# SECRETS OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY

BOOK EXCERPT

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

*To the people of Kashmir*

"Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves."

*--Abraham Lincoln, civil rights activist and the 16th President of the United States*

"Truth never damages a cause that is just."

*--Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India's independence movement*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Kashmir is an active conflict. It is unsettling and unpredictable. Every day, someone dies. Someone is detained. Or someone disappears. The valley of death is also described as 'Paradise on Earth.' But in this land of magic and myth, there are madmen and militaries that trample on Kashmir's beauty. After six decades of war, Kashmiris go on living. They go to school. They fall in love. They get married. Many have children. They do what seems normal, despite the protests, politics, and paranoia of living in a place that is not free.

My first visit to Kashmir helped me see the conflict through the eyes of women and their men. Return visits and constant contact with local Kashmiris made me aware of torture, trauma and terrible life-altering incidents. I entered the private world of women. They welcomed me and engaged me, as I had come from America to see them and listen to their stories. The brief periods I spent in Kashmir tormented me for years to come. I never thought I would fall hopelessly in love with a land of torrential beauty, and a people softened by the traumas of conflict.

Meeting with the women of Kashmir has been risky and rewarding. In this book, I describe encounters with mothers of martyrs, wives of militants, prisoners, protestors, and political activists. The women interviewed have one thing in common. They want a separate country called Kashmir. They demand self-determination. They fight for freedom.

It is because of their struggle and sacrifices that I have chosen to conceal their true names, when necessary. I have a duty to protect them because they gifted me with history through their eyes. Each woman has a story to share. As a collection, these stories are a source of Kashmir's modern struggle. The women of Kashmir have shown me compassion and courage. And so I write, because I dance between both cultures and have a moral duty to share their triumph and trauma. My unspoken promise to Kashmir is that I will hold its closely guarded secrets. I will forever keep that promise.


Taj.
Afghanistan
China
Territory ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963; claimed by India
Northern Areas
Indian claim
North-West Frontier Province
Siachen Glacier
Indian occupied since 1984
no defined boundary
Aksai Chin
Fed. Admin. Tribal Areas
Line of Control
Kargil
India-China line of actual control
Azad Kashmir
Srinagar
VALE OF KASHMIR
Jammu and Kashmir
ISLAMABAD
Islamabad Capital Territory
Pakistan
Working boundary
Himachel Pradesh
China
Punjab
India
Uttaranchal
Punjab
Haryana
Rajasthan
Uttar Pradesh
Area of main map
Pakistan
India
International boundary
Traditional boundary of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir
Line of Control
Internal administrative boundary
Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir
Pakistani-controlled areas of Kashmir
0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

# INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO WONDERLAND

**"It would be difficult to describe the colors, which are seen on the Kashmir mountains."**
--SIR WALTER LAWRENCE, 1895

**"Here, we have the most splendid amphitheater in the world."**
–AN AMERICAN TRAVELER, 1914

This book was started when I was a child. When Mama first said the word "Kashmir," I thought she imagined it, like a fairytale with wondrous characters imbued with magic. In books, Kashmir is described as the land with a floating vegetable garden, a palace named after fairies called *Pari Mahal*, hundreds of houseboats made of the fragrant deodar tree along Dal Lake, and gardens with majestic fountains built by India's long-gone royal emperors. Later, I realized Mama didn't imagine Kashmir. It was real.

Growing up in Texas, in the capital city of Austin, I never heard of Kashmir in school or saw it on the map. I didn't know the word Kashmir came from an Indian text. 'Ka'

means water and 'shimir' is 'desiccated water.' Together, these phrases reflect Kashmir as 'a land desiccated by water.' Some scholars trace the language of Kashmir, called Kashmiri, to the linguistic roots of Sanskrit—an ancient Indian tongue.

In Kashmir, some speak Urdu, Pakistan's national language. Most understand Hindi, the national tongue of India. In school, Kashmiri children are taught English, a token of British colonialism. These facts were missing from the classroom in Texas, where I went to school.

Kashmir is a tiny valley with nearly 86,000 square miles. A microscopic fraction of the world's population lives in Kashmir. Over ten million people in Jammu and Kashmir reside in the state of India, which is two million more than the population of Virginia, where I now live. Nearly six million Kashmiris live in the autonomous territory of Pakistan.

By contrast, my childhood home in the state of Texas is twice the size of all of Kashmir. The Chinese regions of Aksai Chin and Trans-Karakoram account for 19 percent of Kashmir, a fact disputed by India. At its highest peak is the Siachen Glacier, where Indian and Pakistani troops engage in border clashes like schoolyard bullies. It is the world's highest battlefield, fought at an altitude of 20,000 feet. Only India and Pakistan have waged war over Kashmir. In this vicious cycle, Pakistan loses, India wins, and the Kashmiri people are marginalized all over again.

Over time, I learned that Kashmir is a religious place. Over 60 percent of Kashmiris are Muslims. Other religious groups include Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs. Buddhism prevailed in Kashmir's old capital, Shrinagari, founded by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka. Hinduism emerged in the 9$^{th}$ century and Islam flourished in the 14$^{th}$

century. Here, religion is deeply embedded in local customs and cultural traditions, reflected in rituals of childbirth, marriage, and death. Given the diverse religious landscape, most Kashmiris are decidedly tolerant.

As long as I can remember, Mama sensationalized Kashmir with war stories. "Kashmir is worth fighting for," she said, trumpeting nationalism. She wanted to prove to herself that she could do something more for Pakistan other than study. "I know men eventually need women to help them. They cannot fight wars alone," she said.

Mama boasted of being a "pure" Kashmiri. At first glance, Kashmiris look distinctly European and have been compared to the Indo-Aryan race. They have unforgettable features, their faces sharpened by sensual eyes, clear skin, and glorious hair. Some Kashmiris could pass for Sicilians.

In those early years, I didn't know what Kashmir had to do with my parents' country of origin, Pakistan. Were Kashmir and Pakistan related? What was special about Kashmir? And why do Kashmiris refer to themselves as a forgotten people? *Who* has made them invisible? Before I had ever visited Kashmir, I began to compare Kashmiris to the Native American Indian tribes—both were people displaced and disgraced by colonial rulers.

Like my parents, I was born in Pakistan. My mother and I share the same birthplace of Lahore, the second largest city and cultural center of Pakistan. My father was born in the industrial city of Gujranwala, also named the 'city of wrestlers' for being the birthplace of South Asia's finest bodybuilders. Situated on the Grand Trunk Road, Gujranwala is connected to my mother's city in the northern Punjab province. While my mother lived in one city, my father moved around the Indian Subcontinent.

When he was younger, his father, a Sergeant in the

British Army, was assigned to Agra, Uttar Pradesh—known to the world for the Taj Mahal, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife. They returned to Gujranwala when India and Pakistan gained their independence in August 1947; the countries' national holidays are separated by just one day. Pakistan celebrates its national day on August 14; India observes this on August 15.

No matter how often I visit, Lahore is a place to which I do not inherently belong. I have never lived there. I can only identify with its cuisine, which Mama brought to America when she first arrived in Tennessee in 1970, and then moved to Texas with my father, carrying me in her arms. Mama mastered Lahore's culinary gifts—our house was always infused with *garam masala*, onions, and cardamom.

Most of Lahore is foreign to me. I remember it as a labyrinth of dust-tormented streets and dry, trembling air. It is a city described by English writer Rudyard Kipling as "the growling, flaring, creed-drunk city," noisy and rambunctious like a beating heart. My father reminded me of an old Punjabi saying: *If you have not been to Lahore, you have yet to be born*. The wife of Emperor Jehangir once said of Lahore, "By giving my life for Lahore, I have purchased another Paradise." Once known as the walled city of Lahore, my birthplace prides itself with distinguished Mughal architecture and colonial buildings built by the British.

Access to the walled city is permitted through six of the remaining thirteen gates. One is called the Kashmiri gate because it was built in the direction of Kashmir. Constructed by the Mughals, the gates are landmarks of foreign rule. In 1849, when the British arrived, the walled city was annexed. Having been raised in America, Lahore became a distant memory. As an adult, when I traveled to Indian-held Kashmir, I boarded a plane in Lahore, a short

ride to New Delhi, India's capital and my gateway to Paradise.

I had heard enough about Kashmir from Mama and her mother in Pakistan to know it is a deeply divided land. At the heart of Kashmir are its people, trapped in *Wonderland* (between two South Asian rivals, India and Pakistan, who lay claim to all of Kashmir). In this heavily guarded valley, protestors and political activists have so far failed to achieve their goal of an independent Kashmir. Because of the war, life in Kashmir is an assemblage of unknown and unpredictable events. "This is the most beautiful prison in the world," a senior militant told me.

This book is an oral history of Muslim women and their men. It is a series of stories by ordinary Kashmiris living extraordinary lives in an active conflict. It is an attempt to make these invisible women and their men known to the outside world. The story of Kashmir is a matrix of stories of women *inside* the conflict—each with a different version based on individual experiences. That war is a continuum with multiple histories means that women's experiences are bound to change during the various stages of armed conflict. This book brings women's lives to the center of the conflict, putting the spotlight on them as capable, competent, and intelligent actors who deserve greater decision-making power.

Prior to this book, I have given lectures on Muslim Kashmiri women. They are activists and advisors; protestors and politicians; mothers and martyrs; educators and entertainers, and much more. When I think of the women of Kashmir, I am reminded of W.H. Auden, who said, "All I have is a voice."

This book is a tribute to the multitude of Muslim voices rising in Kashmir to oppose a conflict that has lasted over

seventy years. These women are the victims of war. On March 8, 2013, celebrated as International Women's Day, I presented a slideshow at the United Nations in New York to explain reasons why Kashmiri women protest.

*Prestige.* Women are as capable as men. Women protest to preserve their honor, acknowledging that their progress depends on their participation.

*Power.* Women are persuasive speakers and political party leaders. Even stay-at-home mothers take to the streets because they know they can save their families when they collectively call for change.

*Protect*. Women nourish their children and men. They will do anything to shield their families from harm and defend against human rights violations.

*Peace*. Women want to end the conflict by being a voice in the non-violent movement for independence. They are determined to break the cycle of abuse. They lead political parties and movements as protectorates of marginalized populations within their society.

More recently, I have been teaching Gender, Security and Conflict at my alma mater, The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., America's capital city. Inside the classroom, I introduce students to concepts of gender theory with a focus on how it is applied to understanding issues of security and the dynamics of armed conflict, peacekeeping and peace building. The course includes a section on gender-based violence in armed conflict and we examine the women of Kashmir—this book also examines the horrific crimes of rape, and the lack of gender-just reparations for the victims. Gender-based violence is a predominant feature of many armed conflicts internationally, and it is no secret that across the valley women are constantly

patronized all the time by the military, militants, and other men.

Despite these abuses, women rise up. The unfolding story of Kashmir must include the different stories of Muslim women; many have redefined their roles in the conflict. To begin, the book explores the story of Kashmir beginning in my childhood home in Texas and my birthplace of Pakistan, followed by the militarized zone in India-held Kashmir, where my grandmother once lived. This is a personal narrative, though it is only one part of the larger story. The focus of this book is the war histories told by women.

This book reveals the multiple ways women experience war and explores their visibility and different ways they meet and mobilize. It includes their aspiration for political power; and their need and desire to be employed and educated. Ultimately, women will do what it takes to be empowered. All across Kashmir, women deserve human security—the right to political, social, economic, health, and food needs. Human security is an all-encompassing concept I learned from U.S. Ambassador Prudence Bushnell, my mentor and friend. With access to human security, a people can enjoy peaceful living.

Like their men, women in Kashmir feel a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict. These women are determined, dedicated, and destined for change. They are the main survivors of war. With entry into their homes, offices, and prisons, this book is a chronicle of Kashmir's personal stories shared by its women. This book highlights select stories of female survivors—political activists fighting for gender rights; the mothers of martyrs; female prisoners falsely accused of terrorism; and more. The stories are

painstakingly real and divulge the shocking secrets that permeate the lives of Kashmiri women.

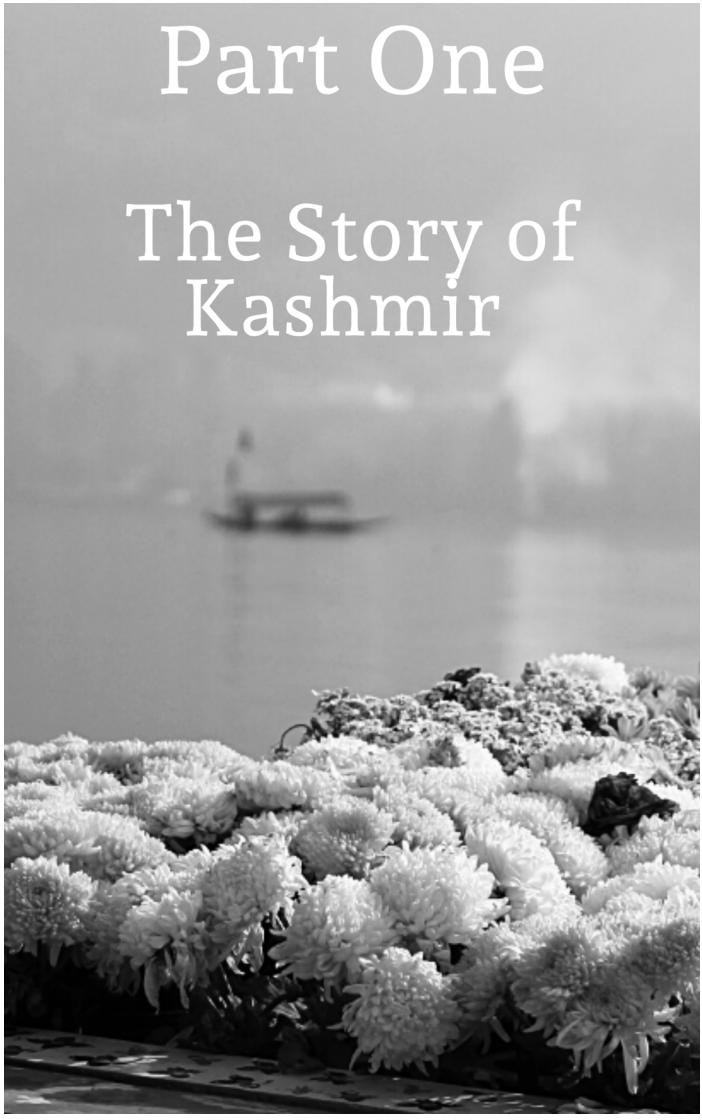
The women (and men) interviewed, and the places visited for this book cover a decade of research. As of this writing, I maintain daily contact with Kashmiris to continuously document the untold truths that are prevented by censorship, communication blackouts, lockdowns, curfews, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this volatile environment, as people and events are likely to change, so do the people of conflict. The excessive use of force and an iniquitous legal system is the norm. It is therefore expected that women alive today may be dead tomorrow.

