursive terrain to a greater degree than secular Muslim feminists who are still wary of it. It was Mir-Hosseini who first characterised Islamic feminism as ‘the unwanted child of political Islam’ and it seems to be evidenced that it is from within Islamic or Islamist groups that women’s voices are being raised. In the context of India in 2006, the Jamaat-i-Islami (Hind) women’s wing leader Nasira Khanum urged a gathering of 30,000 followers in Hyderabad to inform themselves of their rights and be prepared to snatch them if denied. (Schneider 2009: 66)

Similarly there is only one Islamist women’s organisation in Jammu and Kashmir of note, the Dukhtaran e Millat, whose leader, Asiya Andrabi is quoted as confirming herself an 'Islamic feminist'. (Marino 2010) It seems that Islamic feminism may be a way to engage Islamist women in dialogue and nation-building scenarios rather than marginalising and dismissing them as reactionary out of hand. As described earlier the lack of alliance building between secular and religiously-orientated women bodes ill for their representation in conflict transformation and subsequent national reconstruction in a post conflict J&K.
Is Islamic Feminism Relevant in Conflict Zones?

This is a question which will be addressed from the gendered perspective on conflict provided by scholars such as, Enloe 1990, Manchanda 2001, Cockburn 2007, Kazi 2009 and Khan 2010.

Firstly, it is understood that conflict causes the breakdown of male-dominated public spaces by blurring the divide between that and the private sphere. 'Men literally and metaphorically retreat into the private sphere.' Thereby women are able to utilise what Manchanda calls their 'traditional invisibility in the public sphere' in order to create spaces for their activism. (Manchanda 2001: 15-16)

Secondly, wherever there is conflict the access to terrestrial networking opportunities and the promotion of Muslim women's agendas are severely restricted (see section 5) but this does not prevent all women from accessing public spaces and a wide spectrum of women's activism can nevertheless exist as is evident in J&K.

Thirdly, in Muslim majority spaces such as J&K, it is believed that the secular spaces are further limited by the increasing of the religious public domain further limiting women's articulations. (Interview David Devadas 2011) However, it is evident that both secular and religious spaces are being utilised for promoting women’s agendas even though secular organisations do not enjoy the legitimacy they used to.

Finally, why is it relevant to speak about Islamic feminism in J&K? As discussed earlier Muslim women need to be brought into conflict transformation and peace-building processes. Islamic feminism as a discursive category has the potential to bridge discursive divides and create alliances among women from diverse political perspectives and bring women's agendas to the fore so as not to miss the opportunity to shape their societies in a gender-just way.

Historically, waiting for the right time was a mistake for women's movements in post-independence states as nationalist and self-determination movements allowed men to mask their unwillingness to countenance women's demands by saying that the fight for the 'nation' was to take priority. When that was done, then would be time to manage women's affairs. Thus eliciting women's active and supportive roles in the conflicts and whilst some women are prepared to forfeit again, others are not.
Islamic Feminism and Bridging the Discursive Divide

In 1999, Seema Kazi observed, in *Muslims in India*, that laws would not be sufficient until education and economic independence was achieved by women (Kazi 1999: 22). She recommended that Indian Muslim women assert their right to access religious knowledge in order to be able to contest their long standing marginalisation and to participate in discourses on Islamic law. (Kazi 1999: 32)

In the context of India, considering that Muslim Personal Law (MPL) needs reform from within the Muslim communities itself, it is the job of women to initiate the reform that they desire. (see Agnes 2006:29-38) To this end Muslim women in India have started to mobilise for change, as described above. However the questions remain, can the third space be bridged and vital alliances between Muslim feminists of all persuasions (secular and religious) be forged and in a wider perspective alliances between secular non-Muslim groups and Islamic feminists? Can IF facilitate that discursive bridge and enable grass roots work of educating Muslim women about their Islamic rights?

Another problem has been feminist critiques of nationalism, militarisation of civil society in conflict zones and issues of self-determination have been slow to emerge from within the Indian women's movement. There has been a reluctance to de-link from the States version of nationalism and take a radical stance regarding state repression, shortcomings of democracy, and forcible submission to the unity-in-diversity model of governance. In trying to rethink sovereignty and citizenship feminists have now sought to re-define the nation-state itself. (Chakravarty 2008: 36)

It has been the absence of this clear critique, which has allowed for the schism between secular and religiously orientated feminists to widen. This feminist critique has become more focused and more nuanced in recent years although it was seriously challenged by the events in 2001 Parliament attack, near war with Pakistan as a result, and the 2008 Mumbai attacks. These events have highlighted the need to examine afresh the demands for independence/autonomy not just in J&K but also in the North Eastern states.

In taking a feminist lens to the conflict Uma Chakravarty asks a revealing question; 'Does it not occur to you that forced unions between peoples or nations are very similar to forced unions between men and women? A marriage between a man and a woman, imposed by a patriarchal structure against the wishes of the woman, (or the man) results in the family being based on resentment, bitterness and hatred. So does a union between two peoples forced by a state...’ (Chakravarty 2008: 37)
It is important, therefore, to use carefully crafted feminist critique in order to build strategic alliance, which may bridge women's diverse positions and give voice to their struggles. Women need to be included in dialogues that lead to peace not as an absence of conflict but as a means to engage in their societies as equals with decision-making power; this necessarily means that one must take into account all perspectives and not just what is the more palatable or acceptable 'secular' voices. The secular-religious dichotomy persists in J&K as hyper-conflated religious spaces are also unavailable to Muslim women, as equal members at any rate. The question then arises as to how to build the necessary alliances required among women in the State in order to bring their agendas to the peace table and ensure that in the process of national reconstruction in the post conflict period that their voices are heard.

This schism and stalemate between women's groups is detrimental to the necessity of creating alliances and networks with each able to find common ground to work together for the furtherance of peace. Despite women's peace-building efforts, they rarely acquire a seat at the peace table. It will also take Amazonian determination and intense lobbying to be included as even minor actors in an interim government. (UNIFEM Rehn 2002: 76)

The women of J&K have been successfully side-lined in the not-so-distant past but as one peacemaker put it 'Making it from the grass mat to the peace table has nothing to do with their qualifications as peacemakers. Once the foreign mediators come and the official negotiations start, you have to be able to sit at the table, and speak their language. Often women are not trained or given the chance.' (ibid at p.79) Peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction has to be concerned with not just an end to war, but ought to engage in active nation-building processes in order to acknowledge women's contributions to the struggle for peace, promote gender equality and to protect women. Support for the rules of law, multi-party systems and elections have become the benchmarks of peace building, without which women cannot live in safety. (ibid at p.80)

Scholars such as Huma Ahmed Ghosh have suggested a bridging of the discursive divide which exist, 'If the current appropriate framework of social empowerment is Islam, feminists have to work with it to empower women. It is then for women in these situations to exercise their agency to bring the changes to their lives that matches their aspirations... Given the pan-conservative Islam in the region, a partnering of “moderate” Islamic feminists with secular feminists might avoid the schism and stalemate that may exist in the discourse on women’s rights in this region and help bring about at least some changes in women’s rights.' (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 113)
Conclusions

The ideological suspicions and mistrust generated by these presumptions has led to division primarily and most importantly between secular leaning Muslim women and those who are religiously orientated. This has caused a rift, which has further demarcated the religious/secular divide in Muslim spaces. Some of the major contestations have been outlined but other issues are posited by secular feminists such as Moghadam. She asserts that the Quran as such does not contain universal standards and this therefore limits the impact of Islamic feminism. Furthermore, the strategy of relying on the Quran limits the scope of secular alternatives and provides legitimacy to ‘the Islamic system’. (Moghadam 2009: 1158) Moghadam then counters this by stating that the potential threat is negligible because most Islamic feminists are committed to human rights instruments such as CEDAW and are effectively more radical in their work of challenging ‘traditional’ religious authority of the producers of Islamic jurisprudence and ‘more subversive to the existing political system than are their U.S. liberal-feminist counterparts.’ (ibid at p.1159)

Religiously-orientated feminists like Asma Barlas also criticise their secular counterparts as having secularized the very notion of what constitutes liberation in a manner that ‘to be a believer is already to be bound by the chains of a false consciousness that precludes liberation.’ She goes further in accusing secular Muslim feminists of being antagonistic to the idea of the Divine and therefore allowing their religious illiteracy to cloud their judgement in making untrue assertions about the Quran and Islam. (Barlas 2005: 11) She adds a note of caution that secular leaning feminists can be compared with conservative ulema that ‘also confuse the Qur’an with its patriarchal readings’. (ibid at p.12)

This researcher is inclined, as are some other scholars, towards the idea of mobilizing women across divides and creating greater understanding of the common ground they have between them rather than focusing exclusively on their differences at the expense of creating a meaningful platform for change. These divisions are not insurmountable but in the current climate of the ‘war on terror’ they have meant that Muslim women have been unable ‘to build transnational links and as a result the global movement remains fragmented.’ (Zine 2006: 20)

In describing the success of feminist campaigns for family law reforms in Morocco and Algeria Cassandra Balchin suggests that it is precisely the fact that both campaigns were firmly embedded ‘in multiple frames of reference’ which were seen as complimentary and
not mutually exclusive, that led to their eventual success. This strategy was emphatic and successful because of the unity of purpose fostered between women of varied epistemological standpoints who used:

- Islamic feminism as a means to challenge and lay claim to jurisprudence and religious knowledge
- Islamic ideals of social justice were posited as being in harmony with notions of human rights,
- Women’s lived realities and the effects of injustice in family law provisions upon them were highlighted and
- Women’s citizenship and the State’s commitment to international human rights instruments were also emphasised- (Balchin 2010: 222-3)

Whilst these are extraordinary instances of the alliance and co-operation among Muslim women to achieve legal reform of family laws, women’s rights activists like Ferda Cilalioglu contend, ‘What really needs to change is not just the law but the mentality of people. Changing the value system will take decades.’ Legal reforms are only a partial success as the societal changes needed to make these advances work for the benefit of Muslim women in their lived realities is quite another ball game. As a result a concept of ‘legal consciousness’ has been formulated which is a step further than mere legal literacy and enables people ‘to identify and articulate their oppression and exploitation. This is the first stage in the people’s fight for a more just and equitable society.’ (ibid at p.229)

This type of non-essentialised understanding between secular and religiously orientated women allows for the formation of translocal and transnational coalitions and alliances. For such strategizing to be more effective would also require feminists to distance themselves from national governments and their, sometimes, hegemonic agendas. The foreign policies objectives of our governments in the ‘west' and the marginalisation and unjust treatment of minority communities is a challenge for those positioned in secular feminist spaces. In Muslim states Islamic feminists need to likewise challenge regressive religious policies of their governments again with respect to religious minorities too. (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 113) Perhaps it is this, which would inspire the differing camps with the confidence to make moves towards alliance building.
6. Genesis of Women's Activism in J & K

‘During the early years of the movement, the processions were entirely composed of women, some of them with sucklings in their arms passing through the streets, raising slogans, denouncing the suppressive policy of the Dogra despot, or demanding release of imprisoned leaders and establishment of a democratic set-up. A number of women throughout Kashmir came to the fore in the war of Independence against Dogra regime, prominent among them were Sajida Bano, Jan Begum, Freechi, Fazli, Jan Ded, Zunoo Bibi Mujahida, Khat Ded, Fatima Raja Kacher, Zainub Begum, Mehmuda Ahmad Ali etc. Most of these women were martyred during the processions by police firing. In spite of harassment they continued their work and were imprisoned many times.’ (Shah 2011)

In the 1940s Muslim women were increasingly active and for the first time had direct access to education, they composed the Women's Self Defence Corps (see below Fig.2) and in all likelihood won the women's agenda of the Naya Kashmir Manifesto. (see below fig.3) These were all public articulations of women's rights.

Figure 2 Women's Self-Defence Corps Leaflet

(Source: Whitehead)
The overtly ‘Muslim’ woman’s voice is missing from the grand narratives of past heroism and political game plans. It could be suggested here that the missing voice of the ‘Muslim’ woman was present in history and still is today and that political expediency and a fear of ‘communalism’ has created a blind spot as far as seeing and hearing women as more than the essentialised interpretative media/Centre versions of themselves in discourses on J&K.

