



Place, Politics and Platial Significance: Victimhood in Kashmir through Select Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Researches on spatial studies, area studies, human geography and globalisation prioritise place, and even conceptualise place as the primary component for many tensions and conflicts concerning identity, meaning, culture, economy and politics. This research article probes into the place politics of the region of Kashmir to understand the notions of victimhood and marginalisation. Kashmir as a borderland territory, is highly exposed to the geopolitical, religious, and ethnic conflicts. Since the region embraces a multicultural society, differential claims over the land in terms of ethnicity and religion provide grounds for the emergence of divergent political perspectives. The article compares select narratives of the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir to construe the problems of victimisation experienced by the members of the community by employing John A. Agnew’s concept of ‘place and politics’. The article discusses Siddhartha Gigoo’s *The Garden of Solitude* and Farah Bashir’s *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* to examine place-based attributes which influenced the events of the 1990s like militarisation, militant insurgency and exodus of Kashmiri pandits, further delineating the contradictory vision of peace in the efforts of conflict resolution in Kashmir

KEYWORDS

Kashmir conflict, victimhood, place politics, comparative, Agnew.

Introduction

Place, in a geographical setting, implies to the physical and topographical representation of space which is inclusive of social categories. Defining place in a sociological setting, includes the usage of terms, like ‘locale’ and ‘region’, which represent the embedded production and reproduction of social activities. Since, the term ‘place’ gains differential connotations and understandings, the meanings and values associated also spread diversly concerning a few aspects like politics, society, economy, ethnicity, community and psychology. Thomas F. Gieryn formulates a common definition of place that suits all branches of knowledge:

Without naming . . . , identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place. Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined . . . A spot in the universe, with a gathering of physical stuff there, becomes a place only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory. In spite of its relatively enduring and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of the same place is labile—flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested. (465)

— 2 — This constituent of everyday life is a material abstraction, that highly impacts the microsociological episodes of acting agents, humans. The microepisodes of social production and reproduction are grounded to space as the physical space or place acts as an influential means of action. According to Henri Lefebvre, “(Social) space is a (social) product [. . .] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [. . .] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (26). The integration of the concept of place to understand social interaction, further, expounds the interrelation of politics, culture and economy embedded in the process of production. As Lefebvre accounts, all actions of the agents revolve around the space of production. Apart from social, economic and cultural production, Lefebvre refers to political production too indicating the production of power in the place. Establishment of power and the control followed by it, is often confined and restricted to a particular territory. In that case, the platial importance figures the role played by space and place in politics. The amalgamation of place and politics (place-based politics) branches into various models of political phenomena like geopolitical conflict, clientelism, geography of hegemony, nationalisation and many more. Though these phenomena reflect place-based politics, the inclusive aspects of sociology encourage the understanding of the behaviours of the acting agents corresponding to the political activities. In the case of geopolitics, it purely deals with the politics emerging out of geographical consequences, which depicts the process of territorial delimitation of the state or demarcation of territorial boundaries. Place, by not only

being a monofunctional phenomenon of being a physical space, establishes the interdependency of the social structure to the destined place, developing a space for social activities. In that case, the partake of community in the demarcation of territorial constituency of a nation implicates the political dimensions of the physical space determining human behaviours in it. Subsequently, Agnew comments on the previously mentioned interrelationship of place and community, and its influence on the socio-political structure, “place is defined as the geographical context or locality in which agency interpellates social structure. Consequently, political behaviour is viewed as the product of agency as structured by the historically constituted social contexts in which people live their lives – in a word, places” (43). Exemplifying the place-based politics and describing the geopolitical context in India, the Kashmir conflict, a consequence of partition of Indian subcontinent explains the relationship of place and politics. Kashmir, a land marking the border space between the nations of India, Pakistan and China, acts as the central objective of the geopolitical conflict. The unfinished demarcation of the boundaries of the then princely state of Kashmir—later a constitutional state of India, renders to the emergence of the state of continued war, conflict and terrorism. The differential political ideologies are not solely built over the procurement of the physical space but they involve the distinctive communal population in the place. Kashmir being a borderland provides space for the existence of multiple cultures exhibiting heterogeneity of culture, religion and ethnicity. As widely known, in Kashmir, majority population follows Islamism and the rest of population follow Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism representing the prevalence of heterogeneity in the belief system. The population are not identified with their religion but mostly with their place of residence. For example, people are often referred as ‘Kashmiri Muslim’ and ‘Kashmiri Pandits’ exhibiting the affinity towards the place and the place is associated with the construction of identity. This peculiar tendency towards the people’s identity prompted the attempt to probe more into the person-place relationship and the influence of the politics in the borderlands of Kashmir.