Finally, in a patriarchal society like Kashmir, men are the first fighters and primary protectorate of women. I have included conversations with men because they often influence, incite or invite women into their political parties and the protest movement. Often, women join the separatist movement because of their men. Hence, this book is not about the particulars of war. Rather, it is about the *people of conflict*.

The story begins with my mother, one of Kashmir's fighters.

# Part One

## The Story of Kashmir



1

# MAMA'S WAR

**"Kashmir is worth fighting for."**
—NARGIS PERVEEN

**"No nation can rise to the height of glory without its women."**
--MUHAMMED ALI JINNAH, FOUNDER OF PAKISTAN

Nargis Perveen held the British-made rifle in her small hands. She loaded the Lee-Enfield firearm called the .303 with a five-round charger. She had never held a weapon before. She pressed her thumb against the smokeless powder cartridge and waited for the order to fire. Used by the British military in World War I, the rifle was nearly 45 inches long and weighed between eight to nine pounds. Mama preferred a smaller weapon. She was barely five feet tall and weighed ninety pounds.

In her family, she was the middle child. Her name, Nargis, is the yellow and white daffodil flower grown in

India and Pakistan—a flower I remember sprouting like weeds along the highways of Texas in early spring.

I could see Mama clasp her weapon. She had a strong grip. "These are working hands," she often said, opening her weathered palms to prove she could do almost anything. In later years, when she migrated to America, she cut down a dead pecan tree, put up a fence, and once, I watched her slice the throat of a chicken with a large knife on the porch.

In her youth, Mama looked like a Geisha, with pale skin and thin lips. Mama has Aryan-like features. Her eyes match her hair. She has high-cheek bones and a flawless complexion. She was a beauty like my grandmother, Imtiaz Mir, whom I affectionately called Nano.

Mama adjusted her uniform. She sported a pair of straight khaki pants with a long *kameez* (shirt), the color of a sparrow that covered her hips. She let her hazelnut-colored hair hang loose on her shoulders. The Pakistani Army adored her. They called her the "jewel of the East."

"The Army used to look at my rosy cheeks and said I had good blood! They insisted I donate my blood to dying soldiers in the war," she said with a bout of laughter. "But I never did. I thought it was better to join the war. By joining the Army, I had to prove to my country that women are equal to men. That I can fight."

In faded black and white photographs, I see a striking resemblance between Mama and Habba Khatoon, a 16$^{th}$ century Muslim mystic poetess from Kashmir, whose songs still vibrate throughout the valley. But unlike Khatoon, who created some of the most beautiful poetry and songs as she wandered the valley in search for love, Mama used her voice to assert herself as a young woman in a patriarchal and patrilineal country. And while Khatoon was affectionately called *Zoon*, a Kashmiri word for moon, Mama's nickname is

*Mito*, an Urdu word for parrot. That explains why she always has something to say.

Mama was high-spirited, high-strung and highly emotional. At the age of fourteen, when Mama finished the equivalence of high school, she joined a government college in Lahore. At the time, many Pakistanis like Mama were tired of one military failure after another. "People needed change. Each military ruler failed us," she said. This was the 1960s. Pakistan was on the verge of another war with India, and it needed women to fight alongside its men.

Commander Malik was in charge of the young women. They gathered in the Lahore stadium, a cricket ground built in 1959. In later years, the stadium was renamed Gaddafi Stadium after the late Libyan tyrant, Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi. Mama was among the first recruits. She was a volunteer, the only student in a college of two hundred women who joined the Pakistani Army. I do not think of my mother as a warrior. Even though she can be fierce and fiery, she is a no-nonsense and matter-of-fact woman. Bold and blunt, Mama hurls her opinion like darts, a warrior without fear.

Military men did not expect women to fight. As an adult, when I trained U.S. servicemen and women, I met women who confirmed what Mama knew to be true in Pakistan: an age-old story of resilient women. A female Lieutenant Colonel, who identified herself by her first name Jennifer, told me, "One of the things that pushed me to join is that women are not compelled to succeed in the U.S. military. When someone tells you can't do something, you do it."

Promoted to Colonel in the summer of 2012, Jennifer doesn't announce her new status "because it has no value [among her peers] but is an important rank" for her. I imagine Mama had similar aspirations for herself, although

she also knew it was unusual for women to serve alongside mostly Muslim men in the Pakistani Army. Still, as a young woman, she had already accomplished more than most and proved she was willing to die for Kashmir.

But as Pakistan became desperate and despondent, the Army began seeking female recruits. My mother simply volunteered. Pakistan needed women to help them win the war. Mama learned how to perform basic medical training to heal wounded soldiers. She was taught how and when to shoot a weapon and other civil defense skills. She was given all the tools to make her a fighter and a nationalist.

To die while fighting for Kashmir was considered honorable and heroic, worthy of being called a "martyr." I doubt Mama imagined herself a martyr though she shared women's ambition to do something for Pakistan. With a group of women, Mama embraced the national fervor that gripped the new country as it attempted to reclaim Kashmir during the 1965 war—the second time India and Pakistan collided.

The first war between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory took place months after independence. Pakistan had no chance of winning against India which took most of the ammunition stores and ordnance factories when it became a new nation. In the division of British India, Pakistan received a regular army that numbered no more than 150,000 men.

Since the late 1940s, Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah roused Muslim sentiment for Kashmir. Rallying cries for *Azad Kashmir* (Free Kashmir) helped the septuagenarian gain new recruits to the National Guards in the southern port city of Karachi. Women joined the women's wing of the Guard and participated in self-defense exercises.

One of my former students, originally from Karachi,

gifted me an original LIFE magazine from 1948 with a picture of Zeenat Haroon, a member of the Women's National Guard, swinging the bamboo *lathi* (used in stick and cane fighting). Today, the *lathi* is a common weapon used to disperse protestors in Indian-held Kashmir.

With a skeleton Army, Jinnah propped up a rebel force known as *lashkars*, Pashtun tribesmen who lived along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border, to wage Pakistan's first war in Kashmir. India defeated Pakistan. In early 1948, months before Jinnah died in a vehicle while waiting for an ambulance to arrive in Lahore, the United Nations intervened. An agreement was made.

The two rivals agreed to a plebiscite—the people of Kashmir would vote. Interviews with Kashmiri activists suggest that the people would likely have voted to become a separate state. More than seventy years later, Kashmiris haven't been allowed to decide their political future. During the war, Pakistan's famed singer Noor Jahan sang the country's first war song. *Meriya dhool sipahiya tenoo Rab diyan rakhan, aye watan ke sajeelay jawanon mere naghmay tumahre liye hain*. (Oh my love, my God be your protector. Oh you the brave, handsome soldiers of my country, my songs are dedicated to you.)

Mama shared the Army's will to claim a land she had never visited. Her national identity as a Pakistani was linked intricately to Kashmir, a valley off-the-beaten-path that my mother learned from her mother's childhood stories. "I am from Kashmir," she said, but shied away from saying *I am a Kashmiri*. Mama held onto Kashmir like a timeless picture in a vintage frame.

She had romanticized the valley. It is *Janaat* or Paradise, a term coined by the late Mughal emperor Jehangir. In his couplet, he wrote *if there is paradise on*

*earth, it is here, it is here, it is here in Kashmir.* For Mama, the valley had old-world charm. She saw it through iconic photographs, sun-kissed images of a *shikara* gliding along Dal Lake, scenes of mountains cast in blue-green cold, and worshippers at sacred places bobbing their heads like sparrows.

From Mama's hometown in Lahore, Pakistan-held Kashmir is at least a six-hour car ride—a drive she's never taken.

Mama trained for the Army in August when the heat, flies and mosquitos seized the city of Lahore. The days were unbearably humid. With an overarching sky, clouds formed a blanket like dusty cotton. Mama felt the weight of her rifle. She thought it was like any weapon. All she had to do was pull the trigger and shoot.

"Fire!" Commander Malik shouted. "Keep your eye on the target! You're your gun!" A raucous sound filled the stadium and startled the pigeons in the cloudless sky. Mama thought her leader was unpleasant to look at. Malik had the look of a wounded bear with a boyish face, sleepy eyes overcast by bushy eyebrows, a Roman nose, and sun-weathered skin. Typical Punjabi men are known for their masculinity, exhibiting signs of aggression, militancy and boorishness. The other women said he looked like a Pashtun from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or the FATA. Mama called it "no-man's-land."

Mama fired. She jolted and lurched backward. The external spring of the .303 surprised her. "I never got used to cycling the bolt. Each time I let go of the trigger, I felt I could hit someone," she told me. Mama pointed at the target that was a hundred yards away. She leaned on the dry grass, her *kameez* stained with dust. The firing of the rifle made a concerto of noises. Her heart pounded. The firing was an

endless torrent, worse than a cacophony of birds ascending into the August sky.

Mama said she closed her eyes and chanted a Sufi prayer. *Be constantly occupied instead with listening to God.* Mama was unafraid but justifiably nervous. With twenty other volunteers, she was almost in battle.

As she remembered the war, Mama shuddered. "It was my best kept secret," she said. Mama lied to her mother. After class, she changed into her military uniform in the ladies bathroom. She kept it hidden in her school bag.

"Nano didn't check my bag because she was never home. She left early in the morning to teach and then tutored children after school. She was late every night," she recalled.

On the bus to Qaddafi Stadium, a seven-mile journey from her college, other passengers teased Mama. "Look! Here's Fatima Jinnah!" they laughed at her in uniform, although Mama felt honored to be named after a woman coined the Mother of the Nation. Fatimah Jinnah was one of the leading women of Pakistan and a prominent politician.

Before the birth of Pakistan, she Fatimah closed her dental practice to live with her brother, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, after his wife's death. She stood by her brother on the political campaign trail and helped him raise his only daughter. Years before Benazir Bhutto would enter the political limelight, Fatimah became a role model for women like my mother. Fatimah made it possible for hundreds of Pakistani women to participate in general elections and protest in the civil disobedience movement of the late 1940s.

Mama lived by Muhammad Jinnah's vision for a secular Muslim country where women and minorities were recognized as equal to men. Jinnah was a unique political statesman. In his autobiography of Jinnah, historian Stanley Wolpert wrote: "Few individuals significantly alter the

course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Muhammad Ali Jinnah did all three."[1] When Jinnah died, Fatimah continued her political activism and stood against Pakistan's military dictator, Ayub Khan, in an unfair contest. Had the election been fair, she would have won.

Knowing my mother, her greatest hero for women's rights was the founder, himself. Before Pakistan was born, Jinnah made numerous speeches to address women's issues, which helped him gain female support for a new Pakistan. To improve the lives of women, Jinnah had to appeal to the country's men. In March 1940, Jinnah addressed a crowd in the northern Indian city of Aligarh:

> "It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners...let us try to raise the status of our women according to our own Islamic ideas and standards. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable conditions in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life."[2]

After training, Mama changed back into the school uniform and headed home. She lived like this for three weeks. No one suspected her. She knew Nano and her eldest brother would never approve. Though she wasn't sure about her father, Sheikh Nazir Ahmed. He died of a heart attack when Mama was four. Nano never remarried. She refused a second marriage and depended only on herself, thus braving societal prejudices against working women. Nano said,

> "When women have no choice, they do all they can to survive. I learned to rely on myself. I could trust myself to do the right thing for my children. I needed help but when help is not there, women have to prove they are capable. I had to make money. I was not going to let any man or woman tell me I could not care for my family, no matter how hard it would be."

Mama inherited Nano's strong will and spirit, but there were some things she never understood about her own mother. "She didn't allow me to participate in debate contests!" Mama complained. "Those were the days when few women were allowed to talk or mix with men. But I didn't care."

Luckily for Mama, a senior uncle stepped forward to convince Nano that there was nothing wrong with women and men in the same room. In each competition, Mama won trophies, but Nano threw them away when she moved to America.

"I was fearless. I didn't care," Mama said. *How did she keep it a secret? I imagined it must have been difficult for Mama to lie every day to her mother.* "I told your Nano I was out with friends," she replied, smiling. Nano ruled like an autocrat. She delegated chores to her children and enforced strict traditions. She cursed her children for disobedience.

Over time, Mama became resentful of her mother, calling her mean-spirited. "She curses her own children. She doesn't know how to forgive." I wondered if Mama understood her mother carried a lifetime of pain. As her grandchild, I sympathized with Nano. She had been wounded by history. Hers was a time when Pakistan was not yet created and women enjoyed few rights. Had Nano lived

in a different time and perhaps a different place, she might have been able to be truly independent.

Like Mama, Nano could have done anything but wasn't given the chance. "I wanted more out of life," Mama said. "Your grandmother never understood me. I wanted to be a doctor. She said no. Then I selected nursing. Again, she refused. Finally, I said I could be a lawyer because I knew how to win an argument. Nano only allowed me to get a teaching certificate," Mama said.

We stood together in the kitchen, looking out at blanket-like clouds. Within minutes, clouds would parade across the sky, and rain would beat against the shed Mama had built in the backyard to grow squash, juicy green peppers, and fat tomatoes. I asked Mama what she might have been if she had another chance.

"Who knows?" Mama turned to me with glittering eyes. "I could have been a politician."

One summer day in Texas, Mama met Pakistan's first and only female leader, Benazir Bhutto. I introduced Bhutto to my mother after a lecture the leader gave to my university in Texas. Prior to her speech, Bhutto and I had dinner with a group of undergraduate students. The wide-eyed young

women were eager to discuss Bhutto's role as a Muslim woman in an Islamic country. "This is unprecedented," said Dr. Eric Selbin, a professor and my lifelong friend. "It must be amazing to have a Muslim woman in power," he said.