It was in the 1930s that women emerged into the public sphere and the grip of patriarchy seemed to loosen somewhat as women demonstrated shoulder to shoulder with men of the state against the rule of the Dogra Maharajahs. The vast majority of these women according to P. N. Bazaz hailed not from the comfortable religious or political elites, but from the masses of uneducated and unrefined peasantry. Dogra rule did not provide for benevolence or concessions to women of their own Rajput caste and certainly was not going to provide relief for the Muslim masses and their women from centuries of oppressive alien rule, which included them. “...the abominable practice of destroying one’s own progeny illustrates, as nothing else does, the general attitude of the Dogras to their womenfolk. Those who could not suffer their own daughters to live would be the last persons to see the women of their subject enjoying any liberties, however small.” (Bazaz 1959: 195-6)

Comparing evidence from the beginnings of Indian women’s activism, women in J&K emerged into the public domain later due to the reluctance of the Dogras to extend any measure of upward social mobility to the Muslim masses. (Khan 2002: 135) Under pressure from their British overlords the Dogras finally consented to allow missionaries to build the first schools in the state. New legislation allowed for the provision of modern education to be extended to women for the first time and their articulations of their political awakenings followed. Between the years 1936-1946 Kashmiri women in general where equipping themselves with an education and preparing for a great and opportune future. (Bazaz 1959: 261).

**Naya Kashmir Manifesto**

Women were certainly involved in the main political parties of J&K; the Muslim Conference (MC) broadly aligned to the Indian Muslim League and the National Conference similarly in line with the Indian National Congress. Their future was spelled out in a remarkable (for it's time and it's location) document, which had by 1944 taken shape as the Naya Kashmir
Manifsto, a socialist/communist central Asian-inspired document, penned ostensibly by the Punjabi Marxist B.P.L. Bedi together with the Reading Room party under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah; who were the core of National Conference activists. (Whitehead 2010: 148)

Figure 3 Naya Kashmir Manifesto

(Source: Whitehead)

Whether any women were involved in the creation of the women's agenda of the Naya Kashmir manifesto is not known, but educated women such as Begum Akbar Jehan, Mahmooda Ali Shah, Begum Zainab and Freda Bedi, the Oxford educated English wife of Naya Kashmir's author were all prominent as wives or sisters of influential male political leaders. This document enshrined the legacy of those women who had battled in the front-
lines of the freedom struggle in J&K and its women’s agenda promised total equality in the
political, economic, social, educational, cultural spheres as well as health and motherhood
rights pertaining to paid maternity leave of a whole year, childcare to be provided for
women at their place of work where more than 7 women were employed and the right to
nurse their child during their working hours. (Butalia 2002: 313-315)

According to Rekha Chowdhary, ‘the political value of this document was not limited to the
specificity of the movement. It was to have a long term political relevance for the people of
Kashmir because it provided them a conception of a ‘New Kashmir’, a Kashmir purged of
its miserable past reminiscent of external political control, economic oppression, social
backwardness on the one hand and its loss of political and moral dignity.’(Chowdhary
2010: 16)

Women actively participated in the Quit Kashmir Movement (QKM) orchestrated by but not
exclusively the domain of the National Conference and Congress alliance with the help of
the Communist Party of India (CPI). Mass arrests followed the biggest protests the state
had ever seen. In the absence of men during the QKM it was women who came to
prominence and took the reigns seeking to keep up the momentum and motivation of the
movement. Krishna Misri, herself a teenage member of the women’s militia, quoted in
Whitehead said ‘When [the] male leadership was put behind the bars or driven
underground the women leaders took charge and gave a new direction to the struggle ...
However, the leaders addressed no controversial woman-specific issues for they did not
want to come across as social rebels.’ (Whitehead 2010: 151-2)

It was evident from the 1940s that the divisions in the male public sphere between the MC
and the NC also utilised women cadres in their ranks as did their bigger political mentors
the Muslim League and Congress Party respectively. Andrew Whitehead points out that
the Kashmir Valley had not had a tradition considered ‘martial’ by the British and therefore
the establishment of an all-women’s militia ‘was even more of a breach with convention in
such a conservative region, with little space for women in public life’. (Whitehead 2010:
143)

The front cover of a propaganda leaflet Kashmir Defends Democracy depicts a woman
taking aim and in the background one can see the Women’s Self Defence Corps on
parade. Women were trained in firing rifles and throwing grenades by the Indian army but
were not meant for active combat; Muslim and Hindu women of socialist, secular and communist persuasions were a part of this militia. (Whitehead 2010: 156).

The QKM inspired women of all classes but the majority of those who joined its rank and file remained from the masses of J&K's poor. For example, the woman portrayed on the cover of the leaflet wearing a traditional veil and attired in Kashmiri national costume is the dynamic Gujjar milkman's daughter referred to by Prem Nath Bazaz as Noor Gujri, (Bazaz 1959: 262), referred to by Andrew Whitehead as Zuni (Whitehead 2010: 161) and Nyla Ali Khan as Zoon Gujjar. (Khan 2010: 117) Although considered by Bazaz to have proved her bravery and zeal for the freedom struggle she was to be sidelined by the new political order installed after 1947. Was this due to her lack of observation of elite protocol and its rigid patriarchal norms? Was she a revolutionary woman who spoke her mind and paid the price; 'harassed, persecuted and victimised, Noor Gujri finally considered her safety and retired from politics.' (Bazaz 1959: 262)

**Holes in the Story**

There remains a lacuna in the historical narrative and this concerns the invisibility of the ‘Muslim’ women in this period; that is those who were, for example, members of the Muslim Conference party. Although Sheikh Abdullah had mass appeal in the Kashmir Valley it was by no means total and his appeal in Ladakh and Jammu was negligible. The Muslim Conference was the party, which rivalled the National Conference, and it had significant support in the Kashmir Valley and it's stronghold in Jammu. (Whitehead 2010: 145) Intriguingly, it is Bazaz again who provides us with a hint of what may have happened to such recalcitrant women; Begum Birjis, Begum Shaukat Ali and Begum Jahan Ara were among a group of educated women who protested before a UN Security Council delegation sent to J&K in 1948; they very vocally demanded a plebiscite and were subsequently arrested and kept in various jails for several months after which they were summarily deported to Pakistan.(Bazaz 1959: 266) Was this then the fate that awaited any woman who was what Bazaz calls of 'communal bent' (read ‘Muslim’ woman articulating a definite Islamically framed discourse) or did some of this political sentiment remain a thorn in the side of successive regimes in J&K?
Present Dilemmas of Muslim Women's Activism

Women could, in theory, reach for the stars and they entered a multitude of professions and for the first time enjoyed a degree of economic independence, which improved their standing in their families and in their communities too. Unfortunately the improvements in the educational attainment and occupational mobility did not translate into political decision-making power. As with most other South Asian states, entry into the political arena for women is most likely as a result of male familial connections or as Dr. Sazawal of kashmirforum.org suggested in the context of J&K ‘all successful women have become so under the guidance and influence of their fathers.’ (Interview Sazawal 2011) In real terms the development of Muslim women in the field of education remained primarily an urban phenomenon. This was largely as a result of the political landscape of uncertainty (Dabla 2007: 47-48), actual and threatened wars, internal political corruption in the state of J&K and interference in the political fortunes of J&K’s ruling political class by the centre in Delhi. There were few women's organisations, which focused on women's issues and women across the ethnic-religious-social divides were underrepresented and denied access to political power (Suri 2006: 83)

In the light of the shifting and constantly re-negotiated boundaries of gender in J&K secular spaces having been decimated by the competing interests of Muslim men's groups in the local political arena. The state government's secular credentials are discredited as corrupt and sycophantic to the interests of the centre in Delhi (Devadas 2007). Although secular organisations like Aathwas founded by Ashma Kaul Bhatia exist, it is essentially a WISCOMP initiative sponsored from 'outside the Valley' and therefore operates in a situation of trust deficit with local populations. Although some progress has been made by Aathwas it still suffers this trust deficit and the idea that secular organisations stemming from the J&K government (and therefore Delhi) are treacherous and illegitimate

The State foreclosure of avenues for participation and inclusion (for those of an overtly Islamic identity and agenda) in spaces provided to 'non-communal' participants espousing secular agendas, is a dangerous and near sighted omission which does not bode well for peace. The failure to make the centre-J&K dialogues inclusive of all stakeholder groups creates and perpetuates an atmosphere of mistrust, which under current circumstances precludes participation of otherwise willing parties.
Islamic feminism has grown out of the spaces Muslim women battled to acquire for themselves from Islamist discourses and constitutes a discourse of emancipation of women using Islam as a framework and re-interpreting the normative sources of Islam. In theory it should be present in Muslim spaces if women are producing knowledge then they could also be producing Islamic knowledge and praxis in the same spaces. However, conflict changes the rules of any identity formation in opposition to ‘foreign’ occupation. Little wonder that women are wary of making alliances and striking pacts with other women’s organisations and networks which claim to represent Muslim women.
7. Impact of Militarisation on Women’s Spaces since 1989

The contemporary situation of women has a lot of similarities to that of the 1940s when women first came into their own politically. However, as with other Muslim majority spaces, many of which are former colonies, the gains of the past remained mainly with aloof elites whose main focus was on the maintenance of their own privileges and the structures, which sustained them (Badran 2009).

The low-intensity conflict of the past 22 years has left the fabric of social society in tatters and facilitated the rendering useless of the already tenuous social contract between the state of J&K and its people. The territorial space has been militarised by the presence of 700,000 Rashatriya rifles, BSF, SOG; CPRF as well as an assortment of Armed Opposition Groups (militant and insurgent outfits as well as renegades working for the security services).

The displacement of both Kashmiri Pandit and Muslim middle classes has severely impacted the state with the dearth of professionals affecting all vital public services, including healthcare, education, and civil service in J&K. The state and its conflict weary, besieged population have been impoverished by this loss and this has been compounded by the militarisation of the territory. This has, in turn, caused shifts in gendered boundaries between men and women in J&K.

Militarisation

If as Cynthia Enloe has suggested that the militarisation of daily life is the signature tune of neoliberal empires/states (Enloe 2007) then the consequent assigning of anti-national labels (non-Citizen), legally dispossesses the marginalized, subjecting her/him to ‘social death’ (Mohanty 2011: 71)

In looking at the militarisation of J&K it is useful to employ a feminist understanding of conflict and militarism, which assists us in making the invisible visible again. It was Cynthia Enloe, who observed that ‘Women need to be made visible in order to understand how and why international power takes the forms it does.’ (Enloe 1990: 198) Cynthia Cockburn argues that the utilisation of feminist analysis enables us to perceive ‘violence as a continuum—from domestic violence (in and near the home) to military violence (patrolling
the external boundaries against enemies) and state violence (policing against traitors within.’ (Cockburn 2007: 44-45). This was echoed in the formulating of analyses of gendered effects of militarisation in J&K by Kavita Suri (2007), Rita Manchanda (2008), Seema Kazi (2009) and Nyla Ali Khan (2010) in the context of J&K.

It is the militarisation of the state of J&K that has, together with an armed insurgency, reduced public spaces by maximising women's fear of public and private spheres as is traditionally understood. The figure below is a graphic illustration of the current situation facing the people of the state and in particular the Kashmir Valley and the border Muslim dominated regions of Jammu (Doda, Poonch and Rajouri).