Through literary interpretation, the article discusses Siddhartha Gigoo’s *The Garden of Solitude* and Farah Bashir’s *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* to examine place-based attributes which influenced the events of the 1990s like militarisation, militant insurgency and exodus of pandits, further delineating the contradictory vision of peace in the efforts of conflict resolution in Kashmir. The article compares select narratives of the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir to construe the problems of victimisation experienced by the members of the community in terms of conflict and marginalisation by employing John A. Agnew’s concept of ‘place and politics’. The novel, *The Garden of Solitude*, portrays the protagonist, Sridar’s experiences of displacement by drafting the timeframe in a way that sequentially describes the familial history, the phase of displacement, phase of resilience, and lastly the phase of

rejuvenation. The other text, *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, a memoir, narrates the encounters of a girl in the militarised Kashmir, amidst, terror and confinement.

“All politics is local” – Place and Politics

Agnew’s concept of place and politics synchronises the ideas of human geography, political sociology and political geography producing a ‘conceptual place’ for mediating the role of place. Earlier to Agnew, place and politics were not explored in a serious context but some attempts were made. The relationship and close association of place and politics were unearthed from the concept of human geography. A German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel found the expression ‘political geography’ in his book *Politische Geographie*, a subsume of human geography, defining the link between cultural growth of a nation with territorial expansion. Further the idea was developed into environmental determinism theory which emphasised the role of physical factors in influencing the social, political and economic development and growth. Agnew converges the notions of person, place and politics by discussing its tendency of interdependence: “State and society are not autonomous and separable” as they are merged, explaining “the role of locality or place in mediating the actual interrelationships of state institutions and social processes” (Agnew x). The intermediate role of place in affecting the human activities, irrespective of social and political concerns are initially analysed by distinguishing it into three aspects, locale, location and sense of place. The understanding of the three aspects establishes the platial significance of a locality to both individuals and communities. Further, Agnew, through an empirical analysis, accomplishes the role of place in defining the politics at a microsociological scenario and a macrolevel context, for instance, nationalisation. This research incorporates the ideas of Agnew to interpret the role of place in the politics of Kashmir, from the lenses of two communities.

Victimhood and Platial Politics

The term place is an inclusive definition of the person-place relationship that dwells in a society. Establishment of platial significance by the agents of the community is attained on the pretext of social, and cultural interaction in a macro level. Agnew picks up Randall Collins’, concept of macrosociology, where “Collins (1981) has proposed that macrophenomenon are made up of *aggregations* and *repetitions* of many microepisodes” (19). Subsequently, in order to understand macrophenomenon, Agnew develops the three aspects of place as an attempt of determining the subjective/microsociological setting of person-place interaction: “locale, location, and sense of place” (Agnew 5). An individual’s routine, social order and subjective orientation with a place unearth the construction of meaning over that place. The cumulative microepisodes of cultural and social interaction, in process, marks the communal place identity

of groups. This, further, explains the communal association in developing the place meaning. The last generation of pandits from Kashmir traces their ancestral history back to 1900 BCE (Pandit) claiming their indigeneity in the land as “the original inhabitants of valley” (Jerath 618).

Followed by the existences of Hinduism and Buddhism, Islamism came into practice in 13th century after the invasion of Shah Mir delineating multiculturalism of the land. So, in both means, seamless reproduction of macrosociological components by the pandits and Muslims in the context of place contributes to the creation of communal history in Kashmir. Pred comments on the role of place in a macro level context as “place is not only what is fleetingly observed on the landscape, a locale, or setting for activity and social interaction. . . . It also is what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a special context through creation and utilization of a physical setting” (Quoted in Agnew 27). This way, the accumulation of microepisodes transcends to a macrophenomenon which, further, impacts the microsociological interactions in Kashmir. The historical significance, a macrophenomenon, serves as a symbolic capital of the communities influencing their assertive claim over the place. Here, the symbolic capital depicts, ““outstanding-ness,’ . . . if not the essence, of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgement, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem, may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation” (Bourdieu 24). For instance, the protagonist of *The Garden of Solitude*, Sridar recalls his ancestral history through the narratives from his grandmother and mother. The narrative that explains his roots in Kashmir acts as a tool of symbolic capital in constructing the emotional bond towards the place: “Sridar smiled and remembered the story of his great-grandmother’s encounter with a lion one wintry night long ago and how she had slapped the beast amid the pear trees in their orchard. He visualised the scene in his mind, over and over again” (Gigoo 241-242). The segment of Sridar’s intergenerational memory, not only foregrounds his ancestral history but the roots of his family bounded to his home that is located amidst the significant orchards of Kashmir. Similarly, Farah Bashir constructs her idea of home around the social interactions with her neighbours and the memories of her grandmother. She remarks that “The house I would go back would be bereft of her presence but filled with her memories. Our home, the little monument of memory” (Bashir 211). This excerpt marks the influence of ancestral memory and the cultural capital developed in the context of place, in determining an individual’s place meaning. The memories of their ancestors provide the knowledge of symbolic power in constructing an emotional claim over the place. Though the narratives represent the perspectives of different communities, commonly, the repetitive sequences of microepisodes depict the extent of historical significance in the formation of emotional bond over a place. Therefore, the historical dominance over the person-place