When asked about women in Islam, Bhutto turned to me. "Farhana you answer this one," she said. "Muslim women are progressive," I began. "There are endless examples in Islamic history as well as contemporary Muslim countries of women's contribution to their state and society. Fifteen hundred years ago, during the time of Prophet Muhammad," I paused, preparing the Texan women for what they probably did not know. "Muslim women had the right to vote. They inherited property. They could choose whom to marry. They had a right to a career. They could even initiate a divorce."

"The greatest example of a Muslim woman was Khadija. She was a wealthy widow in her early 40s in pre-Islamic Arabia, which later became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She was an orphan, twice widowed, and a noble and wealthy woman. She used her wealth to feed and clothe the poor and took care of her relatives. She earned two titles, 'The Princess of Quraysh,' which was the most powerful Arab tribe of its time, and the 'Pure One,' in honor of her virtue."

Bhutto smiled as I told the story. The room fell silent. I had no idea what anyone was thinking, but I was confident they hadn't heard this before. I continued. "She ran a lucrative caravan business and employed Muhammad before he became a Prophet. Khadija was impressed by her 25-year-old employee. Muhammad was hard working and held the honorific title of *Al-Amin*, the Truthful One. Khadija knew this was the man she wanted to marry. She sent a marriage proposal to Muhammad through her cousin, a Jew. When

he accepted, Khadija was married for a third time. She was about 40 years old."

Bhutto waited patiently for me to complete my next sentence. I felt I had betrayed the students by taking attention away from one of Pakistan's most important and short-lived leaders. "And when God chose him as a messenger, Khadija stood by her husband's side. She is the example of a strong, stable, and serene Muslim woman," I concluded. I had so much more to say. The young women smiled and seemed to understand that Muslim women, like any other faith-based group, were diverse, distinct, and different. Throughout modern history, Muslim women had been famous politicians, writers, musicians, poets, social activists, entrepreneurs, and much more.

On occasion, I am invited by the U.S. military and other government agencies to address the role of Muslim women today, a topic that sparks more debate and discussion. On those teaching days, I try to help others appreciate the historical glory of early Muslim women. The early Muslim women were examples of courage and compassion. As a counter-terrorism expert, I also share stories of why *some* Muslim women and girls join terrorists groups; why they do not represent Islam; and how the global community can help mitigate this rising threat. The women of Kashmir are not violent and thus, they are not included in *that* story, except for the story of 'Bomb Girl,' a local Kashmiri girl who is the rare exception.

When I paused, Bhutto expressed her astonishment at the marriage proposal between Khadija and Muhammad, given their age difference. "I did not know about this marriage pact," Bhutto seemed incredulous.

"Yes," I said with an air of optimism. "There are more

women like Khadija. Even you are a great example to many young Muslim and non-Muslim women."

In an adjacent conference room, Mama waited for her turn to meet Benazir. It was like a rite of passage. Mama glowed as she posed next to Benazir for a photograph with great humility and honor. That picture was placed over the fireplace mantle in the drawing room. Anyone who visits my parents' home catches a glimpse of two powerful women. In 2007, when a local gunman assassinated Benazir Bhutto, Mama lost interest in Pakistan.

There was only one thing Mama kept as a reminder of her youthful activism—a rifle near the bed. "It was loaded until your father took out the bullets," she said, with a tone of regret.

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1. Wolpert, Stanley, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, (Oxford University: UK), 1984
2. "Jinnah and women's emancipation," *Dawn*, December 22-28, 2005, p. 6

## 2

# REMEMBRANCE

**"Independence is God's greatest gift to a woman."**
--NANO

She kept me awake. In the mornings, cries of the muezzin echoed throughout the three-story house. As Nano lay in bed, she prayed by opening and closing her eyes in slow motion. These days, her prayers were short. She had very little to say to God, except that it was time for her to go. She desired death.

"I don't understand You! O Allah! Why am I still alive?" Nano wailed from her bed in Lahore. She turned to me, her eyes magnified by grief and fear. Almost 100 years old, Nano looked exceedingly tired.

She had a thin head of long gray hair, steel gray eyes with a hint of blue that looked like opals at midnight, and hands that felt like old leather. At night, she slept with dangling gold emerald earrings. As she aged, Nano's face withered and her voice cracked between sentences.

Outside, the maid called for Nano to let her know she had arrived. Nano limped to the black steel gate, with keys rattling in her hand. I trailed behind Nano as she undid the heavy lock. A woman in cotton with a gaunt face, dark skin, and shiny brown eyes said hello.

"You are late again," Nano frowned at her. "Always late. You have no responsibility. You don't know what time it is?"

She apologized. "I have a sick child at home."

"Oh? Your child is sick again?"

"Yes, *Ama*," she said, referring to Nano as mother as a sign of respect. It was unacceptable for younger women, especially maids, to address the woman of the house other than by a title. Since Nano had been widowed, *Ama* seemed appropriate.

The maid walked behind Nano, barefoot, her feet thick with dust. Even with her head bowed to the floor, blotches like ink left permanent scars over her cheeks. I had heard of women like her, whose skin turned a shiny black after working as children in the coal mines. Maybe she was one of them. *Where did Nano find her?* I wondered.

The maid swung her arms, carelessly, holding onto a brightly colored scarf drawn over her shoulder. She made long, sweeping strokes with her arms as Nano gave her a to-do list.

"Make simple rice with lentils for lunch. Wash the dishes and clean these floors. There's laundry in the basket, too. Don't forget to rinse the clothes before hanging them to dry. First, make me tea with a slice of bread and something for my child, too. We can't have breakfast at noon!"

The maid slipped into the kitchen, nodding.

"If you come late again, then don't come at all! I don't need you anymore," Nano whined, as she crawled back into her bed.

I watched the maid in Nano's kitchen, a small space with a gas stove, a steel counter and sink, and a glass cabinet for a few mugs and old china ware. In the adjacent room, there was a refrigerator and a small dining table with platters of fruit and fresh vegetables on top. Despite its size, Nano's kitchen was filled with the comforting scents of cardamom, cinnamon and cloves—common spices she used in most culinary feasts when she was younger. Now that the maid prepared her meals, the aromas of the kitchen no longer belonged to Nano.

"Come," I said, holding her by the arm as we crawled back into the bedroom. Curtains with silver flowers were drawn over a side window. The room felt cold and dark when the bright ceiling lamp was switched off. The walls had a fresh cream-white paint and a dated calendar held by a rusty nail.

Situated in the old quarter of Krishnager, Nano's house once belonged to a Hindu family before Pakistan was a country. In the late 1940s, the family migrated to India when it became an independent state. Even after the freedom movement, the neighborhood retained its Hindu name —*Krishna* is a revered god in Hinduism.

Though Pakistan became her home, Nano's family was once rooted in Kashmir before the valley and the entire Indian Subcontinent became unevenly split by the Partition Plan, drafted by Britain's Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who had never stepped foot in the region.[1] In five weeks, the Radcliffe Line, or the border formally recognized by England and Indian nationalists, divided millions of Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. When they withdrew, the British royals transferred the power of all its 584 princely states to the newly created countries of India and Pakistan, except Kashmir. Some historians suspect the British didn't know what to

do with Kashmir so they left it alone. Fast-forward to the present and Kashmir is a complex crisis. *A place without a post office*.[2]

Pakistan's famed literary genius, Bapsi Sidwa in *Cracking India,* and India's celebrated writer, Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*, set their novels in the time of the mass migration and wrote in English. In her book, Sidwa compared the work of the Radcliffe Commission, which set in motion the Partition Plan, to a "careless card game." Suddenly, millions of people in South Asia were given new identities, including Sidwa who wrote: "Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Panthankot to India. I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that."[3] (The author now lives in Houston, Texas.)

Described as one aspect of history's "original trauma,"[4] over fourteen million people crossed newly drawn borders in search of a new home—the British failed to anticipate that people in fear of their lives would feel compelled to move.[5] In history's largest mass migration, Hindis and Sikhs fled to India and Muslims to Pakistan, traveling along the Grand Trunk Road and the railway built by the British. Millions died because they were murdered by angry mobs or fell sick along the way. Most people traveled by foot for dozens of miles and days to reach the other side of the border. In her book *The Other Side of Silence*, Indian scholar Urvashi Butalia describes Partition in heart-wrenching detail: Women were victims of "widespread sexual savagery; about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different than their own.

Thousands of families were divided, homes destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned."[6] Many more were unaccounted for. A Harvard University study claims that at least 3.4 million people were "missing" during Partition.[7]

Other questions about the mass migration remain a mystery. *How many people moved? Where did they settle down?* As researchers at Harvard University confirm, "involuntary movements are harder to study because they are almost invariably driven...by extraordinary events such as wars, partition, and ethnic/religious strife."[8]

Luckily, Nano's family survived. Her parents left Indian-held Kashmir and crossed the Himalayan Mountains to migrate to the Punjab Province, in what was then called West Pakistan. The majority of Muslims already lived in East Pakistan, which later became modern-day Bangladesh. Partition disrupted families and lives. The word 'partition' is, as Indian scholar Ritu Menon notes, a *metaphor for irreparable loss.* The largest migration in history still brings tears to my father's eyes.

As a child, I heard all their stories. Mama told me about her great aunt, who disguised herself as a man, sporting a Western-style business suit and a fake beard. "She boarded the train [from India] to Pakistan. Because women were killed, she had to hide herself. That was a horrible time," Mama said. Indian writer Butalia, also from Lahore, recalls her mother's own story of leaving the city, returning twice to bring her younger brothers and sister to India: "My father remembers fleeing Lahore to the sound of guns and crackling fire."[9]

Most of the recorded violence occurred between castes and faith—Hindu against Muslim, for example. But instances of Muslims betraying other Muslims also defined the myth of nation building. My father recounted a story of his paternal grandfather, who worked in the city of Calcutta under British rule. When Pakistan was born, my great-great-grandfather returned to his ancestral home in the northern slopes of Pakistan, to reclaim a house he had spent a life-

time building. He soon discovered another Muslim family, who migrated from India, had claimed his property.

"They didn't give him his furniture. The new residents threw out his old clothes and dishes. In those days, there was nothing he could do," my father lamented. The leaders of the two countries, Muhammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan and Jawaharlal Nehru of India, recognized the devastating impact of Partition as millions fled for safety. They called for peace, but there was little they could do to control the messy migration.

When I was nine, my father and I quietly watched the Hollywood movie called "Gandhi," starring Ben Kingsley. He intended for me to look at history behind the crevices of recorded events. To see the struggle and sacrifices of millions as single events and to appreciate one man's humanity. He read me poems by Muhammad Iqbal, Pakistan's philosopher-poet, and had a special way of teaching me to look beyond images and words. "The Taj Mahal was built at the cost of hundreds of laborers," he said. Now when I look at pictures of the famous relic, I only see men dying.

Nano's house generated many stories. The story of

moving into a space previously owned by Hindus, before India or Pakistan declared their independence. The story of everyone living together, even after marriage, as one big joint family. And the story of grandchildren playing on the flat rooftop of the house while Nano, their caretaker, watched with joy. For decades, the house was the center of Nano's life, complete with history and family fables. As her family structure changed, caused by children and grandchildren living separately, the house she once cherished for its infectious love of people rearranged itself into empty spaces.

On occasion, rooms filled with guests. Every few years, Mama visited Nano from Texas and relatives gathered to hear my mother's laughter and joyful stories of life in America. Like Nano, I preferred the warm seclusion of her bedroom, where a wooden armoire stored her clothes and a few items from a distant past. She has an assemblage of beautiful, useful, and livable things to be worn at any time. She held onto her woolen shawls, pieces of gold jewelry, and a large colored picture of her eldest son, Qaisar, who died of a stroke in his mid-fifties in Houston, Texas.

In the midst of her things, a vague memory came back to me: from my early childhood, riding on my uncle Qaisar's back as he pretended to be a horse, my favorite animal. In those early years, he came to live with my family in a small town outside of Nashville, Tennessee. The only other family member to migrate to America from Pakistan, uncle Qaisar was more like a friend, always singing and saying silly things to make my sister and I laugh hysterically. He died too young.

Nano's youngest son, Talat, left Pakistan for Texas, sponsored by a university in Arkansas to pursue post-doctoral research in botany. Settled with his wife and two children, both of whom are studying medicine, my uncle never

looked back. Nano's two daughters lived close by and visited often, although it wasn't enough to comfort Nano. She wanted her sons and maybe Mama, who had no reason to return. "My life is here in Texas with your father," she told me. I knew Mama could never leave a garden blooming with jasmine and pink roses.

Nano clung onto her deceased son's pictures, afraid to lose them. When I asked to see a family album, she said she had no photographs of herself or her husband. No pictures of their wedding day or the birth of her five children. So many events in Nano's life were undocumented because photographs were not taken of her. "We didn't have a camera," she said. "What difference would it have made? Everything exists here," she said, touching her forehead. If photography is empathy—a last testament to the identity of a person, place, or a moment in time—then Nano needed images to capture her life's story. She framed her deceased son on the wall across her bed.

"A mother should never outlive her children," she'd say with immense distress. As she continued to age, she began to outlive her friends, siblings, neighbors and other relatives. Given Nano's growing pains, it was a miracle she was still alive.

When Nano was ninety, she was skin and bones. She had few teeth, her spine curved like a yoga ball, and she covered her feet in cotton. In winter, she sported a sweater vest and a simple shawl in summer.

The maid entered the room with a bowl of porridge with rice-grain-shaped kernels. She learned to cook dishes that would be easy for Nano to chew and swallow. Nano perched over the food with disgust. "This is what happens when you can't eat what you want," she whined. She wanted more sugar, a pinch more salt, and perhaps caffeine.

"Go away!" Nano yelled at the servant girl. "You are useless!"

Nano smiled at me. "Tell your uncle in America to stop sending me a maid. I'm capable. Tell him. I know how to cook rice and soup for myself. I can walk, too. Everyone thinks I'm too weak to do anything!"

Nano forgot the time she fell and nearly broke her hip. Or when she had a high fever and whooping cough. When she couldn't move, one of her two daughters came to look after her.

"Women don't usually live alone in Pakistan," I chimed. *Please come back to America*, I thought.

"I hate it when people try to control me. Eat this. Don't eat that. Take this medicine. Go to bed. Stay in bed. This servant girl will make me crazy!"