With between 500,000 and 900,000 Indian security forces (Indian Army, Border Security Force, Special Operations group, turned militants or Ikhwanis) J&K is a more heavily militarized zone than Iraq, which has more than twice the total population and has suffered the presence of about 160, 000 US troops at the height of the conflict. Whilst the J&K figures are high it is almost impossible to get an exact number as these are often disputed between various actors. However, it was revealed that the Indian Army’s own figures claim there are no more than about 350 armed militants in the state (DasGupta 2012:23), and rather than de-militarisation of the state there has been an increase in troops. (Interview Sami Ahmed 2012)

‘Militarization has asserted vigilante jurisdiction over space and politics. The violence is staged, ritualistic, and performative, used to re-assert India’s power over Kashmir’s body. India’s violence functions as an intervention, to discipline and punish, to provoke and dominate.’ (Chatterji 2010)
Legal Impunity

This describes a situation where the Rule of Law has been undermined and sanction against those who violate the law cannot be exercised and redress for aggrieved parties and their families is not forthcoming. There is de facto and de Jure impunity in the state which not only allows the Indian Security forces, but also the Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs), to violate the laws of J&K and to undermine the human, political, civil rights of the population (Agrwaal 2008). In particular there is the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act 1990, which allows for a situation where ‘massive human rights violations have ensued’. (Human Rights Watch 2008). Such laws allow soldiers to interrogate people, destroy or confiscate property, arrest without formal procedure, and indefinitely detain individuals without due process. Indian security forces in J&K can shoot to kill on mere suspicion, being afforded legal impunity by virtue of such laws.

Together with this is the Public Safety Act passed by J&K government, which was widely deployed in 2010 summer of unrest. According to Amnesty International’s report, A Lawless Law: Detentions Under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, ‘this act is being used to secure the long-term detention of political activists, suspected members or
supporters of armed groups and a range of other individuals against whom there is insufficient evidence for a trial or conviction.’ (DasGupta 2012:22)

The de jure and de facto impunity granted by Draconian and badly drafted legislation such as AFSPA; TADA; POTA have afforded both Indian security forces and Armed opposition groups opportunities to collude, even as enemies, to keep women in their patriarchally predestined place. The Rule of Law has been trumped by this impunity, as the judiciary is rendered toothless in the face of those who wield actual power in the state. The possibility of redress does not exist as the Indian security forces are not obliged to answer any charges brought by the J&K judiciary nor are they required to respond to the most important writ in democratic states that exists to protect citizens from arbitrary arrest and detention; the writ of Habeas Corpus, ‘the sole remedy available in law in case of a violation of the right to life and liberty, guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution.’ (Agrwaal 2004: 3)

Healthcare crises

Facilitating the superimposition of militarism upon pre-existing gender boundaries classified by a traditionally conservative patriarchal culture, policy decisions made at the highest levels seek to punish the recalcitrant Kashmiri population in gender specific ways. Impunity and the human rights violations that have followed in its wake have, according to Kavita Suri, induced a 'fear psychosis' in the general population in the Kashmir Valley. This problem is exacerbated by the serious lack of mental health professionals and specialised trauma-counselling services available in the area. (Suri 2007)

In 2008 Medicins sans Frontier conducted research in the Kashmir Valley on civilian exposure to violence.

**Incidence of Witnessed Violence**

- 73.3% witnessed physical or mental mistreatment,
- 66.9% witnessed someone being tortured
- 40% saw someone being killed,
- 13.3% had witnessed rape;
**Incidence of Self-Exposure to Violence**

- 44.1% reported being physically or mentally mistreated themselves
- 33.7% had undergone forced labour,
- 16.9% had been detained or held hostage,
- 76.7% the majority of these reported being tortured
- 11.6% had been subjected to a violation of modesty (sexual violence),

Whilst a third of respondents had thought of ending their lives in the preceding month, the same number was categorized as suffering from psychological distress. Women's psychological distress was primarily as a result of feeling powerless, dependent on others and being witness to violence. In order to cope most people withdrew from public gaze imposing isolation upon themselves and refusing to speak to others. Very few spoke of turning to religion or family for assistance and support. (Kaz de Jong 2008)

In order to more fully understand the effects of high levels of exposure to violence upon on the civilian population of J&K and its gendered impacts, one must examine such abuses and violations in the light of patriarchal gendered discourses of militarism, nationalism and the neo-liberal agenda. Here Achille Mbembe’s conceptualisation of Foucauldian ideas of ‘biopower’ (in his work ‘Necropolitics’) is utilised. From this ground-breaking work the idea of landscapes of the living dead have been formulated using the ethnographic research conducted by Haley Duschinski, (Duschinski 2009; Duschinski 2010), Chandra Mohanty's comparative analysis of securitised regimes of Israel, US and India (Mohanty 2011), and the findings of Human Rights organisations like the International Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Jammu and Kashmir headed by Parvez Imroz and Angana Chatterji (People’s International Tribunal Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir 2009).

**Landscape of the Terrorised**

The body of the territory of desire (Kabir 2009), which is J&K and the Kashmir Valley in particular, has undergone a campaign of terror by the organised securitised state apparatus. As in the Indian national imaginary the territory of Kashmir is female but unlike Bharat Mata who is venerated as Mother and therefore not signified as desirable; Kashmir is young and female and desirable; the coquettish young maiden personified by Sharmila
Tagore in *Kashmir ki kali*. To save her from the terrorist anti national Kashmiri Muslim male, he must be either destroyed or rendered feminised and if there is still resistance then rape is the final consummation of this ‘forced union’; (Forced union was something Nehru warned against in the context of Kashmir). Kashmir as territory is thus tamed and its population is subdued but that is not the end of the narrative; the consequences of taming territory by violent acts, sexualised torture and rape mean that the terrorised territory of Kashmir is now peopled by the 'living dead' who continue to serve as inducers of fear in those not yet assigned a death and bolster persistent resistance to the forced union.

In the process of sealing the Valley off, outside observation of human rights abuses has been severely curtailed and the panoptical gaze of the Security apparatus is ever present. It is a securitised space that is full of technologies that destroy the living through actual death and through social death; it is surveillance and production of the body in the public space that renders it witnessed as an example of the technologically superior violence that can be dispensed by those who wield it. (Duschinsky 2010:710)

Fear is also created by displays of violence against prominent and ordinary citizenry by AOGs; the fear of abduction and rape of the women was a significant factor in the flight of the Pandits; the potential for loss of honour of the community would have rendered them socially dead as a minority community. Those who fled the territory of Kashmir have left a landscape of the living dead. People who appear to be functioning as members of the living community but on closer inspection are dead.

**Actual Death of the Kashmiri Male Body**

As an anti-national the Kashmiri male is stripped of his 'Indian citizenship' because of his suspect loyalties. As Angana Chatterji recently observed 'India’s contrived enemy in Kashmir is a plausible one - the Muslim “Other,” India’s historically manufactured nemesis'. Targeting men for actual death under militarisation inscribes the body of the common Kashmiri Muslim man with the GoI's ideas of nation, ethnicity and religion signifying the ultimate Muslim 'other'. (Chatterji 2010)

Figures vary greatly from 40,000-100,000 dead in the past 22 years of whom the vast majority are males. The death of males has led to numerous problems for those left behind, for whom not only a loved one but in many cases the sole bread winner has been
taken from them. Proving that a male relative was not a militant/terrorist reverses the usual burden of proof in law and it requires women usually to undertake this task in order to obtain compensation for the 'accidental killing' of their relative. According to a Kashmiri researcher, speaking off the record, and as is indicated in Basharat Peer's 'Curfewed Night', this 'compensation' is meant to alleviate the financial destitution caused after the death of a male bread winner but it's insidious double nature is evident as the natal families of the dead often come into conflict with the wives of the dead men and it is usually the wives and children who lose out. (Peer 2010)

Social Death of the Kashmiri Male Body

A failure to castigate, chastise and feminise the male Kashmiri body would, in turn emasculate the Indian Security Forces and render them feminised; this cannot be allowed for the sake of Indian national integrity, unity and security. This failure to control the 'other' has led to the militarisation of public and private spaces and a redefinition of the social contract with the Kashmiri male body becoming the subject and the Indian security forces, the de facto rulers.

Muslim men also face social death if they have survived torture and incarceration. The methods of torture used upon the male body do not necessarily differ to those used against women (beatings, rape and electrocution of the genitalia), but the survivors face gendered consequences. Sexualised torture of men by targeting their sexual organs is utilised to mark Kashmiri males as permanently feminised and rendered redundant in a society where, like most South Asian societies, marriage and procreation are considered of the most important duties of a man. To prove himself he must reproduce himself and a man who is not able to do so because he cannot get married is a social outsider.

As a result of the sexualised torture they have endured many men suffer from a range of disabilities including sexual impotence, PTSD and severe depression with suicidal tendencies as a consequence of their disenfranchisement from society. Research from MSF indicates that for men psychological distress was created by 'violation of modesty', displacement and disability as these factors impact the pre-existing male role in a conservative society. Their ability to retain their dignity and act as a provider for their families is curtailed leaving them with feelings of despondency. (Kaz de Jong 2008)
Rape and the Social Annihilation of the Female Body

Rape is a crime, which at its core inscribes power relations upon the bodies of women whether it takes place in conflict or non-conflict situations or is committed by Security forces or AOGs. According to a Human Rights Watch report:

‘Soldiers and police use rape as a weapon: to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate and degrade. There are no reliable statistics on the number of rapes committed by security forces in Kashmir it is impossible to confirm any precise number. There can be no doubt that the use of rape is common and routinely goes unpunished. Indian government authorities have rarely investigated charges of rape by security forces in Kashmir.’ (HRW Asiawatch1993:3)

The high levels of rape in a traditionally conservative space like J&K is testament to the early phase of the militarisation when it was essential to terrorise the female body by denuding and conquering it. The female body becoming the site of this gendered violence was rendered a social death from which it emerged as the living dead, like the prodigal Boonyi Kaul and her return to her natal village in Salman Rushdie’s ‘Shalimar the Clown’. Boonyi has been, in her absence, processed and assigned death by her family and her cuckolded husband, her return is met by silence and the only to break the silence is another woman who has been assigned the stigma of social death as a rape victim.

‘A lot of people in these parts think of me as a living ghost.....Those people think that when a thing happens to a woman like the thing that happened to me, the woman should go quietly into the trees and hang herself ...I didn’t do that’ (Rushdie 2005: 278)

Indian government policy may not overtly sanction the use of rape by Security Forces but the suspension of the Rule of Law means that the arrest, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators does not take place. The effect of this has been to create an environment in which rape is utilised by Security forces and AOGs with impunity as a weapon in order ‘to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate and degrade’. Whilst women claiming to have been victims of rape are openly branded as liars promoting militant agendas to discredit India’s security forces, on the one hand, they are also seen as mukhbir or collaborators by AOGs and meted out the same treatment. (HRW Asiawatch 1993:11) Thus rival patriarchal discourses collaborate to punish women by rape and social death. (See the report by the
Independent Women’s Initiative for Justice, ‘Shopian Manufacturing a Suitable Story’, which investigated the alleged rape and murder of sisters-in-law Neelofar and Asiya Jan on 29th May 2009)

**Widows and Half-Widows, Female Bodies Negotiating Death**

Other than rape victims, female living dead exist in J&K, suffering from a myriad of psychological disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression. 80% widows have very high suicidal tendencies and most do not remarry because of the security of their children (Suri 2006: 82). As an “army of widows” 25,000 (ibid p.86) women endure social death as actors whose interests can be overridden and who suffer economic, social and legal death. These are interconnected phenomena because most widows after conflict with their dead husband's family are abandoned and do not get to keep ex gratia relief of Rs 100,000 if the man's innocence is proven and 'accidental killing' recorded as the cause of death. Aspects of Muslim Personal Law as it is applied to half-widows in J&K still begs questions such as how long to wait before death can be ascertained, inheritance, custody of children in the event of remarriage are particular problems, which are not highlighted in the dominant discourses. Widows of militants get nothing and mostly live separately or with parents, they are unemployed with 3-6 children on average and live on hand-outs from family, NGOs, and Mosque donations. 'Half widows of Kashmir lead more miserable lives than the widows' as they must prove that their husband is dead involving a search from pillar to post for APDP estimate of 10,000 missing men (ibid p.87). (For a fuller picture see Rashid 2011).