relationship acts as a foundational feature in attributing to the subjective orientation towards a place. Since, history is an objective form of generational memories that carries emotions, it manipulates the subjective level of connection between person and place.

Attribution of meaning to a place is often made possible by contextualising the course of action happened there. In that way, the memories of past and the ongoing events of sociocultural activities contribute to the definition of place. As place acts as means of production of microsociological events, the references of social worlds add value to the place, where, “[place] meaning is attributed to acts and events through communication and interaction with limited numbers of people” (Agnew 26). Agnew elaborates on the role of place in a sociological context under three aspects, as one explains the provision of physical setting in which social relations are constituted: “*Locale* refers to the structured ‘microsociological’ content of place, the setting for every day, routine social interaction provided in a place” (Agnew 5). Additionally, the geographer incorporates the sense of personal and social factors involved in valuing the space. The value of place in Kashmir is determined by the coexistence of diverse communities. The populace of Kashmir is accustomed to the close interaction of multiple communities in a way of adopting the routine of neighbours’ cultural activities. Both pandits and Muslims celebrate and support each other’s existence by taking part in the festivities of the other, as in “Sridar had returned from Eidgah and was standing by the side of a wall at Gani’s courtyard to take home a bowl full of mutton” (Gigoo 29). Here, the pandit boy celebrates Eid along with his neighbours. The narration of that event exhibits the natural engagement of the member of other community in a culture specific festival. Farah Bashir also documents the social relation of pandits and Muslims by narrating their familial practice of celebrating every occasion with their neighbour, the Kauls: “whenever there was a celebratory function to be held at Laxmisree’s house, the two houses were connected by a wooden plank, pilav, merging them into one. The last time that happened was in September 1988, when Laxmisree’s elder sister’s son, Kartik, was born. A feast was thrown to celebrate his birth across both the houses” (86). This part exemplifies the custom practiced by the neighbours rejecting their communal differences. While Laxmisree belongs to pandit community and the author is a Kashmiri Muslim, both the families respond to each other as kith and kin by enjoying the birth of Kartik in a collaborative manner defying the differences. By comparing the narratives of Siddhartha Gigoo and Farah Bashir, the interpretation communicates the similarity in the pattern of social interaction between the pandits and Muslims in the region of Kashmir. The coexistence integrates a locally constructed definition to the place as a space that demonstrates peculiarly pluralist identity, commonly known as ‘Kashmiriyat’—“communal harmony, multiculturalism, and the tolerance that the majority community displays towards the minority community” (Hangloo 37). The narratives, by frequently mentioning the

rituals and routines of the locale, add to notion of interdependent lifestyle experienced by the members of the society. The social space that renders multiculturalism promotes the idea of coexistence. Kashmir, as a social space to its inhabitants, is incomplete without the concept of Kashmiriyat, as it loses its peculiar identity. The idea of Kashmiriyat being a locale-specific phenomenon acts as a dominant reference to the geographically oriented identity of Kashmir. The identity and the attribution of meaning to the region of Kashmir as a social space that renders communal coexistence marks the significance of the place, a unique tendency towards the region of Kashmir. The platial significance established by historical significance and strong blend of socio-cultural elements in the context of place escalates the affinity of human-place relationship assisting the status of place in determining the politics of the region.