"Remember, independence is God's greatest gift to a woman," Nano said, proudly.

*Yes, Nano. No one can tell you what to do in your own home. No man or child can control the way you feel, think or act. You are free and alone.* If only Nano had wanted to come to Texas. She visited when I was sixteen, but a month later, she returned to Pakistan. "Everyone's busy in America. People work or go to school. There is no family time," she complained. "This is not freedom to me." It was clear to me that Nano belonged in Pakistan or a distant Kashmir, her childhood home. She had no interest in living with us in Texas, a place without her stories or people.

After breakfast, Nano moved to an airy, light-filled room painted a pale, yellow color with upholstered cushions on wooden furniture, so she could listen to the world's news on an old television screen. She sat next to the side of the screen, paying close attention to the English news station.

Surprisingly, even at her age, she could still speak and understand English.

"It's because I knew English that I was made principal of the school," Nano declared. "That's a rare position for a woman." After school, Nano tutored children in the evenings to supplement her income. "She was never home," Mama said. In their home, Mama lived with her siblings, her mother, Nano's parents, and a great grandfather.

As she listened to the daily news, Nano's fingers circled the prayer beads. I called them her worry beads. In many cultures, people fiddled obsessively with prayer beads or polished stones for spiritual comfort. This simple act of remembering God by invoking his name or repeating the same prayer with the touch of cold marble stones or round wooden beads can have a physiological advantage. In her book, *A Natural History of the Senses,* Author Diane Ackerman wrote of these worry beads: "...the brain-wave patterns this produces are those of a mind made calm by repeated touch stimulation."[10] In a large, empty house, there was no one there for Nano to hold, except the soothing touch of beads, which reassured her she wasn't alone.

I stayed a few days at a time with Nano. I spent most of my time traveling through Pakistan to interview and research victims of violence, study terrorism trends and examine security challenges until I discovered Kashmir.

With Nano's blessing, I would travel to *Wonderland*. Alone. There, I would witness the desire for freedom. I would meet people generous with their time even when worn down by conflict. I would meet women tortured, traumatized, and trapped by 70-plus years of conflict. Nano's childhood stories inspired me enough to step into a troubled land.

1. According to British author and historian, Victoria Schofield, "what Radcliffe did was conform to the suggested boundaries [that had] already been worked out in February 1964 before the [British] Cabinet Mission arrived in India." Email correspondence in February 2015.
2. Borrowed from Kashmiri-America poet, Shahid Ali, who wrote a verse of poetry titled *The Country Without a Post Office.*
3. From *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidwa
4. Feng, Pin-chia, "Birth of Nations: Representing the Partition of India in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*," in Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 4:2 (October 2011), 225-240
5. Email correspondence in February 2015 with Victoria Schofield, who is an author of several books on India and Pakistan.
6. Butalia, Urvashi, *The Other Side of Silence,* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press), 2000
7. Bharadwaj, Prashant; Asim Khwaja and Atif Mian, "The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Harvard University, August 30, 2008, p. 40.
8. Ibid., p. 39
9. Butalia, excerpt from her book
10. *A Natural History of the Senses* by Diane Ackerman, p. 117

3

# MILITARIZATION

**"Kashmir is the unfinished business of Indian independence."**
--ARUNDHATI ROY, INDIAN AUTHOR & ACTIVIST

**"The history of India in Kashmir has been a story of false promises, manipulated elections…terror, more lies and so on."**
--ARIF AYAZ PARREY, KASHMIRI WRITER

The city of Srinagar lay under siege by rebels, resistance fighters, and revolutionaries. A mighty military used tear gas, gunfire, tanks, and beatings to disperse a crowd of protestors. The Indian military's ubiquitous presence in Kashmir was illegitimate and unjust. The Army's occupancy and heavy-handed tactics against unarmed civilians enraged the Kashmiri youth. Participation in the freedom movement was their only option to chal-

lenge the Indian armed forces and protect the city they cherished.

When the city was calm, Srinagar became a tourist's haven. Visitors marveled at the deep blue-waters of Dal Lake, the *sazaposh* or hollyhocks and sunflowers inside ancient mosques, houseboats made of wood, and the moisture of the morning as spring swelled into summer. The sun in Kashmir altered everything. Even to this day, the beauty of Kashmir can be seen in its yellows—tulips and peonies outline majestic gardens; a cold sun beaming shades of gold on ever-deepening snow; and a tapestry of leaves from the chinar tree changing colors in autumn. *Kashmir is heaven enough*.

One of my first guides, Irfan Hasan (who everyone called Sunny), reminded me that Srinagar is like small-town America. "Srinagar is a familiar city. Everyone knows one another. For an occupied city, it is a source of comfort," he said. Sunny had shiny black hair, big luminous eyes, and a welcoming smile. His chiseled good looks and runner's physique concealed his true age. He looked to be a man in his fifties and lived with his sister and her children. Sunny never married. Over time, he became a loyal friend and excellent guide, sharing stories from a not-so-distant past and a promising future, or at least that's how Sunny viewed the world. He ran a business to make a living and often traveled to New Delhi, a city he liked for its manic energy and intellectual freedom. Sunny also adored Arundhati Roy, an award-winning novelist of *The God of Small Things* and a human rights activist opposed to her country's policies in Kashmir.

In India, few nationals highlighted Kashmir in the way that Roy expressed her disgust for the Indian State. She angered Indian nationalist parties and politician, who

supported the valley's occupation. Roy criticized the Indian leadership for its oppressive policies and practices against the people of Kashmir. In Delhi, I found her books and began to appreciate her political activism. In one interview, she boldly stated what most Kashmiris expressed silently, "Kashmir is the unfinished business of Indian independence."[1]

I wondered, *is Kashmir India's worst nightmare*? A valley rich with resources might also have been a curse to the Indian State as it struggled to siege control of the valley—the long-term psychological damage of New Delhi's policy of control would be felt for generations to come. The Indian story—a biased historical narrative—is that Kashmir belonged *only* to India. No Kashmiri could ever accept this cruel claim. Some Indians agreed that Indian leadership acted with impunity; India's license to kill is unacceptable to Roy and others who understand that Kashmiris are unprotected and undefended against the authorities, including the Army, the police, and the paramilitary forces sent by a government backed by Hindu extremism.

On Kashmir, Roy challenged the Indian State, unafraid of losing citizenship or constrained by threats. Her position has always been that the valley belongs to its people.

> "For all those years, the Indian state had done everything it could to subvert, suppress, represent, misrepresent, discredit, interpret, intimidate, purchase and simply snuff out the voice of the Kashmiri people. It had used money (lots of it), violence (lots of it)...and rigged elections to subdue what democrats would call the will of the people... the well-endowed peace industry informed us the 'Kashmiris are tired of violence and want peace.' What

> kind of peace they [India] were willing to settle for was never clarified."[2]

To the Indian elite, Roy is stubbornly self-serving. Her once long black wavy hair had been cut short and heavy curls rested on her shoulders. Her slender face, thin lips, and deep-set eyes radiated when she smiled. She teemed with tremendous skill and loving-kindness for the Kashmiri people trapped by the spoils of war. "To the governments of India and Pakistan, Kashmir is not a *problem*," Roy wrote in *War Talk*. "It's their perennial and spectacularly successful solution."

The leading spokeswoman for freedom read like a great book. She walked with grace. At public forums, she spoke with tenacity and used powerful words like weapons. Her words were electrifying and comforting like a tapestry of Mughal art. And she always had a call to action. Armed with language, Roy focused on the rebels, resistance movements, and reform. She blamed imposing governments for crushing sentiments of self-determination, including India's policy in Kashmir. But that was only the beginning.

An activist, Roy challenged conflicts everywhere, including America's war in Iraq and India's economic battle with Naxalites, a tribal people in Central India. She beautifully outlined the Naxalites struggle to hold onto their land in *Walking With Courage*, written as if Roy were emerged in a deeply religious ritual.

Whenever I listened to Roy or read her writing, I expected something to happen. In a March 2013 interview for an independent news program called *Democracy Now*, Roy simplified the Kashmir conflict:

> "Today, Kashmir is the most densely militarized zone in the world. India has some 700,000 security forces there. In the early 1990s the fight turned intoan armed struggle. Since then, around 68,000 people have died and maybe 100,000 tortured...This is the crude end of it. Can you imagine living in a place where there are so many soldiers? It's become a very ugly stain on people who would like to have self-respect."

In a mimosa-colored shirt, Roy sat with her eyes averted beside Indian filmmaker Sanjay Kak, who shared his friend's revolutionary zeal. In his tenth film, *Jashn-e-Azadi: How We Celebrate Freedom,* Kak featured images not seen in mainstream news and presented facts easily forgotten. In Kashmir, there is an armed soldier for every eight civilians. His film followed the lives of ordinary Kashmiris as they struggled to survive in a place haunted by sorrow and secrecy.

Sitting next to Roy, Kak was equally impressive. A tall man with a charcoal beard and glasses, Kak was committed to revealing a misunderstood truth—Kashmir is far from free. He highlighted atrocities and abuses in the film and examined the changing nature of the conflict in his book, *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir*.

"The stone throwing was accompanied by the intifada of the mind," Kak explained. "For so long, Kashmir was characterized by armed conflict, but in 2008, the paradigm shifted. After decades, hundreds of people came onto the streets. The same happened in 2010."

The year 2010 was characterized as "the year of killing [Kashmiri] youth," as Indian state armed forces killed over 120 unarmed civilians. The death of Kashmiris sparked a new wave of protests by the youth—including young

women—who took to the streets to resist the violent repression of Kashmir by Indian armed forces. The new freedom movement is one of Kashmir's untold truths—the long-standing struggle for freedom sparked a new cultural revolution that combined literature, films, poetry, art, and rap music to express the right to self-determination.

One artist known as MC Kash became popular for his songs, including "I Protest" and "Why We Rebels." In an open forum, Kash sang: *I'm the rebel of the streets that been eulogized in blood...Demonized in the news with their fabricated tales / While sodomized young kids are still screaming in their jails...They gave us blood and hate then wondered why we all rebels.* Artists like Kash formed what became the 'new intifada'—a reference to street uprising—to defy India's brutal military occupation. While the youth led the protest movement, women and men of all ages joined.

For decades, Kashmiris used street protests and other forms of rebellion, such as developing political consciousness through local organizations, to denounce Indian militarization. Together, Kashmiris were recreating their own multiple *histories* that emerged from conflict, rather than conforming to the Indian government's singular *History*. This is a concept I teach to university students, reinforcing the idea that war stories—the memories of oppression, sagas of occupation and struggle—originate from a people's lived experiences, rather than the perpetrator's manipulation of the truth. The occupier's story often presents the rebels as hardened terrorists, a convenient term used by the Indian State.

"Something significant is happening in Kashmir," Kak said.

Café revolutionaries I met in New Delhi and Srinagar confirmed the bitter truth; Kashmiris are locked with India

and Pakistan's political and national self-identity. "Kashmir is the triumph of Indian secularism. The same act is a failure in Pakistan...it's the end of democracy in Kashmir," Kak said.

While Kak's films are like untouched art, Bollywood movies on Kashmir have reached millions. Indian superstars and self-serving directors have made films in the valley's foothills and along its lakes with dancing girls and hearty heroes. Most of these movies were sensationalist and stereotypical action thrillers. They were misleading and misconstrued.

In February 2020, Indian director Vinod Chopra released *Shikara* (boat) to highlight the exodus and murders of Kashmiri *pandits* (a reference to Hindu priests) during the 1990s separatist uprising. While there is truth to this story, there are gaps in the narrative. The film does not question the *why* of conflict: why young men turn to violence; why Kashmiris (men, women and children) took to the streets to protest a fabricated election; and why the Indian Army chose to infiltrate, rather than use dialogue and peace, to brutally silence unarmed civilians.

In Chopra's 2000 film, *Mission Kashmir*, the opening scene shows a *shikara* torn into pieces by an improvised explosive device. The head of security, played by my once favorite Sanjay Dutt, stars as a Muslim man whose wife and son tragically died. While the son's death was an important detail, the scene that repeated itself was an Army-led operation against militants hiding inside a houseboat on Dal Lake. The operation killed a few militants and the family of a Kashmiri boy, played by riveting Hrithrik Roshan, who fought against the Army chief in an act of revenge. As the story unfolded, the movie exaggerated militancy in Kashmir with most of the plot outlandishly inaccurate. I could not

imagine militant men targeting the holy mosque of Hazratbul, or a sacred temple to reignite Hindu-Muslim animosity, as the film suggested.

In another film, director Yash Chopra's 2012 award-winning and eye-catching *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (As Long As I Live) begins and ends in Kashmir. True to Indian movies, the story was predictable and punctuated with romantic drama. The hero, played by Bollywood darling Shah Rukh Khan, defused bombs for a living as an Indian Army Major. One day, when Khan dived into a river in Ladakh—a region of Jammu and Kashmir that borders Tibet—to save a young woman, a sub-plot emerged. Though set mostly in London, the hero returned to Kashmir where he reunites with his first love. Of course, Bollywood stars didn't need a movie screening to visit Kashmir. To the charismatic Khan, Kashmir held familial ties. "I have fulfilled my father's dream by visiting Kashmir."

Most musical-like movies set in Kashmir revolved around romance. As a teenager, I remember being mesmerized by *Love Story,* a tale of stargazed lovers who desperately tried to overcome the border in Kashmir that divided their two national identities. Before any of these films, it was *Kashmir ki Kali*, an iconic movie from 1964 that set the standard when the legendary Shammi Kapoor sang to his lover in a houseboat on Dal Lake. Over fifty years later, in 2016, cartoonist Mir Suhail recreated the classic poster of Kapoor and the actress, Sharmila Tagore, by adding an eye-patch and pellet injuries to her face. In an interview, the artist said he wanted to "highlight the pain inflicted on this *kali* (girl) [because] there is no romance about the place or the people."[3]

At best, Indian films on Kashmir revealed its pristine, often untouched, beauty that drew visitors to the valley. At

its worst, these films manipulated the truth of what actually happens to a people living in an imaginary homeland—a place in which their collective Kashmiri identity is challenged, crushed, and conquered by the Indian 'other.' Bollywood films distort the realities of conflict, focusing instead on family dramas, romance sagas, and action thrillers. While these films offer an insight into culture, they dismiss context altogether. And without context of the ongoing conflict, the viewer forgets that India infiltrated the valley.