**Prostitution, Female Bodies for Rent**

The ‘flesh trade’ is a relatively new arrival in J&K and sociologists argue as to the causes of it; from being the result of forced imposition of Islamic dress codes by militants to women trying to break stereotypes related to their expression of their sexuality in the changing times (Suri 2006: 86). Far from this being an extraneous and independent phenomenon, prostitution and war have been mutually beneficial to each other. The female bodies of women are trafficked and marketed in a highly securitised space. Cynthia Enloe believes that the economics of militarism and securitised regimes means that policy
is planned at the highest military levels (Enloe 2007:49-53), but in the case of J&K there is no marching army but a stationary one and its particular needs have to met. One of the ways in which the GoI has deflected criticism away from its human rights record vis a viz Kashmiri women is to create an alternative source of 'sexual gratification' for its security forces. The exotic bodies of the social dead are the bodies of young educated students seeking jobs; some are widows, others are drug addicts lured into the trade in order to service officials in high political and security positions in Jammu and Kashmir. (VIP Sex Scandal in 2006 involved organised prostitution and trafficking of women and many in the J&K government and security apparatus were implicated in the case). This researcher was told, off the record, that women from other regions of India and other countries were also trafficked into the region in order to take up the demand for female flesh created by the presence of over half a million security personnel.

In Search of the 'Disappeared' Kashmiri Male Body

According to the APDP 8-10 thousand Kashmiri men and boys have been subject to enforced or involuntary disappearances (Suri 2006: 88). The victims of “disappearance” are of all ages and professions and they constitute a section of the living dead who have also vanished into thin air without their actual deaths being acknowledged. Similarly to the living dead memorial of unmarked graves in the landscape of terror, the disappeared, by their very absence cause havoc for those who are also struggling to hold onto precarious and precious life; their relatives. Usually the membership of those living, who search for the living or actual dead, are grass/half widows, aged parents and other family. (Rashid 2011)

The relatives of the “disappeared” are secondary victims of this crime as their lives are often severely impacted by the “disappearance” of a son or a husband and grieving for the not yet dead becomes endless as years go by in the search. Women whose husbands have “disappeared” wait for a husband who may never turn up, unable to re-marry for 4-7 years these women occupy a special place in the landscape of fear and death. (Amnesty International 1999)
8. Contemporary women's territorial activism

‘Women who were silent sufferers all the time have now after centuries decided to break the ice by breaking their silence. The social position of Kashmiri women has undergone a series of profound changes during the present century. Firstly, women have got admission to a variety of hitherto ‘masculine’ jobs, which on the whole proved that women were unencumbered by family ties. Secondly, there is an endeavour of a growing number of women to combine family and employment.’ (Amin 2010)

There are different women-led groups that are active in J&K despite the many obstacles and threats to their lives and families due to the 22-year ongoing low intensity conflict and the militarization of the state by Indian security forces and AOGs.

Here women’s groups and their agendas are discussed. This analysis is restricted to women’s groups who either have an online presence or are frequently referred to by online writers.

Parveena Ahangar Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)

Parveena Ahangar of the Association Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is the mother of Javaid Ahangar who was ‘disappeared’ by Indian security forces in 1993. Due to this personal tragedy Parveena undertook an arduous search to recover her child, she has been forced out of her traditional familial role into human rights activism visiting police stations, army camps, hospitals, prisons, political institutions. In 1994, together with lawyer and human rights activist Parvez Imroz, Parveena Ahangar set up the APDP to provide assistance to other families in the same predicament of having a relative disappear.

She has been threatened, there have been attempts to bribe/pay her off, and, in 1998, Halima a fellow member of APDP was murdered along with her son by masked gunmen. No-one has been brought to charge for this crime or the 8-10,000 enforced disappearances, which the group insists on pursuing as an apolitical cause. Parveena Ahangar has matured politically since the beginning of her search, she has refused to be co opted by anyone else’s political agenda. Her’s is the only grassroots organisation in the selection and enjoys widespread respect from many contributors to cyberKashmir.
Parveena takes the APDP’s cause all over the world. APDP members meet every month, sometimes singing poetic Islamic eulogies such as the Yusufnama, ‘Joseph’s story’ is the lamentation of Jacob (Old Testament), for the disappearance of his favoured son after he was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

This is an important instrumentalisation of Islamic eulogy being utilised in a public space to simultaneously provide for an emotional context for members and is informative (public remembering) in its performance. They hold sit-ins, carrying photos and wearing headbands with the names of their disappeared loved ones.

‘Maternal surveillance may look simple, because it is instinctive, reflexive and biological…….. On the surface this process might be misread as a simple mother searching for her son. But it is a deeply political quest, which requires rigor, passion, strategy, motivation, initiative and a sense of brave invincibility against extreme threats to life under the coercive laws (remember Halima and her son); values which were amply present in Mughli and continue to fuel the mothers of the disappeared in Kashmir (Zia 2006: 5).
Iffat Fatima’s film ‘Where have you hidden my new crescent moon?’ records the journey of one, now deceased, member of APDP, Mughli Massi to find her son. (Fatima 2009)

**Dilafroz Qazi Pattan Engineering College**

Is the head of an engineering college in Pattan and runs several primary schools where many orphans of the conflict receive free education. She is engaged in number of philanthropic activities, which include the promotion of literacy among rural communities and lending support to rape victims of the Kashmir conflict. She is responsible for establishing a dairy farm for the Kunan Pushpora rape victims and provided cows for them in order to assist them in making an independent living.

She is also one among 3 women from Kashmir to have been nominated for the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 along with Parveena Ahangar and Nighat Shafi Pandit. (Suri 2006:91)

**Anjum Zamrooda Habib Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM)**

Is a separatist women's organisation, which is also a founding member of the Hurriyat conference. Anjum Zamrooda Habib started the group with others as social workers in 1986 in response to dowry deaths in Kashmir but after the Gaunkadal massacre when security forces killed 60 peaceful demonstrators they joined the movement for Azadi. MKM is an organisation which does not insist on burqa but rather that it is a matter of Muslim women to dress ‘according to one's own conscience’. Their green banner reads *It's time to recognise Allah and express our identity* (Butalia 2002: 85-86). Although couched in Islamic terms Anjum Habib refuted any suggestion that the organisation was communal in nature and the manner in which she articulated herself, according to this
researcher, was of a seasoned politician more secular-leaning than Islamist (Interview A.Z. Habib 2011). She spoke to this researcher of the lack of unity and alliance building among women’s groups, and highlighted the situation for women’s mobilisation in J&K in the following way:

- NGOs (women’s groups) do not reach the grassroots level because of a lack of trust in/between the women who run them
- No connectivity between women’s NGOs/Groups in Kashmir with those in Jammu and Ladakh
- Networking tools such as new media are restricted by cost and censorship
- Training women for leadership roles is missing
- Funding restrictions apply on NGO agendas (Interview Anjum Zamrooda Habib 2011)

This means that ‘Apolitical/Secular’ organisations probably stand a better chance of receiving J&K government funding but probably not Islamic/Muslim organisations promoting religiously framed agendas. Government funding in turn compromises the women activists agendas and their effectiveness at a grassroots level. (Interview Nyla Ali Khan 2010)

**Asiya Andrabi Dukhtaran e Millat (DeM)**

Asiya Andrabi founded DeM in 1987 as a social organisation to provide education for girls and assure equal rights to women in the frame of observant Islam. At times they have campaigned for the right to have segregated buses, eliminate dowry and protest against moral degeneration of society; including against politicians who have been found organising, profiteering from and patronizing prostitution rackets.
The DeM do not see women’s role as limited to the home and insist that women should take up careers as professionals as long as they follow the tenets of Islam ‘the ideology of the organisation is a strange mixture of feminism and fundamentalism’. (Butalia 2002: 61)

‘If I had a daughter, instead, I’d like to see her become Prime minister. Men are meant for war, women for managing the world.’ (Marino 2010)

Further they believe that religious force should not be used against minorities but Muslims can be forced to obey the tenets of Islam and purdah/burqa should be used by women as a ‘weapon for their safety’. Asiya Andrabi infamously suggested women carry knives or other weapons to use them to protect themselves against Indian army excesses and minority women should wear saffron dupattas or bindhis to identify themselves. Though the ‘burqa threat’ forced a few women to wear the veil, burqas of all designs, colours and prices flooded the markets and there was competition to wear the latest designer burqas. Kashmiri women used the burqa in their own way and to their own benefit. (Suri 2006: 88) Other Muslim women in Kashmir fought back against the imposition using the medium of writing open letters to editors of newspapers addressed to AOGs in Kashmir (Butalia 2002: 62).

Today they are known as 'soft terrorist outfit'- using extra legal means including threats to impose its doctrines. But the point is that according to Nyla Ali Khan ‘the discourse propounded by Asiya Andrabi does not give the marginalised, does not give the oppressed, does not give the educated few, who are trying to make a foray into the world, does not give them much to look forward to and does not allow them to envision the creation of spaces in which they would be able to function with some kind of agency with some kind of empowerment so I think her ideology is more or less marginalised.’(Interview Nyla Ali Khan 2010)

**Nighat Shafi Pandit (HELP WAV)**

A dynamic woman Nighat Shafi Pandit is the founder of two organisations; Human Effort for Love and Peace (HELP) foundation and the Women Against Violence (WAV). They work on issues of social reform within J&K including violent crimes in general and domestic/familial violence in particular. They are campaigning for the introduction of moral education into school and college curricula in the state, which it is felt would combat the
acceptability of violence in J&K. Although ‘Nighet Shafi Pandit has done a lot of work in the last 10-12 years with orphanages and vocational centres for women.’ (Interview Nyla Ali Khan 2010) She is also someone whose name does not appear frequently outside of Kashmirforum.org, where her work is duly acknowledged. Recently she and her work were recognised in her nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize 2006.

Figure 9 Nighet Shafi Pandit

Ashma Kaul Bhatia (Athwaas)

Founded by Ashma Kaul Bhatia, Athwaas was borne out of a Delhi round table in 2001. It brought together women from different religions, political and ideological backgrounds. Over the years it, expanded to include women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds belonging to the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Athwaas wanted to put an end to violence and rebuild the damaged relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The pursuit has further led Athwaas to understand how patriarchy and masculinity operates and war for power is not confined to states but exists within homes too.

As mentioned earlier Athwaas has suffered from an initial trust deficit which is compounded by its ‘outside the Valley’ status and persists to this day but it seems that it is the only organisation dedicated to creating alliances for peace-building across the divides; it provides ‘an example at the macro level for all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir, for different ethnic groups, political formations the possibilities to reorganize the polity in a way that accommodates the aspirations and vision of all regions , groups, minorities and sub minorities in a non-violent way.’ (Kaul- Bhatia 2010)

Ezabir Ali runs Athwaas’ rural samanbals in order to promote healthcare and provide para-
healthcare training for young women to work in their communities. In doing so she helps these young women to provide essential but usually inaccessible healthcare to some of the neediest women in the state. In turn, these young women are able to earn an income which they use to help their families but also to be able to afford to get married (von der Haide 2006).

**Suraiya Abdullah Ali (Behboodi Khawateen Markaz)**

Madre Mehrban (Benevolent Mother) of Kashmir, Begum Akbar Jehan founded Behboodi Khawateen Markaz in 1975. The organisation’s mission is to provide intensive training in arts and crafts to facilitate women’s employment in the handicrafts sector and to provide homes for destitute women. It also has a hostel for young Gujjar girls which enables them to get an education, which was and still is a major problem with scheduled tribes like the Gujjars for whom 60 plus years of development has meant little. Today Suraiya Ali, daughter of Sheikh Abdullah and Begum Akbar Jehan, runs the centre where she also works for women’s welfare; to improve their health, encourage and educate women about the benefits of immunization. The organisation also provides literacy classes and has started a micro-credit program and training in small business management with which women can manage their own cottage industries. (Interview Suraiya Abdullah Ali 2010)

Although the longest formally established organisation, its work seems to be on the margins as far as the frequency with, which writers in online spaces refer to women/women’s groups. Recognition is slow but women are nonetheless utilising public spaces for their social activism and their political agendas.