Kashmiriyat, a locally oriented perspective on the communal coexistence of Kashmir, has a macro level impact over the politics of the region. The partition of nationalities in the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was attempted to establish religiously functioning state, where Pakistan emerged as Islamic republic with Islam as its state religion. Since, Kashmir has a combinatory population, pledging the region to one particular nation remained complicated contributing to the escalating conflict. By complying with the political boundaries of Kashmir, politicisation of communal differences defines the nature of geopolitical conflict in the territory. The state's political ideologies are often dependent over the territorial configuration where it is implemented to cast a place-based political expression. Agnew states his views on the interdependency of place and politics as

Places, therefore, are connected to the state through its organization into various tiers of administration and the geography of its hegemony. The state survives and prospers as long as it can hold together the territorial coalition of places that gives it geographical form. The state is dependent on places for support as they are dependent on it for political influence. The political parties and local-central links it provides a locus for are in turn their main channels of political expression. (40)

The state's dependency towards the locally oriented concepts influences the formation of the political expressions. Agnew expresses the making of policies for a place and the political dependency over a place. In the context of Kashmir, the locally constructed idea of Kashmiriyat acts as one of the main channels that regulates the national political expression of two nations with respect to the geographical orientations. The term 'Kashmiriyat' is a common expression that holds no political concern but the politicisation of communal differences escalated its sense as a political expression. Ratan Lal Hangloo, states that "Some define [kashmiriyat] as an ideological foundation of ethnic nationalism, and in most recent times, it has also been defined as a marker of Kashmir identity that cuts across the religious divide" (Hangloo 38) emphasising the

political significance of the concept. In the narrative of Siddhartha Gigoo, the coexistence between Hindus and Muslims is positively represented until the rise of insurgency, a result of geopolitical conflict, which affected the relationship of the populace. Suspicion was an omnipresent phenomenon in Kashmir among the people and also the security forces. Suspicion and doubt created in the minds of the people continuously caused rupture to peace and the natural social interaction that happen in Kashmir, especially, communal interactions. Through the conversations between Lasa and his neighbours on the state of terror spreading in Kashmir, Gigoo comments in the novel,

The local newspapers wrote about freedom struggle. Fear ruled the hearts of the Pandits, and they became suspicious of the Muslim neighbours and friends with whom they have shared close bonds for years. The same fear shattered the love Muslims had for the Pandits. The Pandits became suspects – informers and agents of India. (Gigoo 32)

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This excerpt expounds the existing displeasure between the communities without any direct reasons. The suspicion was directed towards both Pandits and Muslims in terms of their identity and allegiance towards the state. Pandits were often called the informers of the state which broke the trust and escalated encounters of betrayal between the communities. The suspicion towards the pandits was not just communal but had waves of nationalism—pandits were identified as ‘agents of India’. This way the events of forced displacement of pandits were not just a consequence of religious indifferences but a consequence of national conflict. Here, the notions of Kashmiriyat, though region specific, insinuate the place-based politics of Kashmir. Similarly, Farah Bashir narrates the perspectives of Muslims about the measures taken by the security forces in order to protect the state from the threats to national integrity. The conflicted religious and political ideas resonated the unrest in the region which called for military occupancy. The incessant surveillance, often, reflected in the form of search operations, indefinite curfews and violence were considered as invasion of privacy. The author of *Rumour of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, expresses the perspective of nationalism through her text: “The sting was of a different kind. When thousands of unarmed dissenters took to the streets to protest the Indian rule, troops fired bullets on these larger processions. Sometimes, they fired tear gas. . . Often, it was worse than the old springtime kreth from chilli fumes” (Bashir 112-113). The excerpt represents how the loss of a regionally constructed idea has an impact over national politics. Farah Bashir portrays her life amidst war and terror but this sequence reveals the political scenario of Kashmir. Though the sequence projects the negative aspects of surveillance and militarisation, it establishes the national attention rendered to a locally oriented disorder. Agnew remarks on the national scale impact on social concerns as, “[r]eference to local settings

or to global processes was largely closed off by the nationalizing of social science and its subservience to the national state” (74). In the 1990s Kashmiri population was divided by religion and different political ideologies causing insurgency in the state. So, the loss of the harmony and peace in the coexistence of communities called for the operation of the state machinery in the region. *Gigoo* also marks few occurrences in the novel which represents the shift in the national consciousness of the characters influenced by their regional beliefs, as an attempt of exhibiting the existing national conflict from a communal perspective: “‘Lasa, we will live in peace and happiness when Kashmir becomes part of Pakistan,’ Manzoor would say” (*Gigoo* 56). Here, Manzoor conceives his peace as settling amidst his own community. Though he wishes for Lasa’s accompaniment in Kashmir and the idea of coexistence with pandits, he secretly wishes for communally formulated state. This regionally constructed notions of communal coexistence and displeasures of border demarcation, have direct influence over the state’s political ideologies which undergo a transition of becoming a national orientation advocating the emergence of nationalism. According to Agnew, nationalism, a “place transcending ideology” (71), “reinforce rather than undermine the identity between . . . ‘social places’ and ‘physical places’” (4). In the case of Kashmir, Kashmiriyat acts as the principle factor in stimulating the national consciousness of the populace based on communal identity and religious ideologies. Either the loss of Kashmiriyat or its existence provokes nationalism of different means. Through the instances that offer different perspectives on the politics of Kashmir, it is inferred that a locally constructed communal orientation called Kashmiriyat gains a political significance establishing a place-based politics in the territory.