Before the 1990s popular uprising, the cinema halls in Kashmir were popular. Kashmiri filmmaker, Hussain Khan, remembers when he used to skip classes "to watch the movies in the cinema halls."[4] During the 1980s, there were 15 cinema halls in Kashmir; nine were located in Srinagar city, including the historic Palladium cinema, once a famous spot. But after the summer of 1989, cinemas closed down "under the threat of armed insurgency after a militant outfit, who called themselves the Allah Tigers, appeared."[5] The militant group banned cinemas and bars in the valley and said it was against Islam. By December 31, 1989, all the cinema halls in Kashmir were closed.

A great fire devastated the Palladium cinema. For two

decades, original owners tried to reclaim the cinema built on their property, but that case has been unresolved by development authorities in Srinagar. Situated in the heart of the city, the Indian Army transformed the Palladium into a bunker.

In May 2011, blogger Farooq Shah posted this:

> "Beyond coils of shiny razor-wire and an eight-foot high fence of tin sheeting along Neelam Chowk, two policeman peer over rotting nose-high sandbags and into the street from inside chicken wire-wrapped towers. Some twenty yards behind them an aging, windowless stone building appears empty and derelict, its curvilinear chlorine blue façade faded by sunlight."

With the ancient cinema closed, the Army rented it for 700 hundred rupees ($11 dollars) a month. And the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) besieged other well-known theaters, the Firdaus, Shiraz and Naaz.

One morning, when the light was dreamlike and clear, Sunny drove me by the Palladium. "It was a favorite past time," he said, with an expression profoundly sad. Perhaps, someday, the cinema halls will be restored and reopened. As of June 21, 2020, Vijar Dhar, a prominent Indian businessman, is making plans to build a multiplex cinema theater at the site of the old Broadway theater, which was once shut down in the 1990s.[6]

Sunny was more than a guide to me. He became my teacher. I had so much to gain from a man with encyclopedic knowledge. He showed me relics of Mughal history in Kashmir, which included a drive to *Pari Mahal* (Castle of Fairies). He pointed at bullets in vacant brick houses in the old quarter of Srinagar. He took me to lunch at Kashmir's

oldest restaurant located in the heart of Srinagar city inside Ahdoos Hotel, which first opened in 1918 as a bakery shop. Aside from the delicious local cuisine, Sunny said Ahdoos had historical significance to militants. "This was their focal meeting place. Some of them even stayed in this hotel," he said.

An intellectual with a love for literature, Sunny encouraged me to read the novel *Shalimar The Clown* by Salman Rushdie. "You will find references to Kashmir," he said. (In the book, one of the main characters' "mother had been Kashmiri, and was lost to her, like paradise, like Kashmir in a time before memory.")[7] Sunny introduced me to the work of Kashmiri-American poet and his only friend, Agha Shahid Ali, who earned his doctorate at Pennsylvania State University and taught at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Ali was a celebrated poet. He won the National Book Award in 2001 for *Rooms Are Never Finished*. Of his friend's verses, Sunny admired what he termed the poet's 'immortal lines':

*I am being rowed through Paradise on a*
*river of Hell*
*Exquisite ghost, it is night*
*The paddle is a heart.*
*It breaks the porcelain waves.*

Ali died of brain cancer before Sunny could visit him in the United States. "It's the hardest thing for a Kashmiri to get a visa to travel to the West," he said. I wondered how many Kashmiris would leave India if they had the choice to travel anywhere in the world. I had learned that denying Kashmiris a passport to travel was another form of control by the Indian State. Those with a 'clean' record—individuals

who had never been arrested or were seen protesting—were permitted a passport to travel to the holy Muslim sites in Saudi Arabia, for example, or study in other Indian cities. Few were able to come to America to visit. The passport was a luxury afforded to the few, including some separatist leaders who shuttled back and forth to Pakistan.

The more I learned about Kashmir, the less I realized I knew. "Here, everyone has a tragedy in their family," Sunny said. "You will find sadness everywhere." As an outsider looking in, I tried to feel his pain: the exposure to and experience of unmarked graves, enforced disappearances, torture, death, and detention were enough to cause a lifetime of grief. I wondered how Sunny was able to survive with no visible scars of trauma. He exhibited no signs of stress and instead, remained well-balanced.

*You are wise,* I thought. *You have a strong will and a business that keeps you* out *of the conflict. You have more resources, wealth, and education than others I have met. This might be the reason you are able to cope with conflict.* I was beginning to see that survival depended on opportunities *outside* of the conflict, as well as strong familial ties and a community support system.

Despite Kashmir's terrible events, Sunny and I smiled more than we cried. The more time we spent together, the more I began to question his decision not to join the militant movement. *Why do some men become militants and others like Sunny do not? Are certain people predisposed to violence?* I've had to answer these questions numerous times as a public speaker at conferences and other events. While there were no simple answers, I had come to believe that the reason a man (or woman) chooses the violent path is deeply personal. For Sunny, his father's influence and short-lived career as a police officer steered him away from militants.

"I believed a job in the police was the only way to escape brutality. I thought being an officer would help me do something greater, but in time, I saw that there isn't a person here who hasn't been beaten by the police or the Indian Army. My father told me I can contribute more to Kashmir when I use my mind. This is more powerful than any weapon. You need brains to outsmart your enemy," he said, pointing his finger to the side of his temple.

A café revolutionary, Sunny was charmed by Che Guevara, the guerrilla fighter, who forced the French out of Algeria after 132 years of colonial rule, and Russia's nationalist leaders. Above all, Sunny believed violence begets violence, a key concept in counterterrorism studies.

"Education matters...[and] we need courage to gain our freedom," he continued. Sunny painted a picture of Yasin Malik, the head of the original Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) before it splintered. Malik was poor but a capable and courageous rebel leader. Sunny explained that Malik's decision to "give up the gun" came from Gandhi's stance on non-violence. Malik's transformation reminded me of Sinn Fein (also known as Gerry Adams), the leader of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), who embraced a peace strategy with London in the 1990s after a long bombing campaign against England.[8]

In Kashmir, Malik was willing to talk to India and Pakistan to find a political solution to end the conflict. Other revolutionaries with political agendas were unsuitable partners in peace. "The clash between Geelani and Mirwais in 1993 created a clash of interests and a divide and conquer policy. We don't need to fight against each other or India," Sunny said.

A friend to Malik, Sunny believed he made the right decision to work with India and followed his example.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, Sunny accepted India's invitation to tea. "India is making in-roads. I said to myself, if I don't go, it will annoy them [India]. I admit I would've been afraid to go earlier. My own people might think I am an Indian informant. But that day, when I broke my fast, I met an Indian commander who said I could go to him for anything. In that moment, I believed India changed. Look what time does," Sunny said.

One late afternoon, Sunny and I ran into each other at one of Kashmir's contemporary cafes off the main road in central Srinagar called Café Arabica. We sat together in our warm coats, next to a woman at an adjacent table with pale-green eyes and flaxen hair, writing in her notebook. Here, no one would interrogate her.

We listened silently to a mélange of music, Frank Sinatra, Amr Diab, and American hip-hop. Owned by a Hindu, Café Arabica became the go-to-place for activists, journalists and students. It was one of the city's few places where people intermingled openly—women could sit alongside men, with or without their headscarves. Or women could come alone, without being harassed by men. Like everyone else, Sunny and I ordered hot drinks and indulged in small talk.

"It's getting colder."

"I should be home before the blizzard," I said, half-heartedly. A part of me wanted to stay in the world's most beautiful conflict.

"I want to show you much more. There is so much to see."

"I hope to return."

"You must come back! Before you leave, you must have your last meal with my family in my home," he said, excit-

edly. Sunny lived with his sister, her husband and their daughters.

The next morning, I gathered my luggage and had the driver take me to Sunny's house in Rajbagh, an upscale neighborhood in Srinagar. His sister served me *noon chai,* also called Kashmiri tea or pink tea, a traditional salty rose-colored milky drink served with nuts, dried fruit and baked bread.

Back in Pakistan, I remembered an afternoon when Nano's sister, also a Kashmiri by birth, showed me how to change the color of white milk to a pastel pink. Sunny also introduced me to his octogenarian mother named Sarah, who had been a schoolteacher at a missionary school in Kashmir run by Miss Mallinson.

"She was a great lady who did good work to spread women's education," Sunny said, describing the English woman. "The school was eventually renamed after her." When Sunny's mother married, she stopped teaching there.

Kashmir cast a spell on me. When I returned home, I followed Sunny's advice and read Shahid Ali's poetry. I also read *Che Guevara* by Jon Lee Anderson, a monstrous study of the rebel's life. It helped me understand why many Kashmiri political activists plastered images of Che on their office walls —Che represented resistance against an oppressive ruler.

Finally, I browsed the autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Marshall Frady, which brought back memories of workshops I attended led by local journalists. America's prominent civil rights leader inspired Kashmiri youth: *So let freedom ring! Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.*[9] One Kashmiri journalist later added: "Let freedom ring from the Himalayan mountains!"

Since Sunny admired Arundhuti Roy's political activism, I picked up a copy of *Walking with the Comrades*, a story of India's "war with its own citizens...desperately poor tribal people living" in the state of Orissa, before they became forest guerrillas.[10] (In her book, Roy made several references to Kashmir: "Almost from the moment India became a sovereign nation it turned into a colonial power, annexing territory, waging war. It never hesitated to use military interventions to address political problems [to include] Kashmir.")[11] Roy consistently asked her readers to consider why India had "tens of thousands...killed with impunity, hundreds of thousands tortured. All of this behind the benign mask of democracy."[12]

I did what Sunny had wanted me to do. To keep learning, reading, and asking questions, no matter how uncomfortable they might make me feel. He encouraged me to engage both Indians and Pakistanis to understand their mindset. Even in America, the close ties I had developed with Indian Americans was just as important to me as my allies with Pakistani Americans—they helped me appreciate the diverse views that exist on Kashmir. Their lived experiences and personal narratives were just as important to the overall story of Kashmir.

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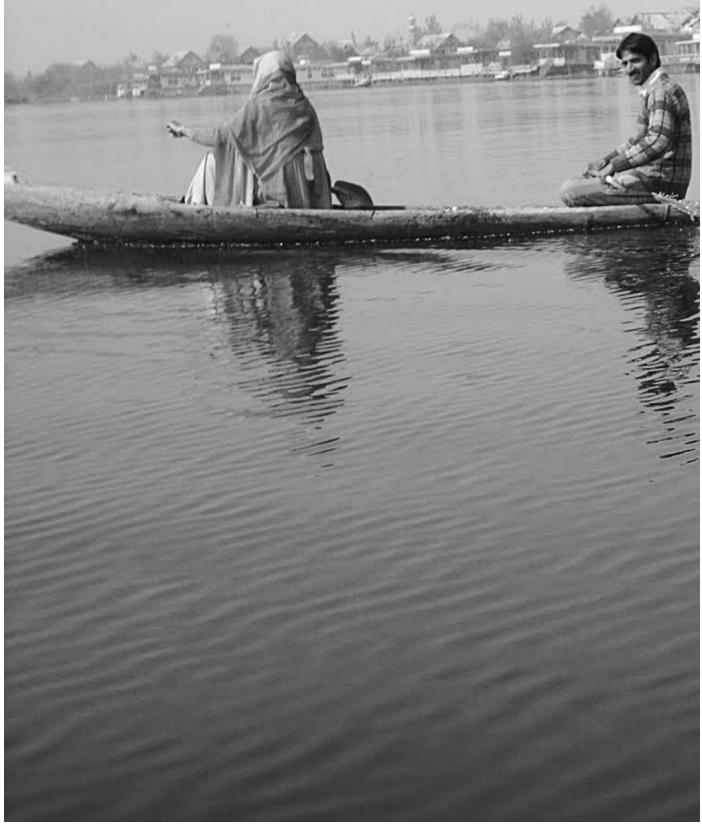
# Part Two

## Visible Women



4

# BOMB GIRL

**"If I cannot live, then I want to die."**
--SADIA, AN ACTIVIST

**"Personal grievances give rise to holy war."**
--DR. JESSICA STERN, AMERICAN SCHOLAR

She had the most beautiful eyes. They matched her headscarf and *abaya*, an ankle-length Islamic dress, the color of pearl gray. A young woman I will call Sadia wore no make-up, though I imagined her eyelids painted a sublime blue and her hair falling over her shoulders. In a Valentino dress, she could have seduced men. She had a charming smile and a sweet voice. Beside her, I chose to loosely cover my hair in a blue teal pashmina shawl and sported a knee-length silk shirt and loose pants. I should

have worn white cotton. Sadia reached for my hand. We walked together under the chalky sunlight.

In July, Srinagar is mildly tropical by day and cool by night. Flies buzzed haphazardly. The atmosphere was arid. Only a few damp clouds billowed. I prayed for rain. Sadia led the way on the wide road. Shopkeepers lazily turned their heads. The Indian Army on patrol gawked as we silently turned into a corner street.

"I volunteered for a suicide operation," Sadia said, her head lowered.

"The men turned me away. They said they didn't need women. But they are wrong."

*Wait! Aren't you a Muslim? Doesn't Islam forbid this?* I wanted to scream at her. I knew Islam better than this young woman raised in a Muslim conservative culture.

I tried to understand what causes an attractive, intelligent young woman to choose death over life. Sadia didn't look like a hardened criminal or terrorist. At first glance, she didn't appear emotionally unstable or mentally insane. But I knew violent women didn't fit any profile. A female bomber could be young or old, single or married, widowed, and have children. With more than a decade of research, the academic and intelligence communities have yet to agree on whether psychological profiles of militant women are a useful way to understand their drive to commit violent acts. What we do know is that common themes exist, largely reflected by personal grievances, which includes perceived injustice and the indiscriminate use of violence by authorities on distressed Muslim communities and individuals.

What all these women had in common is their commitment to a cause. For Sadia, the freedom of Kashmir was reason enough to strap on the bomb—a goal that suits her male handlers. Because of their gender, violent men view

women as attractive and agile. The perception that women can mask her activities and disguise her intentions to be violent compels men to reconsider "hiring" women, even when conservative groups argue against it. Luckily, for Sadia, the *Lashkar-e-Tayba* wanted nothing to do with her—at least not now.