There is a lack of unity and cohesion among the women concerned but it is also evident that there are connectivities between them because of the region in which they work and the issues upon which they base their activism. It is the political milieu of the region, which seems to be a divisive factor and women’s inability or unwillingness to transcend this even when their activism is framed as ‘apolitical’ or secular.
9. Challenges to Media Scapes in J&K

“There is no touch between the government and the people, no suitable opportunity for representing grievances and the administrative machinery itself requires overhauling from top to bottom to bring it up to the modern conditions of efficiency. It has little or no sympathy with the people’s wants and grievances.” (Sir Albion Bannerji 1929 Associated Press)

Print Media in J&K History

Censorship and violence against those wishing to tell the story of J&K in a different way is not new to the state as Zahid G. Muhammad points out in his article *Press and Freedom Struggle in Jammu and Kashmir*. Against the grain of some notions of Kashmiri isolation from the cultural milieu of British India in the pre-1947 period, the author shows the links between J&K and Punjab (Lahore and Amritsar in particular) were deep and abiding. This was largely due to the fact that there was a Kashmiri diaspora settled in Punjab because of the lack of opportunities to earn a living in their own state. “*In 1891 according to census 1,11,775 Kashmiris were residing in different parts of Punjab*”. They had become an important part of landscape of Punjab whilst always retaining their Kashmiri roots by contributing to the Punjabi economy as well as ‘its intellectual landscape’. (Muhammad 2006)

The newspapers published in Lahore were instrumental in relaying the story of Kashmir to an oblivious world. The Punjabee an English language paper founded by Syed Mohammad Azam was the first to openly support the Kashmiri Muslim cause. On 9 May 1857

“*By the brutality and tyranny of that incarnation of sensuality, avarice and all evil, Maharaja Gulab Singh, Cashmere is rapidly being converted into melancholy desert….The smiling fields now lie waste, happy hamlets have turned wretched collections of ruined homesteads and desolate hearths. And all this is the work of one demon, to whose tender mercies an enlightened Christen Government has made over the most beautiful valley.*” (Muhammad 2006)
When, in 1905 a Kashmiri, Mohammad Din Fauq wanted to start a newspaper in Kashmir and filed for an application to do so, Maharaja Pratap Singh instructed his government to institute a blanket ban on publication of newspapers in Kashmir. Due to the imperial ban on print publishing in J&K many local luminaries such as P.N. Bazaz were writing for Lahore papers such as Akhbari- i- Am. These discourses prompted Kashmiri Muslims in the diaspora to create an advocacy organisation; Anjuman-I-Kashmiri Mussalmanan-i- Lahore. (Muhammad 2006)

**Freedom Struggle 13th July 1931**

“The news of indiscriminate and unprovoked firing outside the Central jail, Srinagar, reached Lahore on the evening of 16th July and was published in the Muslim Press on the 17th morning. The news shocked Muslims of Punjab. Individuals and organization sent about seven to eight thousand protest telegrams to Maharaja. Thousands of telegrams were also addressed to the Viceroy urging immediate intervention.” (Muhammad 2006)

This date is very significant in the framing of historical narratives of the Kashmir freedom struggle and until today is considered the beginning of a mass freedom movement against ‘foreign’ occupation. Muhammad suggests that if it were not for the Lahore print media’s reporting of that day then perhaps the movement might not have been galvanised. As a result of the spreading of this news the All India Kashmir Committee was formed and later headed by Mohammad Iqbal. It is this forum rather than J&K political parties, which played a vital part in exposing the misrule of Maharaja before the world. (Muhammad 2006)

**Indian Media Scapes**

The fact is that religion in J&K is often only mentioned in terms of a problematic, regressive, ‘jihadist’ view of Islam projected by the mainstream corporate Indian media. In this paradigm Pakistani Islamist terrorism is the cause of the insurgency in J&K and Indian security forces have the honour of protecting the national sovereignty of the India by routing foreign mercenaries, who are instigating a normally docile population of the Kashmir Valley into armed violence. Whilst this may serve the geo-political interests of India there are cracks in the paradigm.
In Teresa Joseph’s insightful article *Kashmir, human rights and the Indian press* the Indian mainstream print media came under criticism for its reporting of human rights violations in the state. She maintains that although International human rights organisations and Indian civil rights groups have documented the violations of human rights committed against people in Kashmir by Indian security forces and AOGs, this does not seem to find its way into the mass media and therefore the general public are not engaged (Joseph 2000: 42).

‘The Indian press has consistently projected the government’s stance on Kashmir…. often has even justified the so-called few cases of security excesses, and questioned the credibility of human rights reports on Kashmir. Even the condemnation of human rights violations in Kashmir by other countries is often blocked out.’ (Joseph 2000: 42)

It is the author’s suggestion that there may be an unwritten but apparent ‘policy of self-censorship based on a misguided sense of patriotism’, which means that reports critical of security forces are not carried in the print media. As proof of this she argues ‘near-jingoism’ can be evidenced from the way reports of Human rights violations in Pakistan are often ‘quoted verbatim’ whilst virulent criticism is directed against the reporting of human rights’ violations in India. The author ascribes this condition to the print media’s over reliance on government sources, which creates ‘an inherent bias towards the government position on the issues concerned, while ignoring the ground reality.’ (Joseph 2000: 53)

‘It is beyond doubt that in the context of Kashmir, the press has failed to play its role as the watch-dog of democracy, as it has by-and-large collaborated with the government in not revealing actual occurrences in the Valley….by its continued reiteration of the official version of events in Kashmir, the Indian press has helped only to increase the sense of alienation among the people of Kashmir, and to keep the general public (Indian public) ignorant of what is really happening in the Valley.’ (Joseph 2000: 54)

It is this inherent bias that prompts Rita Manchanda to argue that Indian national media should resist ‘…the anti-democratic militarist impulse justified by the so-called needs of national security.’ (Rita Manchanda 2002: 320)

**Kashmiri Media Terrestrial Scapes**

It is thus that a conflict paradigm is created, the effect of which is to give not just the Indian public but also the international observers a skewed picture of the reality of life and death.
in J&K. In fact, what is discernible from this research is that a large number of those who are articulating in cyberKashmir are print journalists frustrated by censorship, violence (Reporters Without Borders 2008) and prompted by the lack of terrestrial security, to use their skills in online discursive spaces to present a very different and Kashmir-centered perspective. Therefore censorship and control of print media in the state lies in the hands of the J&K government, which is -if anything- partial, corrupt and beholden to Delhi for its very existence.

Struggling to be Heard

According to Hilal Ahmad in Media and Politics in Kashmir, a censored and ‘weakened local media and biased propagandist Indian media have defined the political realities in the state’. Writing of the Indian centric paradigm on Kashmir he adds that the 'Indian masses have been fed the notion that turbaned terrorists from Pakistan have been killing and looting the Kashmiris.' During tourist season bunkers are moved or prettied-up so as not to arouse the curiosity or fear of Indian tourists who are sold on the idea that something called ‘normalcy’ exists. (Ahmad 2006)

As well as keeping outsiders such as this researcher and other foreigners from visiting J&K (see section Access to Indian visa) Indian intellectuals, civil society activists, human rights advocates and writers such as, Pankaj Mishra are ‘viciously attacked in the press when he criticized Indian policies in Kashmir in an article in New York Times. Indian magazine ‘Outlook’ carried an opinion poll stating that over 70% of Kashmiris desired ‘freedom’ and found that right wing Shiv Sena elements burned copies of the magazine in public. Arundhati Roy refused India’s most prestigious literary award; Sahitya Academy Award and in a letter to the academy cited Indian policies in Kashmir as one reason behind her decision. ‘The Indian media blacked out the Kashmir portion of her letter’. (Ahmad 2006)

Aijaz Hussain asserts in Silence in siege: Media realities in modern Kashmir, it is the ‘siege’ of Kashmiri public spaces, which has led to the silencing of journalistic voices. ‘The seemingly free press, a closer examination reveals, filters out the essence of every single word expressed that makes it to print….. Interests, personal and collective, keep this conundrum up and running, somewhere for the sake of secrecy and propaganda,
sometimes for the so-called national interest, and sometimes for the sake of petty interests of the emerging petit bourgeoisie.’ (Husain 2006)

Hussain compares the present condition to that of 1990 when there were around six vernacular newspapers being published from Srinagar, whereas today there are 24 Urdu dailies, 6 English dailies, 4 local news agencies more than 12 weeklies published from Srinagar. He complains that this has had no subsequent effect of increasing ‘the volume of reportage’. Even stranger is that a majority of the ‘vernacular dailies and some of the English language newspapers function without hiring even a single reporter’. (Hussain 2006)

It is this researcher’s belief that the difficulties and impediments faced by print journalists in terrestrial spaces have led them to take their journalism into digital hybrid spaces.

Convergent Journalism in cyberKashmir

Having moved to cyberKashmir Aijaz Hussain (2010) writes in Facebook, YouTube used as weapons in Kashmir: “The struggle on the streets and in the corners of cyberspace have a mutually complementary nature”. Freelance journalist Fahad Shah in Kashmir’s e-protest suggests that it is the conflict generation in Kashmir that is spearheading this online activism and it even has members in a wider Kashmiri diaspora in India and further. (Shah 2010: 1)

During the 2010 summer protests in which more than a hundred people, the majority of whom were students, were killed, there was a clampdown on the organisers and networkers who were using Facebook to organise their protests (Fahad 2010: 1). ‘The stone pelters use Facebook to debate the weekly calendar of protests, discuss ways to hold Kashmiri leaders accountable and trade daily news updates, some of questionable reliability.’ (Hussain 2010)

An estimated 40,000 Kashmir residents are on Facebook, furthermore, techno savvy Kashmiris have produced some highly polished and professional Youtube entries uploaded from cell phones and put to music. ‘One of the first videos combined images of women and children wailing at graveyards and the bodies of slain Kashmiris with a moving song written by Abdul Ahad Azad, an early 20th-century Kashmiri revolutionary poet.’ (Husain 2010)
Citizen journalism is in practise as young Kashmiris upload images from mobile phone of security personnel damaging vehicles and property during curfews, “Because of this video evidence that cannot be denied, some people outside Kashmir have started believing the horrors we have been living under,” said Rayees, a young protester.

One of the most impressive compilations, for its collage of image and music, is set to Everlast’s song for Palestine, “Stone in My Hand.” It was created by someone known only as a computer engineer’ who has become an admired figure among protesters. “He showed us how one can be more meaningful and imaginative and yet continue to be a stone pelter.” (Hussain 2010)

Discursive terrains are being challenged as online veteran journalists write in these digital spaces they have created and novices utilise Facebook and Youtube to tell their story through the creative use of new media.
10. Framing Women’s Discourses in Cyber Jammu & Kashmir

Data has been analyzed using a mixed method data process with critical data analysis techniques applied to web portals/blogs and interviews.

First of all the data was coded using user pre-defined axiomatic codes, which were employed in order to code large corpus a text converted into rich text format then put through Coding Analysis Toolkit Pittsburgh University\(^7\) software in order to obtain numerical values which in turn can be turned into general graphically illustrated representations of the major themes that are being discussed by women.

The next step, after this axiomatic reading of the data, was to use adapted methods of CDA propounded by Norman Fairclough (1989) and Teun van Dijk (1985). These are text-orientated approaches to discourse analysis, which aim to place linguistic analysis into contexts. They speak of the relationship between language and power and allow the researcher to focus on this in order to observe how social orders and/or practices are challenged. This method reveals the absence/presence of other ways of seeing; knowing and doing that can exist simultaneously and seek to problematize the dominant view.

In order to analyse the open ended semi-structured interviews the research method employed was to leave out the coding stage using CAT software\(^7\) and moving directly to the second step of CDA instead.

Test run example

In order to illustrate the method by way of example I have chosen to describe the methodological process thus.

Kashmiriwomen.com was a blog that was started by two male journalists who wanted to create a platform for the women of Kashmir. The ‘suffering’ of their mothers, sisters and friends motivated them. I was told it was discontinued ‘because of financial reasons’ but

\(^7\) [http://cat.ucsur.pitt.edu/](http://cat.ucsur.pitt.edu/)
having been able to retrieve the texts from the only web portal to sporadically address Kashmiri women, it contained interview texts with women activists and political figures as well as featuring the writings of Kashmiri women scholars. Analysis of this text meant taking the following steps:

1) Convert word document into a rich text format or plain text formatted document

2) Create an axiomatic list of codes with their descriptions and keys (e.g. Islam, Feminism, Conflict). A list of 21 possible codes were derived with 1 code representing ‘no code’ for extraneous information like website URLs, names of writers, dates etc

3) Text was then examined paragraph by paragraph with codes being attached to every piece of text using the CAT facility at Pittsburgh University, USA.

4) Completed coding then allows for numerical values to be interpreted graphically in bar or pie chart form.

In analyzing the contents of discourses Critical discourse analysis is used in an axiomatic approach to the analysis of texts. The first step was to convert the data collected into rich text format and then to analyse this process using a simple software application freely available on the Internet called Wordle. This is a very useful program, which can provide a quick and illustrative initial analysis of the data; word ‘clouds’ are created with colours and designs chosen by the researcher. This process allowed for the high frequency words to be highlighted giving a general overview of the data, the second stage CAT was used as freely available data analysis software.

Most of these web portals/blogs were of Kashmiri origin but ‘outside’ blogs such as Countercurrents.org, thehoot.org and islamonline.org were utilised as they are locations where Kashmiri journalists, activists and scholars were known to be articulating their discourses. In online discourses, when the data analysis of each individual web portal/blog was aggregated the main themes being framed were:

1. Conflict,
2. Violence,
3. Feminism,
4. Public spaces/media,
5. Healthcare,

6. Activism and Reform

7. Islam (see Figure 12 below).

Islam as an overt theme is in 7th position as far as framing of discourses by and about women is concerned. This shows not an exclusion of Islam from discourses but rather that women and men in the region speak about conflict and related impacts on women more than they relate Islam/religion to women. Islam will be discussed later in this section when individual web portal/blogs are examined.

![Figure 12 CAT Aggregate of Data Analysis](image-url)
The above graphic representation can be further analyzed by taking codes such as ‘Conflict’ and creating a subset from them to get a more refined idea of what type of conflict is meant. In this case there are various different nuances to the category of ‘conflict’, which for the large part are directed to an outside audience as well as being educational for a younger generation of ‘diaspora’ communities. The findings in fig.12 are discussed in section 10.

1. Collective Media Web portals/blogs

The 6 URLs above are the individual web portals/blogs, which became part of the composite category labelled ‘Collective Media’. Since the beginning of the research period in April 2010 some of these web portals and blogs have been ‘abandoned’ whilst others
have been digitally ‘hobbled’ or sabotaged. This means that much of the data collated by this researcher is from now non-functional portals.

This Wordle image was generated using the free Internet software program of the same name and reveals that ‘Kashmir, Indian, Government, Newspapers and People and Media’ were the most frequently occurring words. This creation shows clearly that media professionals are involved with these discourses and that these are in fact print media journalists who have taken to using online spaces where greater ‘freedom’ can be had to do their work. ‘Convergent journalism has wide scope and a great future’ according to journalist and writer, Afsana Rashid. (Email exchange Afsana Rashid 2012)

![Figure 14 Collective Media Sites](image)

Further analysis using the CAT program shows a more detailed graph of the main axiomatic categories, which were present in the Collective Media web portals/blogs. Public spaces and access to them was the most dominant theme present in these discourses, and this speaks of the censorship and violence among other problems such as curfews, strikes and demonstrations. (see section above) Press freedom to do the job of journalism, in a conflict/militarised environment, such as J&K, does not guarantee a journalists life, livelihood or health of their loved ones. For example, in September 2011, journalist and author, David Devadas was detained and attacked by police in J&K. (Interview David Devadas 2011)

Violence is the next largest value in figure 14 and this is very telling as conflict follows in third place. Violence is mostly described in conflict related scenarios and it is only in this
respect that women are specifically referred to. Whilst discourses do not ignore the internal
dimension of societal violence for conflict-affected families, there seems to be a limited
and essentialised portrayal of women in this terrain; as silent suffering victims.

Conflict as a category is also a dominant theme and within this the historical origins of the
conflict are very dominant, which could suggest that this is still a bone of contention.
Rather than a forum for competing Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri nationalisms it seems to
be of an educational nature. Often Kashmiri respondents have educated this researcher
about the origins of the conflict with India. It is through these online discursive spaces that
it becomes discernible that an ‘outside’ (non-Kashmiri) audience and an Indian audience,
in particular, is the potential audience.

Law and rights as a category was found to contain legal references (UN Resolutions
Indian constitutional provisions and laws, J&K laws etc) to provisions mentioned in
historical explanation of the origins of the Kashmir conflict. This is done to inform
‘outsiders’ and was directed to a mainly Indian audience and sometimes gravitating to an
international readership. The legal status of J&K is only one contention but a major one,
which plagues questions of ‘whether J&K state is an integral part of the Indian union or
not?’

Islam as a category is used mainly as a framework for understanding the discrimination
against Muslims of J&K. It is revealed through this frame that issues of discrimination
against Kashmiri Muslims such as the impingement of the right to free movement. This
was highlighted through cases of refusal of awards of passports to Kashmiri Muslims
based on ‘evidence’ of connection to a militant (this can be as unfortunate as sharing a
name with an insurgent/militant).
This Wordle image shows the word cloud that emerged from the initial analysis of the web portal kashmirlit.org. This web portal was created by journalist, writer, poet and scholar Ather Zia (also unavailable at the time of writing) she shares the concerns of other journalists in cyberKashmir terrains about the political situation and the militarisation of the state. The Words 'Kashmir, Political, India, State and Dr.' appear most prominently, which suggests that the political dispute between India and Kashmir is the most dominant theme. Doctors (Dr.) is also featured, which is also interesting as mental and general health issues have reached crisis point in the region, due to the on-going militarisation of the state. J&K is not even able to keep its new medical graduates. (Interview Ather Zia, 2012)

This word cloud includes no mention of feminism as a distinctive category, although women activists are mentioned. This could be due to women not seeing their issues as separate from men’s or they consider the other frames raised to be more important to the political survival of and future of J&K.
The detailed analysis of this discursive terrain reveals that ‘Violence’ and ‘Conflict’ are again hyper-conflated categories or themes. They are mainly engaged with conflict related violence discussed in section 7 on the impacts of militarisation. Violence has collapsed all binaries together and militarisation has also made society a horror for those with untreated mental illnesses and their families.

‘Healthcare’ is the next largest frame, which indicates a deep concern shared across other sites in cyberKashmir about the need of urgent and radical intervention in health matters. Mental illness connected to self-experience or the experience of witnessing violence against others is discussed in section 7. The dearth of medical staff and facilities to treat patients is evident in much of the primary literature and testified to by medical professionals writing in other locations such as Kashmirforum and Brutallyhonest1.

Reform is necessary which indicates to this researcher that societal transformation is being spoken about in relation to how victims of exposure to militarisation and violence are dealt with. As the most urgent issue in cyberKashmir is healthcare and the lack of capacity to treat increasing incidences of drug addiction, depression, PTSD amongst the general population. Societal reform of attitudes to these ‘new’ phenomena of addiction, and other mental illnesses is also highlighted as desirable, so that sufferers are treated more compassionately.

Islam is the frame through which possible understandings and potential solutions can be posited such as in trying to alleviate the suffering of Half widows, for example. This could
be achieved by unifying Islamic legal understandings to prevent the injustice of women having to wait for endless years to be pronounced a widow and having the right to remarry.


Figure 17 Kashmiri Women Wordle

This web portal was created by another Kashmiri Journalist, Rameez Makhdoomi, together with a friend in response to the conditions of women in the state of J&K. He wanted to highlight the heroism of women both in the distant past and since 1990 and also to talk about the conditions for many women who have to live in destitution because of the loss of the families’ breadwinner being dead or disappeared. This was another web portal/blog, which stopped functioning after a few months and although the researcher was told that this was due to financial reasons, it seems to be a common pattern for Kashmiri-originated web portals. (Rameez Makhdoomi 2011)

The wordcloud reveals the axiomatic categories of ‘Women, Kashmir, Time, Kashmiri, Like’
Many women activists from the Kashmir valley were highlighted on this web portal and interviews and articles by young scholars were also carried. For this reason, it is the thematic category of activism, which is the most prominent. The women activists, who are included and celebrated from the terrestrial sphere are Zamrooda Habib of MKM, Dilafroz Qazi and Paveena Ahangar. Interestingly, DeM leader Asiya Andrabi was not represented and neither were the National Conference linked Markazi Behboodi Khawateen run by Suraiya Abdullah Ali or HELP and WAV headed by Nighat Shafi Pandit. The reason for these exclusions could be the premature shutdown/abandonment of the website, or perhaps these Kashmiri women are not appreciated in the same manner? Are they not Kashmiri women activists too?

Feminism/gender appears in the bar chart as the second most dominant frame and is linked to activism. This category is important because within the larger category are smaller connected themes of gender discrimination, women’s issues and concerns and women’s position in Kashmiri society. This category again raises the issue of whether the women activists mentioned above are not included.

Public spaces available for the media are highlighted and journalistic, democratic freedoms are reasserted in this terrain. (See above) Online censorship can be as insidious as that which is practised terrestrially and just as well-known magazines are suddenly
pulled due to ‘financial’ reasons. Well-healed journalists informed this researcher that this means that funding, usually in the form of J&K government placed advertising, has been pulled at the behest of someone in authority. Certainly this researcher can confirm that certain sites belonging to journalists are either abandoned or ‘mined’ with embedded computer viruses. (Interview Sami Ahmed 2012) As web censorship exists in many other disputed regions of the world, cyberKashmir also has a securitised cyber–intelligence profile, meaning that intelligence agents attempt to infiltrate social networks and/or mine web portals or try to hobble unsuspecting researchers.

The next largest value is that of ‘conflict’ again and the militarisation of the state. The credentials of women who were interviewed are detailed in secular political terms and their personal achievements, societal contributions and work before and during the past 22 years are celebrated. This could be interpreted as painting participants with pro-Independence leanings and reveal the possible reason why some women from a pro-India positions (as is frequently understood in J&K; those related to or with links to the National Conference party such as Suraiya Abdullah Ali and Nighat Shafi Pandit who runs Governmental NGOs funded by Srinagar are considered untrustworthy). Asiya Andrabi’s inclusion could also lend the web portal designers and operators into trouble due to the fact that she is under constant surveillance as DeM are considered a ‘soft’ terrorist organisation.

Education being a frame that is not mentioned in the prominently in any other blog is important here. This is integral to achieving high levels of activism and allowing women to train as decision-makers and leaders. Whilst literacy rates among women need to be improved to achieve the Indian national average, the view dominant here is that education will ensure necessary reform of society because women increase their activism, if they are educated. Perhaps this is when women’s activism will become concerted and perhaps a Kashmiri Women’s Movement could eventually emerge.

The above Wordle is taken from the web portal countercurrents.org and within that space there is a section, where those writing about J&K have expressed their articulations. This is one of the ‘outside’ (not of Kashmiri origin) web portals/blogs, which provide a wealth of literature and information about the region. As this was an ‘outside’ web portal, it could have been a very discursively dissimilar terrain in which people were writing about J&K but using very different frames from those in cyberKashmir. However, the top 5 values shown in discourses covering J&K on countercurrents were; Conflict, violence, healthcare, feminism, Islam and activism and this would suggest that countercurrents.org is a very good platform for the dissemination of discourses on J&K.

‘Kashmir, women, India, people and state’ are the dominant words that appear in this discursive cloud. It seems that in this frame there is an address to Indian audiences or readership on the question of Kashmir, its population and its status. There is again a framework crafted around the origins of the dispute between India and those Kashmiris wanting independence.
In the more detailed analysis of the data we see again conflict. This is posited as the historical conflict, including details of dates, times, accession documents, invasions, coups and revolutionary significant events. This category is given further nuance by the details of the origins of the current conflict from 1990 onwards.

Violence: Effects of increased violence in society is exposed here and women and their issues are referenced. The societal effects of conflict related violence upon women are described here and the tropes of suffering and wailing are not as prominent as found in most of the analysed web portals/blogs, which serve to silence women by the very act of highlighting them.