Still, I wondered. *Did I overlook something? What explains Sadia's motives? Was she abused as a child? Did someone hurt her? Did she lose someone in her family? Did she witness unthinkable acts of aggression? Did she volunteer for a suicide operation for herself or to prove to men she is capable? What does her family say about all this? Do they know?* There were too many questions unanswered. It would have been impossible to learn more about Sadia's childhood and family background in one afternoon. All I could see was her veil, a perfect cover for any anxiety, depression, fear, or bomb she might have been carrying.

As a result of an ongoing conflict, countless women I have interviewed in the valley exhibited signs of anxiety, depression, and trauma. They don't sleep. Some have nightmares. They can't eat. One woman lost her voice when she learned her youngest son was thrown in jail for a crime she says he didn't commit. Many women take common antidepressants to cope with conflict. Others like Sadia seek comfort and strength in a movement. They are a part of something larger than themselves and wish to forget their individual grievances. Being part of a movement creates a sense of belonging and offers women a wider community, other than her immediate family members.

As noon approached, the breeze stopped. I followed Sadia to a shady spot. We stood across each other, leaning against a brick wall.

"The men didn't have to refuse me."

*You have so much to live for. You can continue studying. Stay single or get married. Have children if you wish. You do not know what you are saying.*

"I quit the organization."

Sadia referred to the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* or LeT, an extremist group based in Pakistan. In November 2008, the LeT perpetrated one of the deadliest terror attacks across India's financial hub, Mumbai. The reign of terror killed more than 150 Indians. Founded by Hafiz Saeed, who has a $10 million reward for his capture from America, the LeT is arguably Pakistan's prized weapon against a mighty Indian Army. Pakistan continues to publicly deny ideological, logistical, and financial support for LeT, a point that is still debated. Thankfully, India restrained and did not go to war with Pakistan, but agreed to a joint investigation. The Kashmir peace process perished and was then put on hold. In 2013, clashes along the guarded border further disrupted any effort to press for a political solution in Kashmir.

"I had no choice," Sadia said, her eyes to the black gate ahead. "I joined a women's organization. Women do two things: They stay at home or protest. But we need something more." She leaned towards me.

"I have to find a way to convince other girls like me that jihad is the only way," she whispered. Suddenly, I witnessed an innocent-looking girl turn to violence for a false sense of security.

By now, I had grown tired of Kashmir's secrets. In a conflict, almost everyone sheltered a secret from the authorities. A mother would protect her son from an arrest and lie about where he is hiding. A wife can pretend she doesn't know her husband is a militant. A daughter can forgive her mother's decision to lead a movement, making less time for her, and yet never fully understand it.

On the dusty road, it was impossible to know if Sadia could be callous, careless, or crazy. She had known me for a few hours and somehow believed she could trust me. I suspect she needed someone from the outside to listen and understand her. Sometimes, all a person needs is a stranger to show sympathy; someone to believe in and listen to, even if their secrets burdened us.

I watched Indian guards pace up and down the street, twirling thick wooden sticks, their primary weapon.

Sadia stopped and raised her head to the sky. A flock of birds circled above the roof of black-green trees. In the distance, they were like paper butterflies. We heard their cries. A natural light reflected off the girl's eyes, her beauty "an exception, always *in despite of*, [which] is why it moves us," wrote American environmentalist John Berger in *The Sense of Sight*.

She continued. "When I was 18 years old, I was a member of *Lashkar*. I was convinced I could be successful. We were planning a major attack. But the operation was put on hold. I don't know what happened next. The brothers told me there were enough men. They didn't need a woman to attack India. I did not expect this."

"The men were foolish," she said again, in a passionate display of defiance.

"I have a responsibility to my people. Do you understand?"

I nodded in disbelief. *And who would be responsible for your actions?* Sadia may have sounded determined, but she was confused. Her abstract emotions of a holy war that would alter the political landscape of Kashmir were fantasia. I assumed she had unexpected flashes of glory, a moment when she could imagine herself a martyr or a *mujahida*, the female word for 'mujahid,' the name for a

fighter. The *mujahid* is a reference for hundreds of men armed and trained by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan to push the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan during the Cold War. The early female fighters who defended their Prophet were rightfully called the *mujahidaat*, the plural of female fighters. Until Sadia was ready to let go of the bomb, she had no right to consider herself a martyr.

"The men don't see my power. They don't think I can do it."

*Strap on the bomb?* She made it sound like putting on a lace dress. Her unbridled spirit was enviable and dangerous.

As we kept walking, the sun's warm golden light danced on the rooftops of houses we passed. In a small garden nearby, flowers resembled luxurious wrapping paper.

"The world will know what is going on here if I do this. No one sees Kashmir."

I tried to understand what Sadia really wanted. She needed the world to take action in Kashmir and end the conflict. I sensed that violence was a symbol for honor, dignity, and respect. Terrorism was a timeless and often compelling method to force the international community to ask the pivotal questions: why does it [the conflict] matter and what do they want? My counter-terrorism experience had taught me that contextual pressures helped explain radical, violent behavior. The more I listened to Sadia, the more I accepted that she was a victim of a protracted local conflict and international inaction—these conditions explained, in part, her commitment to change the conflict through whatever means necessary. And by doing *something*, Sadia could believe she was part of something bigger than herself; she belonged to a cause; and her life had purpose.

There was awkwardness and a heavy silence for a

minute as we continued to walk side by side. The air was stiff and a shaft of sun crossed the stone bench. In the summer heat, I could feel our physical breathlessness.

"That's not true," Sadia said, breaking the silence. "It's the only way."

"They do see you. I talk about Kashmir all the time. I teach. I write. Some Americans do care," I protested. I thought of lectures I had given. Or articles I had written on Kashmir, starting in summer 2008 for *Ms.* magazine titled "Kashmiri Women Speak Out" with Sarah Wachter. She didn't read *The New York Times* either, which chronicles the conflict in Kashmir every few weeks. To her credit, however, Kashmir remained the invisible conflict. Both its beauty and tragedy unseen and unknown to much of the Western world.

Those who don't know about Kashmir are not at fault. Many Americans are too busy living to care or understand a conflict they may never see or hear about in the news, in lands they do not recognize. Ignorance or isolation is not uniquely American. Most Kashmiris will also never visit the United States. Most view America through a diluted media lens that includes sensationalized television dramas and Hollywood movies. With limited access to a place and its people, it's no wonder that biases are born, and stereotypes are solidified. If only Sadia knew what I know about America—its culture, principles and values, but how could she? Sadia lived in one of the most remote places on earth.

"I want to be a martyr," Sadia admitted.

*This can't be the way to Paradise. Martyrdom means 'to bear witness' and to sacrifice in God's name. Only self-defense was allowed in Islam. Never violence for the sake of violence.* I remembered an oral tradition by the Prophet of Islam that rejected suicide: "The gates of Heaven will be closed forever

to anyone who takes his/her own life." *Maybe Sadia didn't want to accept the tradition, or she was manipulated by militant men. There was so much about her I didn't know or understand.*

When militant men declare martyrdom, it is expected, even predicted. But women are rarely seen as victimizers. A longtime friend, Dr. Mia Bloom, makes a distinction between the victim and victimizer—women can be both. I had no right to judge Sadia, but it seemed unusual for women of Kashmir to choose death over life. Many women were educated and working professionals. Even Sadia studied at the university. She led women's protests. She had earned the respect of other women. She was already doing something positive. I wanted her to believe that. And yet, Sadia would rather die than live under Kashmir's current conditions.

Luckily, Kashmir did not have a history of female suicide bombers. There was only one report. In October 2005, a twenty-two year old Kashmiri woman detonated minutes before an Indian Army convoy passed along a highway in Avantipora, a town 20 miles south of Srinagar. Her name was Hafsa. There was very little known about the woman. Basharat Peer's investigation claimed she had an affair with a militant and ran home to join him. His study suggested that there were social taboos against girls, who married Pakistani militants, and if they do, they are no longer accepted into conservative, traditional Kashmiri society. The female bomber was a member of the Daughters of Ayesha, a woman's wing of the terrorist group, *Jaish-e-Muhammad* (JeM), another radical group based in Pakistan.

In the early days of Islam, Muslim women helped their men to victory. They tended to wounded soldiers. They carried messages and money. They called on men to fight to protect Muhammad. They were the mothers of the believ-

ers.[1] Women were skilled in warfare. They were given swords to use in fighting by the early Muslim men. One of the most celebrated female fighters is Nusyba bint Ka'ab, also known as Umm Umarah (mother of Umarah). She fought in Islam's second Battle of Uhud in 625 C.E., lost one arm, and suffered eleven wounds as she protected her Prophet.[2] After Muhammad's death, Muslim women continued to fight. A Bedouin woman, Khawlah bint al-Azwar al-Kindiyaah, dressed like a knight and entered the battlefield with other women. She "slashed the head of the Greek," a reference to the Byzantines who retreated after Muslims declared victory.[3]

But what these women did not do was abuse their status as the most noble of women. Only those who sacrificed their lives in defense of their honor, homes or honorary Prophet could be called martyrs. By Islamic law, Sadia could not qualify as a martyr for choosing suicide terrorism.

The jet-black gate is within view. It is the entrance to the women's organization Sadia joined after she left the terror group.

"How far is your office?"

"Not far."

"Follow me. It's a few more kilometers."

The sun bathed our headscarves. The cloudless sky promised more heat. We crossed steppingstones and walked towards the chinar tree. The sun spiraled through the branches like a kaleidoscope. The mountains in the distance curved down like galaxies over green rolling hills. The scenery reminded me of iconic photographs from Tennessee, where I lived as a child. Then, I couldn't speak English. Punjabi is my native tongue. Years later, I taught myself Urdu. I never learned Kashmiri. I was grateful most Kashmiris could speak fluent Urdu or English.

I stole glances at Sadia. There is something troubling about her. I wanted to know why she was different. *No girl or woman I had met earlier in Kashmir aspired to be a suicide bomber, so why now? Did this young woman choose violence, or did violence choose her?* Trying to understand motivations for a would-be suicide bomber is almost impossible. Most terrorism scholars make predictions on too few factors. Most make calculated guesses.

In *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, I tried to offer an explanation: "The reasons why women participate in violence will vary, even where common grievances are present, but what motivates women to engage in suicide terrorism is bound to be different for each *individual* woman."[4] I still believe the study of gender-specific terrorism is limiting and based on too many generalizations to draw conclusions. If I wanted to deter or stop Sadia, I had to get to know her.

At the time, all I could see was a beautiful young woman with a desire to act. She wanted something more out of life than a college education and marriage. She wanted to change the conflict in Kashmir.

"You are doing something meaningful in your life."

"I wish it were enough."

"God helps those in need."

"You can say this from America," she bemoaned.

Sadia was right. I can't promise a peaceful future when the Indian Army patrols the streets and tracks everyone's movements like an intelligence agency. We are never alone.

I imagined Sadia to be the perfect recruit. Cloaked in a heavy Islamic dress, she was unassuming and undetectable. She was less likely to be suspected and searched in a conservative outfit. The same would have been true had she dressed without a headscarf and in colorful clothing. In many Muslim cultures, women were prizes of men.

Untouchables. Bloom argued that women with the will and capability to detonate "are the new stealth bomb."[5] Theirs is an unholy war.

When Sadia mentioned the word jihad, I began to think of what it meant in Islam. In earlier published essays, I described jihad as an act of worship. It is a living, breathing concept.[6] Jihad originated in Arabic from the root words *ja ha da*, meaning to strive, to struggle, to seek goodness over evil. My father instilled in me his liberal, secular values so that jihad was something private, not public and personal, not packaged with emotional responses to death.

Terrorists are clever to manipulate the meaning of jihad and avoid using the word suicide. They believe martyrdom operations to be legitimate, legal, and laudable. They have distorted the meaning of war and opt for suicide, their sacred act. It is the ultimate sacrifice for which they expect a heavenly reward. Perhaps Sadia believed she could gain quick entry into Paradise with an explosives belt. She would not feel the pain of death. Her body would smell of musk. She would dance in the gardens of Paradise, fatten herself with sweet fruit, and enjoy companions of her desire. The only thing she couldn't do is wish for 72 male virgins.

If, for a moment, we believe that male terrorists are rewarded with 72 virgins in Paradise, then what do Muslim women receive for committing suicide attacks? What are they promised? What do women possibly have to gain from strapping on the bomb? Nothing, except a quick death. I'm confident that didn't matter to Sadia. All she needed was to believe that she had the power to change Kashmir. My experience with these women is that some are coerced. Others volunteer. Each woman chooses terrorism for different reasons. No two bomb girls are alike.

*Why is suicide an attractive option to some Muslim women?*

In August 2005, when I left the U.S. government before any major book was published on female terrorism, I gave my first presentation to the U.S. government community on this subject using my experience and insight from being an intelligence officer. Later, I briefed my findings to foreign governments and American officials. I believed a woman's desire for death hinged on multiple motivations.

As a young U.S. Government analyst, before the subject of female terrorism became sensationalized and studied, I briefed the "4 Reasons to Die" to policymakers and senior officials. They are: Respect (to elevate a woman's status in society); Revenge (to avenge the death of loved ones); Reform (to improve the lives of a community); and Recruitment (to call other women to action). Sadia chose terrorism to reform Kashmir, which likely explained why she joined the LeT.

Sadia's drive to kill may have been personal, too. A respected friend, Dr. Jessica Stern of Harvard University, wrote that personal grievances "give rise to holy war." [7] Her list, which includes alienation, humiliation and history, applies to protestors and political activists fighting the armed struggle in Kashmir.

Sadly, Sadia confused fighting for freedom with suicide operations, an illegitimate tactic in Islam. She could learn a lesson from Indian history by looking at the long list of women who fought against British colonials. Both women and men led the first armed rebellion against the British in 1857-58.