Healthcare issues ensuing from conflict-related trauma either of a primary nature (Self-experienced) or indeed the effects of secondary trauma (due to witnessing the death/serious injury to loved ones etc) are again a priority on this discursive terrain. Increasing suicide, conflict induced infertility, depression, drug addiction are all discussed in relation to Kashmir and this information is mostly related by Kashmiri medical professionals/journalists/scholars etc. (see section 7)

Feminism as a category includes issues of women’s rights, issues and concerns and gender discrimination. In telling of women’s stories international legal provisions, constitutional provisions and state J&K legislation are utilised to construct women’s legal/political position and then compared to their lived realities in a heavily militarised state.
It is interesting to note here that the frames of Islam and activism share the same value. Although not directly connected it occurred to this researcher that within the framework of Islam there is broad potential for social activism. It could be that the assumed connection between these two frames is only this researcher’s construction but this could also suggest that activism from within the Muslim community/Within an Islamic framework could be a solution.

Key scholars and activists in the broad field of Islam and women’s rights in South Asia have submitted articles for Countercurrents. Yoginder Sikand is a prolific writer on Kashmir, who submits to this web portal regularly and has submitted articles on the discursive category of Islamic feminism for Countercurrents.


![KashmirForum Wordle](image)

This Wordle image very loudly announces the words 'Women, Kashmir, society, people and one'. This web portal and blog was set up by Dr. Vijay K. Sazawal, who is also one of 3 Kashmiri men who have set up online spaces for the benefit of speaking about women’s issues and for allowing women to express their concerns, which in the reduced public spaces are few and far between. (Interview Vijay Sazawal 2011) The women in this category could be categorised as feminists, but as this researcher would be hesitant to
label other women, therefore, this is the location on the web where the most detailed and clear discourses on women and women’s issues can be found.

Feminism as a frame of reference for the mostly, but not exclusively, female contributors to KashmirForum is clearly prominent in this discursive terrain. As a frame of reference it consists largely of discussions surrounding gender discrimination faced by Kashmiri women in their places of work, as well as in the home, and society at large. Professional women in this online space concisely articulate their grievances about the reasons for this condition of Kashmiri women and how society could be reformed to alleviate the injustices meted out to women because of their unequal status.

Violence is the next largest frame and it is these analyses of gender inequalities (e.g. discrimination in the family, female foeticide, spousal violence, other familial violence from in-laws to eve-teasing, rape and murder of women) that lead this researcher to understand a concerted effort by women to analyse the nature of the violence around them.

Although conflict related violence is written about here, it is not the main focus and other issues in Kashmiri society are also highlighted such as late marriages are interspersed with women’s successes and recognition in education, in professions, as entrepreneurs, as activists in both the Valley and nationally and internationally. Detailed and three-dimensional stories are told where women are not just victims of violence with barely a name; this discursive terrain seeks to uncover women as fully-fledged beings.

Figure 22 KashmirForum.org
Healthcare as a frame of reference is the next most prominent frame for Kashmirfirum.org. This topic is highlighted by those medical professionals, (and Journalists) who are trying to cope with a wide range of medical crises (situations where there not enough resources to meet an acute need) on a daily basis. As many hospitals were destroyed and facilities are still being rebuilt, the fact remains that qualified, trained staff are in short supply and many of those who are medically qualified choose to leave the state and work elsewhere. The most pressing would be mental health care needs of an increasingly traumatised population. (De Jong 2008)

Reform that is urgent societal reform is also a called for in this terrain as health issues, both mental and physical health are immediate , which have been left relatively untouched in the wider mainstream international and Indian press discourses. However, critique is directed at the state government of J&K and at Kashmiri society for discriminating against women and failing to protect and promote women’s rights. Both are in need of transformation but the focus of the writers here is on societal transformation in order to

1) remove discrimination and violence against women

2) address healthcare crises facing the population of the Kashmir Valley

Activism is the solution to the issues highlighted by the writers to this forum. It is through education, that mobilisation and training of women for leadership roles and decision making could transform society into a more gender just model, which is described by writers.

The Conflict is a thematic category, which this discursive terrain does not give high priority to at all. In fact it is the only web portal/blog of the 7 researched, which did not show Conflict in the top 5 themes as all others had done. This was quite significant in the research process in order to ask what is being spoken of and what is not. ‘Conflict’ as a category is marked by its absence. It could indicate that these women are of the Kashmiri political elite, educated, worldly and confident and mostly in the 30 and older category and that they are afraid to speak openly about ‘conflict’.

Many intellectuals and scholars fear the consequences of saying the wrong thing (Chenoy 2006: 176) as was evidenced when this researcher tried to contact academics from Kashmir University for research purposes repeatedly via email and then by telephone, only one in situ academic responded to the research request and she was from Jammu University. University professors are not just afraid for their careers but also for their lives
and their families’ lives and well being. One young woman student emphasised that ‘everyone knew there were Indian agents’ (Incognito security personnel) in amongst actual students at the University of Kashmir. (Interview Shabana Hussain 2012)

It may be that women on this forum are looking at the details of conflict and uncovering the nuances of the macro conflict as it affects society and the traditional patriarchal structures within it. As historian Chitralekha Zutshi wrote ‘I am not suggesting that the conflict is not important, simply that there are many kinds of conflicts in Kashmiri women’s lives’. (Email exchange Chitralekha Zutshi 2011)

6. Brutally Honest1 - www.brutallyhonest1.wordpress.com

This Wordle was created from the rich text format of data from Brutallyhonest1.wordpress.com, which has now also fallen into disuse. The blogger, writer, activist and scholar Mushtaq Ul Haq Ahmad Sikander submitted articles. In an interview with the researcher he professed to have started writing about women and women’s issues online because he knew and felt concerned about the sufferings of women in the
state. (Interview Sikander 2012) (This is something the creator of this blog has in common with 2 other men Dr. Vijay K. Sazawal and Rameez Makhdoomi).

The most prominent words in the image are ‘Women, Kashmir, Hijab, and Society’. Islam is not prominently seen in the word cloud but women’s concerns and Islamic solutions to societal problems are themes, which dominate Mushtaq’s blog and his other writings posted on different web portals. (Sikander 2011)

![Figure 24 Brutallyhonest1.wordpress.com](brutallyhonest1.wordpress.com)

The CAT analysis reveals that ‘feminism, activism, reform and conflict and violence’ are the most dominant categories. Feminism as a category revealed the nuances of the discourse, which covered general women’s concerns such as employment, access to education etc, to overt analysis of women’s inequality and critiques of current societal standards for women. Mushtaq has written on women and conflict in J&K and touched on issues of widows, domestic/familial violence, female foeticide, suicides among women, mental health issues, and drug addiction amongst women.

Activism is the next largest frame and it is this category, which reveals the core of Mushtaq’s belief that it is women’s activism, which is necessary for the immediate alleviation of some issues, but vital for the long-term formation of a more just and equal society. To this end most of his article lean towards highlighting possibilities for women to engage actively in Kashmiri society.
Reform of society is necessary from Mushtaq’s point of view and in order to make it more just, it must start with issues of women and women’s rights both within the Islamic framework and in the secular framework. This duality exists in this terrain because Muslim women in India do not only have recourse to an Islamic legal framework but also have redress from secular provisions ensuring their ‘equality’ in both J&K’s own constitution as well as in the Indian constitution. Mushtaq’s critique castes the gaze again (Kashmirforum and Kashmiriwomen) towards a male-dominated culture of Kashmiri society, which is need of radical change.

‘Conflict’ or the militarisation of the state is addressed next as impeding the societal transformation and activism required to create gender justice for a more just society. Women’s treatment at the hands of security forces and AOGs is highlighted as reducing their access to public spaces. Mushtaq also makes the connection between the macro conflict (militarisation of the state i.e. public spaces) and the micro conflict, (militarisation of the private/personal) as sites of conflict.

Violence ensuing from the excessive militarisation of the Kashmir Valley is the next largest category and many aspects of women’s sufferings as a result are prominent. However, Mushtaq also highlights initiatives and the activism of Kashmiri women in aiding their communities.

Although using both secular and Islamic frameworks employed to analyse the problems and potential solutions, this researcher presumed that Islam would appear in the 5 most prominent themes for brutallyhonsest1. However, Islam and healthcare issues were seen with equal values attached to them in 6th position and therefore fell out of the selection. Mushtaq’s blog would therefore be seen as not overtly prioritising Islam but rather that he sees remedial solutions to societal problems involving women from within an Islamic framework.
Figure 25 Zunagash Wordle

This Wordle above prominently displays the frequency of words in this web portal/blog, which was abandoned after only a few months of being created. ‘Prophet, pray, women, and love’ are the dominant words in this cloud but the prominence of Islam is also discernible. Within the broad theme of Islam there is a discernible discursive stream evident from the data analysis that speaks of Islamic feminism directly. It challenges the idea that romantic love and Islam are mutually exclusive categories and is reformative in its tilt against practices contrary to harmonious marital relations.

Young women also wrote about the lack of public spaces for women to pray and are critical of a society which does not prioritise Muslim women’s need to pray at set prayer times. It observes that the experience of Muslims in non-Muslim spaces is often more conducive to Muslim women’s prayer obligations. Here one could surmise that they are young Muslim women from Kashmir who have lived in a western country and can therefore make that comparison. Another observation would be that they are single and therefore probably still in their twenties.
As for a more detailed look at this discursive terrain, it can be ascertained, that it is younger, single women (and a man or two) who are writing in this arena. Originally, the category was marriage/divorce but due to the nature of this site, it was changed to marriage/relationships, which is a more accurate description. A reason for the dominant thematic frame of marriage/relationship is that marriage is a major social problem in the state of J&K, due to the dearth of eligible partners, increases in the numbers of those never married and exorbitant increases in dowry costs. The state has an estimated 897,289 people in the ‘never married’, which is higher than the national average. (Malik 2010) As marriage is the only Islamically sanctioned relationship mentioned in this discursive terrain, it is highly significant and Islam providing a possible solution to the problem is posited.

Islam is the next frame and this follows from the issue of marriage described above which is a pre-occupation for most young women and men in their mid-20s who are educated and do not want to be left on the shelf. This is also borne out in interviews with young women students one of whom suggested that dowry costs are to blame for increasing violence against women in Kashmiri society. (Interview Saima Bano 2011) The Humsafar Marriage Counselling Cell was set up in 2005 by the Islamic Dawah Centre in response to public clamour for something to be done. Set up as an ‘austere’ marriage bureau which seeks to match prospective clients with suitable partners, it seeks to help in the marriage
of those who are otherwise too poor to afford it or educated clients who cannot find the right partner. (Sikander 2011a)

On the surface this would seem to be a reformative and welcome relief for people of J&K but some issues arose when in conversation with the creator of www.brutallyhonest1.wordpress.com, Mushtaq Sikander. Who is conducting these marriages is important because it would seem that the All India Muslim Personal Law Board have an executive working at Humsafar. It would be pertinent to discover if the AIMPLB standardised Nikanama (Islamic marriage contract) is used or can couples/families write/prepare their own? If young prospective couples are advised about their rights and duties in their ‘counselling’ sessions then what specifically is the nature of such advice to young women? Why can the couples not meet on their own to talk to each other without the presence of parents? (Interview Mushtaq Sikander 2011)

Feminism here takes upon the hue of Islamic feminism as prominent scholars in the field are paraphrased, Ahadith (Prophetic sayings) are quoted and utilised as are stories from the life of the Prophet Muhammad. This feminism is reformative and speaks of gender justice from within the Islamic framework; referencing both feminist works and issues dominant in Muslim diaspora communities, such as women’s access to mosques (see section 5).

Reform or societal transformation is necessary in order to accommodate the religious obligations of women in public, at work and in the mosque. A future is being envisaged by these young women where Kashmiri society would be more just to them and others because they were persuaded by Islamic emphasis on social justice and in particular ensuring women their Islamic rights.

Conflict/war is limited to the violent effects it has had on women in the state. These stories focus on stories of orphans and widows, of drug abuse and unplanned pregnancies as consequences of conflict and the ensuing moral decay of Kashmiri society as a result of militarisation.
11. Findings

Web portals/Blogs

There seems to be something of a generational divide in cyberKashmir as is shown in the differences between where the older; 30 and over age group venture. This is evident in the political tone, religious terminology, and generational markers in these discursive terrains. For example Kashmirforum carries articles discussing balancing motherhood and work, which normally would indicate that women with children were the authors. Younger women in cyberKashmir are focused on marriage and the finding of a suitable partner as is evidenced in Zunagash. They are also more overtly religious in their language use/discourses when compared to the discursive language employed by older women in Kashmirforum.

There are many convergences as well as divergences in the aggregate of the discourses analysed. The 7 sites investigated (including the 6 collective media sites as one web portal/blog) showed agreement in their choice of frames and disagreement. The frequency of thematic convergence between the locations is expressed as a percentage of the total in the following areas:

85.71% CONFLICT

The militarization of Kashmir is the primary source of contention but there is also an educative/informative discourse around this theme, which includes historical origins of the conflict, personalized memories and the Kashmiri Pandit minority. The exception to this being Kashmirforum, where the absence of the category from prominence is discussed in the section above.

71.43% VIOLENCE

Violence is primarily associated with the conflict, which has further collapsed the private sphere and impacted the social fabric of Kashmir and J&K at large. This has been manifest in increased violence against women - the exceptions being Zunagash and Kashmiriwomen. It is interesting to note that it appears that it is these web portals/blogs,
created by younger people in their 20s, who could have another understanding of the 'violence' around them by virtue of growing up in a conflict zone.

71.43% FEMINISM

It is Kashmiri men (Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, Dr. Vijay Sazawal and Rameez Makhdoomi) who have created hybrid spaces and enabled women’s discourses by allowing space for them in these terrains. The other would be the Zunagash women whose web portal is Islamic and it is mostly a female run affair. The only other web portal analysed, which is run by a women, is the Kashmirlit and there was no indication of feminism being a prominent category.

57.14% REFORM

Kashmiri women, Collectivemedia and Countercurrents did not prioritise reform of Kashmiri society. The reason for this could be that journalists (those on Collectivemedia, Kashmiri women, and many ‘outsider’ voices on Countercurrents are not so familiar with Kashmiri society). Perhaps, they are better at describing the situation on the ground rather than recommending actions/solutions, which is usually the job of policy makers. There are exceptions such as the work of Afsana Rashid that also exist.

57.14% ACTIVISM

This refers in particular to women’s activism, which is highlighted and celebrated. Furthermore, greater mobilisation of women and their skills needs to be achieved through women’s own effort. Interestingly those who were not prioritizing activism were Zunagash, which is using Islamic feminism as a framework, Kashmirlit which does not prioritise feminism and Collectivemedia with the former two being the only women run web portals.

42.86% ISLAM

Islam as a frame of reference does exist and this tends to be posited on Islamic concepts of social justice. Social service is an obligation, which is framed in an Islamic framework
and those who do not prioritise Islam in their top 5 frames of concern are brutalthonest1, Kashmiriwomen, Kashmirorum, Collectivemedia.

42.86% HEALTHCARE

This is a primary concern for most of the online discursive regions. This is discussed above in more detail but Zunagash, Kashmiriwomen and Collectivemedia, and brutalthonest1 did not cite healthcare as a top 5 priority. However, Kashmirorum carries regular articles about health matters of concern to medical professionals who battle against the limits inflicted by a protracted 22-year-conflict and the militarization of J&K.

28.57% PUBLIC SPACES/MEDIA

Censorship the restrictions upon a free press and free movement where highlighted by journalists on Kashmiriwomen and Collectivemedia web portals which is important as this also serves to instill fear in women activists and social reformers.

14.28% LAW/RIGHTS

It was only Collective Media sites where journalists are seeking to educate an Indian/transnational audience upon the legal/constitution, international treaty provisions, which are relevant to the Kashmir issue.

14.28% EDUCATION

This appeared as a prominent frame in only one web portal; Kashmiriwomen. This researcher believes that the women activists in this web portal believe in education, particularly women’s education, being a tool for activism and reform of their society. Other women on Kashmirorum highlight education in 6th position and were therefore not selected for the data sample.
Facebook

There are overtly Islamic discourses in the Facebook community observed by the researcher. In this community mainly young, single educated Kashmiri’s exchanged thoughts and feelings of an everyday nature. Not only personal information but also Ahadith were quoted and highlighted in an educational/instructional manner, and campaigns to raise awareness of Islamic obligations and duties take place on this online forum.

These are orientated to a reformative Islamic framework seeking to change society from within; for example ‘austere’ Islamic marriage practices are being campaigned for by some Muslim organizations terrestrially and online one participant created a campaign entitled ‘Boycott Dowry Marriages’ and wrote against the financially crippling, un-Islamic practice of dowry. Others could ‘like’ her campaign to show agreement with the idea that Muslims should take action to boycott such marriages in their communities.

Interestingly, this correlates to articles written by Sikander on brutallyhonest1 about austere marriage practices and the Humsafar Marriage Counseling Cell. (Sikander 2011) It would seem that a reformative Islamic frame exists, which creates a connection between the cyberKashmir discursive terrains and those of the social network/community active on Facebook. The subject of delayed marriage and grand dowry expectations has also been discussed in Kashmirforum and Countercurrents. This is also a point of convergence for seemingly disparate groups in online spaces.

Peace Processes

As long as elite peace building is reduced to pacification and its impact assessed only by how effectively violence is controlled, it will continue to block rather than open up possibilities of conflict transformation. Peace building is much more than conflict avoidance. It involves bringing people – combatants and non-combatants in conflict zones – into the centre of the peace process. (DasGupta 2012:23)

Nitasha Kaul wrote, with familiar Kashmiri resignation that ‘a prinked cage is still a cage’ (Kaul 2010: 11). The strategies utilised so far in order to ‘restore normalcy’ in J&K have not been successful and this was starkly evident in the summer of 2010. Known to some as the beginning of the second Kashmiri intifada, 2010 has changed the perception of the movement for self-determination around the world and within India too. Internet
technologies such as social networking media (Facebook) have enabled the dissemination of information about Kashmir and by Kashmiris through cyberKashmir. There is also a discernible change in the reporting of news from Kashmir by some in the Indian press. Sumona DasGupta in ‘Pacification is not peacebuilding’, highlights the failure of the ‘national elite’s’ twofold strategy of persuasion and coercion. She cites ‘The Hindu’ from September 22, 2010; ‘No economic packages and cosmetic administrative measures can be a substitute for demilitarization and a life based on political justice and the rule of law.’ She ends by quoting Sheikh Abdullah from his last testament, ‘People’s hearts can only be won by love, justice, truthfulness and sincerity and not with subsidised rice, army and offering largesse’. (DasGupta 2012:21)

Women and men are disenchanted by the peace processes and the failure to include Kashmiris adequately in dialogues. This has been the reason for heated online engagements between those who believe that the centre in Delhi is concerned with peace and those who do not. (see Fig.27)
Once again the Center appoints committee/team/interlocutors on Kashmir

We have seen this process so many times in the past and therefore one more team won't really hurt the delaying tactics of Indian intelligentsia.

In order to ascertain the ground situation, the team talks to various shades of opinion in Kashmir excluding the separatists who have seen such talks before.

For the umpteenth time the cycle of deflection, resentment, hatred and disillusionment start all over again in the Kashmiri populace.

Ground situation reviewing committee composed entirely of patriotic Indians

Indian interlocutors/team members take immense offense and report to the Indian central administration that Kashmiris still don't want to be a part of glorious India

Central administration thanks the interlocutors and throws the report into a dust-bin

The Indian intelligentsia holds a high level meeting and decides to keep working until a committee report in favor of the Indian state surfaces in Kashmir. Long live Bharat Mata, long live her democracy and now let's get back to killing more Kashmiris.

Figure 27 Kashmiri view of the peace process

(source Kashmiraffairs.org)
11. Conclusions

The militarisation of the state has led to violence not only on the macro level for women at the hands of Indian security forces and armed opposition groups but also on a localized societal level where violence against women is increasing. This violence is something that Kashmiri women are making efforts to combat by engaging in discourse and analysing problems sometimes using clearly feminist analyses and campaigning to show that it is women’s activism, which is specifically required in order to create a more gender just society. This activism is envisaged through mostly secular frameworks but also emancipatory Islamic frameworks.

As a discursive category, Islamic feminism could have relevance now in terms of conflict transformation, alliance-building and trying to create leadership roles for women but pressing Islamic feminism as an issue in this environment of conflict, violence and societal crisis in J&K, is not without risk. On the other hand it could provide the basis of the inclusion of younger women into peacebuilding/conflict transformation processes. Islamic feminism does exist in discursive streams emerging from online and territorial activism for reform and there is discernible framing of this discourse; albeit a saffron thread. It may not yet be discursive currency for older generations of Kashmiri women who are mainly articulating using secular/legal/constitutional frameworks but their daughters and granddaughters may be part of a social reformative movement based upon this discourse in the future. Younger women used more religious frames than those who are of a previous generation but those frames are nuanced by the transnational links to the Ummah, which is evident in digital spaces.

What is evident from the framing discernible in the borderlands of cyberKashmir, is that a tentative social reform movement among educated urban Kashmiris (women and men) exists and reflects their visions of a society in desperate need of transformation. This social reform movement would be led by women and utilise women’s skills for the reform of Kashmiri Muslim society. The conflict or the militarisation of the state is the most important issue for participants. The historical grounding of this movement since 1931 is emphasized as are contested origins of the present conflict, relevant legal instruments such as international human rights treaty obligations, Indian constitutional provisions and a listing of all the draconian legislation involved in the maintenance of the status quo in
Kashmir. The primary problems articulated by participants are violence against women and the health crises facing the Kashmiri population.

In order to provide for an alleviation of both, actions must be taken on a humanitarian basis such as an international call to medical professionals (especially psychologists, trauma therapists and counsellors who have language and cultural links to and/or understandings of J&K) from the South Asian diasporas worldwide. Women’s activism cannot be truly effective; at least as far as its grassroots basis is concerned, without having the security of free movement and free association. The only way to make women safer is to remove the Indian security forces from all civilian policing functions and all civilian territories. No measures will be effective to ameliorate either violence against women or the healthcare crises without the de-militarisation of the state.
'Peace Hath her Victories no Less Renounced than Those of War'

'It implies that victories won during peace time are as great or greater than the victories won in war. Victories won in war do not solve the problem of war. It creates new problems, which lead to new or fresh wars. War creates a cycle of hatred and bitterness. The victor and the victim of war suffer alike. Industry is ruined; economy shattered. The victories of war are costly, short lived and destructive.

The victories of peace on the other hand are constructive, creative, but silent. The victories of peace are won against nature, human passions, pain, poverty, ignorance and other social evils. Art and literature, trade and commerce, education and architecture, science and culture can flourish only during peace time. The Taj Mahal, various discoveries and inventions of science are the victories of peace.

It has been rightly said that we live in deeds, not in years. A man’s greatness should not be judged by number of years he has lived on this planet. It should be judged by the good deeds that he does for the benefit of his fellow men. The real worth of a person depends on his good actions.

We must come forward with the offer of help when we find anybody in need. We should not hesitate in coming to the help of a friend in distress. It is a moral duty and a promising step towards peace. Unless and until we don’t take pains for the reformation of our society, which is presently bound with so many social problems, we cannot imagine our bright future. ‘

(Razia Majeed 2008: 23 .Young Voices of Kashmir. ANHAD)
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Skype Interviews

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Interview with Suraiya Abdullah Ali (Social activist) 8th July 2010

Interview with Vijay K. Sazawal (Retired professional/blogger) 28th August 2011

Interview with Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmed Sikander (Scholar/activist/blogger) 4th September 2011,

Interview with Rameez Maqdoomi (Journalist/blogger) 9th September 2011

Interview with Tabassum Yakin (Student name changed) 18th September 2011

Interview with Anjum Zamrooda Habib (MKM leader/activist) 1st October 2011

Interview with Samie Shah (PhD student) 9th October 2011

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Interview with Iffat Fatima (Film maker) 9th January 2012

Interview with Sami Ahmed (Journalist, name changed) 11th and 12th January 2012

Interview with Prof. Rekha Chowdhury (Academic expert) 15th January 2012

Interview with Saima Bano (Student name changed) 9th December 2011

Interview with Shabana Hussain (Student name changed) 4th January 2012

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