Waging war against the British East India Company, a royal courtesan, Begum Hazrat Mahal, entered the battlefield. She motivated men to fight. When she and her supporters seized the city of Lucknow, she declared her son the ruler, and then escaped to Nepal. Rani of Jhansi was

another famed woman. Her adversary, British Sir Hugh Rose, said Rani was "the best and bravest military leader of the rebels."[8] In one battle, Rani dressed as a man to lead her troops outside Gwalior in May 1858. She died fighting.[9] By the late 19th century, few Indian women attacked and assassinated their British rivals. Two teenagers murdered the Governor of Comilla and were sentenced to life in prison. Other women tried to kill Stanley Jackson, the former governor of Bengal, and Sir Charles Teggart, the police commissioner of Calcutta.[10]

*Why did these early women kill?* Twenty-one-year old school teacher, Pritilata Waddedar, led the raid to bomb a European club in Chittagong, leaving behind a note to explain her participation: "I wonder why there should be any distinction between male and female in a fight for the cause of the country's freedom?" Those words reminded me of Mama when she joined the war front in Pakistan. "I wanted to show men that women can fight, too," Mama told me. In all the above cases, these women were legitimate fighters, trained to kill the enemy for nationalism ideals. They were *not* suicide operatives.

In Kashmir, women proved to be a force to reckon with. They were active participants in war. Before the British colonized the region, a Hindu maharaja ruled Kashmir unfairly and women joined men in large-scale protests against the Dogra king. In 1931, women "from a rough, lower middle-class warren of a neighborhood in the heart of Srinagar" sang songs of freedom.[11] Early Indian and Kashmiri warrior-women were the archetypal folk heroines. They were legendary and locked in popular imagination. Sadia was not one of these women. As an American Muslim woman, I had a responsibility to correct her.

"Suicide is forbidden. Besides, you're too young to die."

"Nothing happens when we protest. No one notices," Sadia said.

"You are doing something meaningful. You are a political activist." I wanted to report her, but I believed if she wanted to detonate, she would have done it by now. Something stopped her.

"This is not who you are. If you stay focused, one day, Kashmir will be yours."

She didn't need a counseling session, especially on an empty, dusty road. Soon, a thicket of clouds would shield the afternoon sun and rain the size of pellets would fill the streets. Sadia listened.

"You have to trust God to guide you."

"I need help from the men. Talk to them. They like you."

"How old are you?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Twenty-one."

"You can do so much. Youth is a gift."

"If you could see what I see, you would understand."

As we approached the gate, she pleaded. "Talk to the men. They can help me."

The men she referred to are male political activists. At one time, they were gun-toting militants with anger towards their oppressors. Today, the same men are politicians, protestors, and participants in the conflict. Theirs is a nonviolent resistance. They have reassured me they can never return to terrorism. "We lost too many of our young men. They were arrested. Some disappeared. Some died fighting. Most died of torture," a senior ex-militant told me. He made it easy to understand why militants opted for a Gandhi-like approach. "Violence hurt us," he confirmed with a long list of friends who died in the early 1990s.

Sadia and I pushed through a large wooden gate that was unlocked. A row of houses the color of misty taupe

looked unassuming. From the window, a group of women in colorful garb and mismatched headscarves were inviting.

"Please don't say anything," Sadia said. "They know nothing about me."

*What would I say to them? The bomb girl is waiting for an order?* Often, I've wondered why Sadia chose to speak candidly to me. Maybe it's true. Talking to a complete stranger can be easier, less intimidating. *Maybe Sadia believed I had influence over the men, and if I did, what would I tell them? That a young woman wanted to die?*

The conversation in my mind stopped there.

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1. For an accurate list of the Prophet's wives and notable women, see *Great Women of Islam* by Mahmood Ahmad Dhadanfar (2001)
2. Busool, Assad Nimer, *Muslim Women Warriors*, (Al-Huda, Chicago), p. 35
3. Heath, Jennifer, *The Scimitar and the Veil*, (Hidden Spring, NJ), 2004, p. 215
4. Qazi, Farhana, "The *Mujahidaat*" in *Women, Gender and Terrorism* (editor, Laura Sjoberg), University of Georgia Press, 2011, p. 30
5. Bloom, Mia, *Bombshell*, (Univ of Penn Press, 2011)
6. Article was published under my former name, Farhana Ali. Co-authored with Dr. Jerold Post, "The History and Evolution of Martyrdom in the Service of Defensive Jihad: An Analysis of Suicide Bombers in Current Conflicts," *Social Science Research Journal*, Vol. 75, No. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 619-620.
7. Stern, Jessica, *Terror in the Name of God,"* (Harper Collins: New York), 2003
8. Burke, S.M. and Quraishi, Salim al-Din, *British Raj in India*, (Oxford University Press, New York), 1995, p. 28
9. Ibid, p. 35
10. Chakrabarty, Manas and Agarwala, Vidyawati (eds), *Women and Politics in India,* (Associated Publishers, Ambala), 2006
11. Statement made by human rights activist Rita Manchanda.

5

# FEMALE FIGHTERS

**"Where are the women?"**
--CYNTHIA ENLOE, AMERICAN SCHOLAR

**"If women are remarkably diverse, why are such a small subset of their experiences featured in those stories?"**
--LAURA SJBORG, AMERICAN PROFESSOR

Inside a yellow painted room, I met Yasmine Raja, a forlorn-looking woman in her forties dressed in traditional clothes (a full-sleeved long shirt and baggy pants), her head covered in a nutmeg colored scarf. She limped on one leg, a result of being tortured by female prison guards. She looked too frail to be the leader of *Muslim Khawateen Markaz* (MKM), the Muslim Women's Group. A political party comprised mostly of women, they are a new brand of female freedom fighters waging a battle

for peace. Without weapons, these women use their voices and numbers to represent strength, hope and a possible future for all women in the valley.

I read about the MKM in local Kashmiri newspapers. The group's primary goal consists of reporting human rights violations and leading protests to call for gender equality and identity. In Kashmir's conservative culture and society, it was reassuring to see women join hands to oppose violations against their gender. Much like any other conflict, gender-based discrimination and violence intersects with women's experiences in war.

The war against women in Kashmir is a gendered war.[1] Gender-based violence is a topic I explore in my classes at The George Washington University. Sexualized violence is a common weapon of war employed by male-dominated security forces that degrade and dehumanize women because they believe them to be docile, weak and helpless.

Together, Kashmiri women are taking a stand against gendered violence[2] and fighting for women's rights. In doing so, women are reclaiming the Indian narrative and telling their own stories because their voices matter; their participation in the freedom struggle is vital to creating ties of empathy and solidarity with the men of Kashmir.

For far too long, Kashmiri women have been portrayed as the image of a stereotypical gender in need of men to fight for their honor and homes. This is true of wars in general—men will fight wars for women. Kashmir is no different, except that I soon discovered that women of all ages are more likely to engage the security forces when their men and children are abused, manipulated, and worse, discovered dead.

Raja pulled out a chair alongside a wooden desk littered with piles of paper and a vase filled with plastic flowers. A

large window overlooked an empty road. The room was bare except for the desk and a small table in the corner that was large enough for a tray of tea.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, in a meek voice. I explained my reasons for visiting Kashmir and mentioned my grandmother.

"She is a Kashmiri? And you are Muslim?" Raja's eyes widened.

When I nodded, she flashed a megawatt smile. She called other women to join us, including her second-in-command, Masrat Maryam, a tall, thin girl with striking brown eyes who looked to be no more than twenty-five years old. The women silently watched me adjust my long blue shawl and fidget in the chair.

"You're not well," Raja observed. I tried to explain I just needed rest. Raja ordered someone in the nearby kitchen to make a pot of tea and bring yogurt with white bread. She guessed I had stomach pain. I continued to explain my research. For years, I had studied and written about women in conflict, including the violent women in Iraq and Pakistan—my first editorial "The Bomber behind the Veil" in *The Baltimore Sun*[3] predicted the rise of female bombers in Iraq after U.S forces were deployed to the country in March 2003. But I said that most women were not violent—they only wanted to be free, like the women of Kashmir. I referenced the women in Chile who took to the streets to oppose the Allende government in 1971.

"As no two conflicts in the world are alike, neither are its women. Some women fight using conventional methods. Few choose suicide terrorism. But the majority of women believe non-violent protest is the answer," I said, confidently. Studies of women's movements in Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia and the West confirmed my thesis

that women had the will to create new paradigms of power. In patriarchal societies, such as Kashmir, men were key players—they had to believe in greater rights for women.

I explained to Raja and her members that men can manipulate women to advance their nationalist goals. When independence is achieved, men often push women back into their homes. Terrorists do this too. Women who joined al-Qaeda and its affiliate organizations were a riding wave of its success. "They were like mistresses of terror," I said. To date, no woman has taken operational charge of militant Islam.

Raja had a blank expression. Masrat, who sat to my left, nodded in bewilderment. *How do you know this?* She might have asked.

"I want to know if you believe you are equal to men in Kashmir," I asked.

"We support our men, but we know they have their limitations. They are in prison or hiding from the security forces," Raja replied.

Before she could explain, a woman entered the room, holding a large tray carrying a pot of tea, a bowl of homemade yogurt, and plates of dry bread and beef kebabs. The teacups and saucer were locally crafted, encrusted in a pattern of floral gold, similar to a fine bone China tea set. The women insisted I finish the food, a reflection of Kashmiri hospitality—they considered it an honor to serve a guest.

Unexpectedly, a middle-aged man walked in. He was lean, defined in jaw, nose and cheekbones and had a receding hairline. He introduced himself as Junaid, the only male member of an all-women's organization who served as their political spokesperson. He spoke with a fast-paced enthusiasm in a knowing voice.

"We don't want a temporary solution to the conflict," he began. "If we surrender, then the next generation will suffer. If we compromise today with India, then the real issues will not be addressed. We have to fight peacefully. We have to keep protesting. We have all suffered in this conflict. I spent ten years in jail. The Indian government violates our basic human rights. At times, they block us from going out to perform our prayers. We cannot go to the mosque freely! What kind of democracy is this?"

Like other male militants out of prison, Junaid was eager to share his experiences. He needed an audience. His back-and-forth style of speaking was understandable and I assumed he wanted me to know everything. He said, "The policy of arresting and killing Kashmiris is deliberate. It is designed to force us into solitude to keep us quiet. I can tell you I have never tasted India's great democracy! There are so many Pakistani youth who cross the border and are martyred here. Jihad is their right! Of course, we do not accept violence. We are a peaceful organization that believes in non-violence. But we received nothing in return! This frustrates our youth and the militants who refuse to lay down their weapons."

"You will find pain in every household. Every man or woman knows someone in the family who has been tortured, and for what? Tortured for peace? Have you heard of such a thing? The militants will put down their weapons if we have freedom here. India underestimates our will. No one can break our resolve."

Looking at the other women, it seemed that they had heard all this before. Junaid's monologue, packed with emotion, made me second-guess his non-violent stance. *Did he intend to win me over? Was he trying to convince me that militants had an important role to play in the conflict?*

*What was his main message?* His personal story sounded familiar.

He continued. "My father was a militant. I was eight years old when he was arrested. I was a child of violence. I took after my father. I was arrested in 1990 and then released. I was arrested again in 1992 and served five years. The Indian Supreme Court made special cases against us. When I was released, I was arrested again in 2001, even *after* I gave up violence! I was arrested again and again. It is the story of my life."

"Why were you arrested?" I asked, naively.

"Freedom is a crime," he replied, with a fixed grin. As abruptly as he had arrived, Junaid stopped speaking and left the room.

Next to me, Masrat waxed on enthusiastically. "The authorities here don't want us to raise our voices. They want us to keep quiet. Many women are simply tortured because their husbands are involved in the freedom struggle or because they think our men are militants. It doesn't matter if our men are innocent. Because we are their wives, we are made to suffer."

Her words made sense to me. All over the world, I read reports of women punished for their husbands' actions or crimes. *Women bear the brunt of war. They are easy targets. They are victims, abused by authorities for their relationship to men involved in violence. Too often, rape is a tactic used against these women. It is intended to dehumanize her. I feared that soon enough, Masrat would talk about sexual violence and confirm what I already knew.*

Sexual violence is an all-too familiar tactic of war. In Kashmir, it is a silent (taboo) subject. Girls and women violated by the military are silenced by shame, and the shaming of women through rape or the threat of sexual

assault is physically and psychologically damaging. Victims are scarred for life and rarely speak up. In many cases, female victims live in shame behind closed doors and are thus, made invisible by a society in which men uphold the honor of women. It is the responsibility of Kashmiri men to protect their women from the anarchy of violence. Gender scholars affirm that wartime rape is committed to perpetuate the making and fighting of wars. In other conflicts, including Sierra Leone, Burma, Rwanda, women were no longer silent witnesses of pain. The women of Kashmir sympathized with other oppressed women and used political participation and protests to express global outrage.

"When did you join the MKM?" I asked.

"When my husband was shot in front of me," Masrat said, incensed. "I was a young bride made into a young widow. I know the horrors of war."

"What did you do?"

"I remarried," she said, smiling. *You are lucky,* I said to myself. *Most widows in Pakistan and other parts of the Muslim world did not expect to remarry, and live the rest of their lives mourning the loss of their husband donned in white or black clothing, depending on the custom.*

"I have a new husband," she said, proudly. "I got married soon after I was widowed." Her attractive smile and sensual eyes could charm any man.

"I am happy now. I have a home, two children, and I also work here [at MKM]."

We smiled at each other often. To me, she represented the visibility of Kashmiri women and the different ways that women experience war and life in a prolonged conflict. Women like her are *more* than caretakers of the home; the new reality is that Kashmiri women are everywhere. When tragedy strikes, Masrat and her colleagues take to the streets

to call for justice. Women empathize with the suffering. Women make hard choices every day in this conflict. They are shaping the story of women by playing a more active role in the conflict. They are redefining the way women engage in war activities—their roles are multiple, revealing the complexity of their experience and challenging the question 'where are the women?' In truth, the women of Kashmir are remarkably diverse.

I continued to listen to Masrat share her personal story in a reassuring voice. The solace in her voice made me believe in a geography of possibility—that women of all ages could be a provider, protector, politician and/or peacemaker. That anything in Kashmir was possible for its women.

Unlike Masrat, her leader Raja never married. She was one of the few women in Kashmir who focused exclusively on the separatist movement—she represented the few with an unwavering commitment to the cause, hoping for permanent change through activism. In a traditional, patriarchal society like this, it pained me to see a woman outside of marriage. It was common in America for women to be single, unmarried—it is a decision no one questions, but in Kashmir, the choice to marry the cause is admirable and yet, surprising. While no one I would later meet questioned Raja's decision, there is a silent sorrow for women outside of marriage.

*If Kashmir had been peaceful, would Raja have chosen marriage? And perhaps have children? Would her dreams be any different? Would she embrace the gender, societal norm that values family above anything else? Or is Raja "doing gender" by diverting from the norm? I had to admire a woman who chooses an irregular path. For Raja, being a freedom fighter was life. The cause was her family.* These are questions I could not ask the

generous and tenacious woman sitting in front of me with an aggrieved look on her face, the scars of conflict reflected in her eyes.

I turned to Masrat, who continued to tell me about her work. She documented cases of human rights abuses. She visited the families of victims and provided women and their children with food and shelter. In addition to her work, Masrat ran a school in the southern village of Sopore with 110 girls.

"We give each child school supplies. They have notebooks, pencils, and a school bag," she said, handing me a stack of photographs of children with their new black bags with the MKM logo.

"We do what we can," Masrat added. "It's never enough. One organization like ours can't help all the children or women of Kashmir."

Raja interjected with a photograph of a child. "Look at this picture," she said. "This is a ten-year-old girl with her mother. She was gang-raped by Indian Army officers in Handwara," referring to a village. The picture of a child sexually abused by a gang of paramilitary officers would haunt me for days. *How could this happen? Why did this happen to a child? The pained look on the girl's face could not even describe the cruelty of the incident that stripped a child of her innocence, dignity, and the right to happiness.*

In another photograph, Raja pointed to a group of women dressed in black robes, making them indistinguishable. Raja and her followers held up signs with the word "Justice" and shouted slogans at the authorities, calling for an investigation into the rape of Shabnam Rashid that took place in November 2004. The incident provoked wide protests in the border town of Kupwara. Villagers from the area took to the streets to demand the rapists' arrest.

Authorities responded by firing shots at the peaceful protestors.

In another photograph, the victim has her shirt pulled back to show red-pink scars, her face frightened. "Her body is completely bruised. The officers raped her multiple times to punish the father. They brutally tortured him in the next room after they raped her and her mother. It is not clear what the officers wanted from the father. But whatever they wanted, they should have left the women alone," Raja said in a knowing voice.

"On International Human Rights Day, we held photographs of rape victims, including this girl's picture, and protested in front of the world. We shouted 'stop state terrorism' and 'stop genocide' of our people. We shouted to the cameras. We wanted the world to see that rape is unacceptable. It is a gross way to punish the girls and the women of Kashmir. We are punished because we are women." Estimates of rape in Kashmir varied. Raja counted at least 4,000 cases since the 1990s, but that was a modest number. The humiliation and shame associated with rape explained why families in Kashmir (and elsewhere in the Muslim world) didn't report the crime.

"Many rapists go unpunished," Raja said, "and an investigation is rarely conducted. Even when a victim speaks out against the crime and takes the case to court, the rapist goes free."

The same was true for the rape of an 8-year-old girl, Asifa Bano. In April 2018, for one week, Asifa was held captive in a Hindu temple, "where she was drugged and sexually assaulted before being strangled and thrashed to death with a stone."[4] Six men were accused of gang raping and murdering the innocent girl. In June 2019, *The Washington Post* reported that an Indian court sentenced three

men to life in prison for the abduction and murder of the girl while three others were given a five-year jail term and a fine for destroying evidence. Struggling with rape cases, the Indian court passed a criminal law in 2018, making the rape of girls under the age of 12 punishable by death.[5]

For young Kashmiri girls and single women, the stigma of rape also ruined their chances of marriage. Many girls secluded themselves inside their homes. When the shame became too great to bear, some girls committed suicide. The overpowering feelings of shame and social stigmas made these girls feel like 'unwanted' members of society.

Sexual violence is another form of reinforced gender hierarchy. The subordination of girls and women by male authorities is a *hyper-masculine* approach that deepens social stigmas against local females, who are helpless to defend themselves against the victimizer. And so, war is deeply discriminatory and militarization is highly gendered. Scholars Dyan Mazurana and Keith Proctor argue that violence "as a strategic choice [is] sustained through the manipulation of gendered identities, institutions, systems and symbols."

Therefore, violence promotes gender exclusion, creating an unethical and unfair outcome for the rape victims. Justice for the victims of sexual violence is one way to correct the wrong committed against them. And yet, in Kashmir, the victims' experiences and needs often go unrecognized and unaddressed by the Indian State, the entity with the power to prosecute the perpetrators—a right granted to the survivors in United Nations Resolutions 1960, 2106, and 1888. These resolutions constituted and outlined provide gender-just reparations (such as a naming and shaming listing mechanism and a team of experts to investigate cases of sexual violence). Sadly, in Kashmir, these

mechanisms do not always apply when the Indian State is in control.

Raja handed me the photographs, and continued to explain her commitment to protect these girls. "Rape is one of the reasons we come together. We led a protest the day we found out Rashid was raped to make people in our community aware of this incident. If we don't take to the streets, then the abuse will go on. No one will know. I have to tell my own people what is happening in our remote villages. The world should know too, although sometimes, I think the international community has gone blind. No one seems to care."

Raja's passionate response to abuse against her gender helped raise awareness. At the very least, reports in local and Indian newspapers highlighted crimes committed against girls and women. However, Raja demanded more than a news report. She sought justice for the victim and her family. There were no words to speak after listening to stories of shame and viewing images of abuse. I admired these women for their beauty, rigor and truth. They were volunteers, playing an active, benevolent role in the women's movement.

Raja handed me her file of papers and pictures. "You are our messenger," she said, with bright eyes. "Tell the West we are survivors and stoic in our suffering."

"I will try," I said, moved by the enormous responsibility.

"All we ask for is our freedom and the right to have a life, as you do, in your country. This movement *is* my life."

I placed the folder into my handbag and vowed to protect it.

"Will you be here tomorrow?"

"Yes," I replied.

Raja insisted I observe the protest she organized the next

day. The women planned to walk to *Lal Chowk*, the center of Srinagar. So far, they had never made it to the city's main boulevard. The police blocked the road each time.

"Will you be arrested?"

"Probably," Masrat said, smiling. "We're not afraid."

*Welcome to Kashmir. This is a place of infinite surprises, a land where the Army is the State. They are* not *here to protect or serve with honor—two principles an officer is sworn to uphold, as indicated in the United States' Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. Instead, Indian authorities enforce extreme patriarchy and chauvinism by using the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to crush anti-nationals and so-called 'terrorists. How strange that outsiders (non-Kashmiris) determine who gets to live and die in a place that is not their original home! Most Indian soldiers are deployed to Kashmir from somewhere else. They gather like crowded moths around a fixed place, waiting for something to happen.*

As the conversation drew to a close, I hugged the women and said good-bye. I wanted to say 'we will meet again' but this was probably untrue. As a researcher, I had gathered enough handwritten notes and a lifetime of lessons learned to understand—or in some cases, *not* understand—the visibility and invisibility of women in war. Later, I would question how gender makes war and war makes gender. I would wonder: *Why are some Kashmiri women visible and others invisible from society and political life? What do some choose to live gender expectations and others change the rules?*

I had learned and taught at the university that gender biases, stereotyping and expectations create boundaries around women; that some women, like Masrat and Raja, test these boundaries in a traditional society in order to write their stories of Kashmir, so the world can see them as they are: female fighters willing to speak up for gender

inclusion, advocating an increased role for women in all aspects of life in Kashmir. Most of all, these are the women willing to die for peace.

At the foot of the stairs, I saw Sadia again. She waited for me, patiently, so we might speak again (perhaps one last time, as is often the case in an active conflict). I knew Kashmir was not my home, though I secretly wanted it to be. If I had my way, I would have stayed forever.

We stepped outside, the dust rising beneath our sandals. Raja instructed Sadia to walk me back to the JKLF-R office where the male hosts were also waiting for my return. Outside, a golden sky drifted behind a labyrinth of clouds. I needed to return to my temporary 'home' before darkness overwhelmed me. Nights in Kashmir were an "endless black, which seemed to stretch forever between the stars and even backwards in time"[6] that forced residents to stay indoors while the Army scanned the streets like flightless birds. The last thing I wanted was to lose myself in these dark, ghostly nights.

Sadia smiled warmly as we walked briskly. I prayed this young woman might find a greater purpose in life that does not include violent action. *You can create your own organization someday. Just like Raja, if you choose. You can be a great leader, blaze your own path. Was it possible for Sadia to choose life over death, beauty over filth, reason over insanity? God, I prayed silently, cast Your brilliant light on this troubled girl. Make her believe in a future for Kashmir.*

Sadia stopped at the entrance of the men's office and leaned against the orange brick wall. She held my hand for the last time.

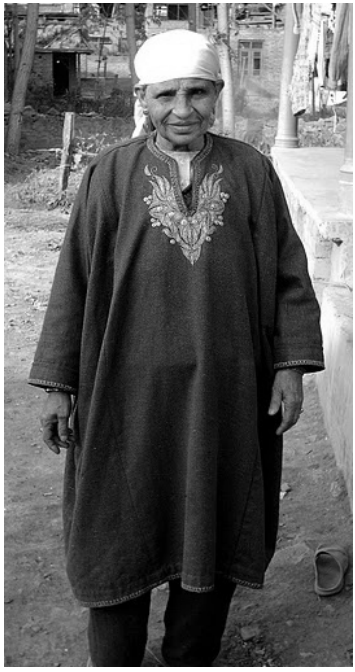
"You must come tomorrow," she whispered. "I am leading the protest."

1. To learn more about gendered nationalism in Kashmir, see *Resisting Occupation*, edited by Haley Duschinski, Mona Bhan, Ather Zia, and Cynthia Mahmood, (Univ. of Penn. Press, PA), 2018, pp. 24-28.
2. Fabian Hartwell, "Burhan Wani and the Masculinities of the State," *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 127.
3. The op-ed was published under my former name, Farhana Ali. Article can be accessed online, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-12-13/news/0512130414_1_suicide-female-attacks
4. "Asifa Bano Story," *Stars unfolded.* For detailed information, see https://starsunfolded.com/asifa-bano-kathua-rape-victim/ and https://starsunfolded.com/asifa-bano-story/
5. "Six men convicted in the rape and murder of 8-year old girl that shocked India," *Washington Post,* June 10, 2019. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/six-men-convicted-in-rape-of-8-year-old-girl-that-shocked-india/2019/06/10/cde7b17c-8b5f-11e9-b162-8f6f41ec3c04_story.html. Also see, "All about Criminal Law Bill 2018 on child rape passed in Lok Sabha," *India Today*, July 31, 2019. Accessed at: https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/child-rape-criminal-law-amendment-bill-2018-1301038-2018-07-31
6. Ackerman, p. 245

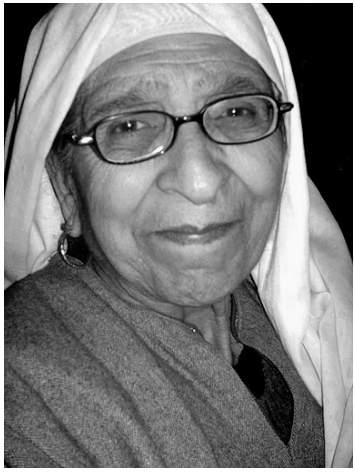
# MEMORIES

*Mama with the late Benazir Bhutto, twice Prime Minister before she was assassinated on December 27, 2007.*

*As a university student, Mama debated men on gender-related issues and won trophies.*



*A Kashmiri woman in a pheran, a traditional dress*



*Mughli, the "lonely mother" searched for her son for nearly 20 years. She never found him.*

*Qazi's lecture on Kashmiri women at Chautauqua Institution, New York*


*Local Kashmiri women silently protest, holding pictures of their loved ones. Photo by Imran Ali.*

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Get your complete book at my store. Click on the link below. Your book purchase helps the village women of Kashmir. Thank you for caring.

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## A CALL TO ACTION

Over the years, so many people have asked me: what can I do to help? How can I support the Kashmiri people? The first step is awareness. Please share these stories on social media to build understanding and make the world aware of the conflict's ongoing impact on the lives of women (and men). To stay current on news in Kashmir, you can follow: The Greater Kashmir, The Kashmir Observer, Kashmir-BBC News, and Kashmir-The New York Times.

Another vital step is empowering local women. I support local village women in Indian-held Kashmir to improve their lives. These women weave shawls from their homes and neighborhood co-ops to support their families. Your purchase of this book will help the women of Kashmir. Thank you for caring.

Join the newsletter for insightful analysis you won't find anywhere else. Visit www.farhanaqazi.com

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Farhana Qazi is an award-winning speaker and scholar on conflicts in Muslim world. Born in northern Pakistan and raised in Texas, she straddles the East and West and brings multiple perspectives to her work.

As a young analyst, she began her study of conflict in the US government, where she briefed senior policy makers and practitioners. Upon leaving government service, she continued her work as a researcher and traveled to Muslim countries to understand the origins of conflict. She is the founder of Global Insights, LLC, where she conducts independent research, provides training on Islam and conflicts in the Muslim world, and works with clients to resolve complex problems in conflict-prone countries.

As an Adjunct Professor at The George Washington University, Farhana teaches Gender, Conflict & Security and Women in Violent Extremism. Inside the classroom, she addresses the impact of war and prolonged conflict on women. She examines the different roles and contributions made by women in war.

As a senior instructor for the US military, she trained hundreds of men and women in uniform on Islam, Pakistan, the Middle East, and global threats. She has trained officers all across America and foreign liaison officers (military and police) from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, South Korea, and Pakistan, to name a few.

Farhana is a recipient of the 21st Century Leader Award, presented by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy in New York, for her training and service to the US military, and she received the Distinguished Humanitarian Award from Southwestern University, her alma mater in Texas, for her research on women in war.

As an expert, Farhana has appeared in mainstream media: CNN, the BBC, PBS, National Public Radio, Fox News, C-Span, Bloomberg, ABC News, MSNBC, Canadian national television, Voice of America, Al Jazeera, and more. She is a graduate of the National Security Studies Program at the George Washington University and holds a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Political Science and a minor in French from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.

Farhana lives in Virginia. She loves the outdoors: walking along placid blue waters; hiking dry mountains; and spending time in Langkawi. To learn more about her research, visit www.farhanaqazi.com


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