Politics, a geographically rooted administrative orientation, is often demonstrated as an organisation that distributes resources among the community. However, the imbalance in the allocation of resources among the groups creates identity based on political alliances. P. G. Klandermans comments on the development of politicised identity as, “Identity politics had bred politicized identities. Politics is about the distribution of goods and bads in society. The allocation process almost inevitably turns into identity politics even if governments painstakingly try to not advantage or disadvantage the one group over the other” (1). This way, individuals and groups have their identities with different significance based on place, race, economy, religion and many more. The differential identities create divided opinions paving way for the politics based on identities implying to the prevalence of identity politics. Identity politics in Kashmir involves the communal distinction among the population. Certain indifferences in the social and political expressions based on the communal identity negatively affect the marginalised one. In case of Kashmir, both the communities are targetted for different concerns of the region. In the broader concern, identity in Kashmir involves the terms of national consciousness amidst the

populace. Agnew discusses about the nationalism and the consequences of resultant place-political identity: “The consumption side of nationalism involves the so-called psychic rewards that the act of supporting nationalism provides at the time of acting (identification with a community, patriotism, affirmation of identity, racial prejudice, etc.)” (138). Agnew’s views on the contribution of the act of support and dejection to nationalism in the formation of identity offer an insight into the place-based politics and the sequential victimization experienced by the Kashmiri populace based on identity. In the novel of Siddhartha Gigoo, the protagonist’s family experiences forced migration from Kashmir to Jammu. The exodus of Kashmir pandits, often called as “ethnic cleansing of Kashmir” (NHRC Annual Report 22) was imposed based on the identity of the victimised population—pandits. Sridar’s family and friends were under constant threat for life until they left their homeland. Pandits were terrorised for their identity rather than for their actions: “‘It is not about being innocent,’ a pandit neighbour argued. ‘Hira Lal was kidnapped because he is a Pandit and the militants suspected him to be an informer. For the Hizbul militants, all Pandits are informers’” (Gigoo 48). Pandits were eliminated from the valley not for their communal identity but for the communal identity that is politicized. The conversation between Lasa and his friends clearly expresses how pandits were tagged as informers in Kashmir during the time of insurgency and how they were victimised, merely, for their identity. Hira Lal was a respectable person in the locality of Nalle-e-Maer, who worked for the Border Security Force (BSF). His multiple layers of identity added to the reason for his kidnap by the militants. Though the character returned safe, the fear and terror that spread among the members of the community expose them to vulnerability and further to the state of victimisation. This instance emphasises the negative consequences of identity politics or politicised identity. P. G. Klandermans remarks on the politicisation of identity as

Individuals have multiple identities, identities that reflect in how they are socially embedded. Identity or issue politics make identities salient. Depending on the interaction with opponents and allies, a collective identity politicizes. Politicization of collective identity, supposedly, intensifies the impact of collective identity on action preparedness. Politicization of collective identity implies that the involvement of the wider social and political environment is sought. (16)

Though the term ‘Pandits’ refers to a community, politicisation of the identity adds multiple layers to it by referring them as informers of India, and by implying their allegiance to the nation state. The identity politics involved in the conflict, intensifies its impact by resulting in the displacement of the group. From the perspective of Kashmiri Muslims, who also experienced similar occurrences of identity politics but in different terms. In the 1990s Kashmir, the rise of insurgency and unrest in the region alarmed the need for law, order and security. The unrest in

the territory which is viewed from the lenses of geopolitics called for national attention too. As discussed earlier, from the words of Siddhartha Gigoo (32), about the prevalence of suspicion between the population, the Kashmiri Muslims were suspected for supporting the voices of seperatism and militancy. In that case, ordinary people are also subjected to suspicion and other surveillance strategies. Farah Bashir, in her narrative, documents the difficulties experienced by her family due to suspicion based on their identity:

Upon discovering the trapdoor on the floor – the *voggeh* – they went berserk! They ran amok with suspicion, as if they'd unearth a tunnel to the other side of Kashmir, in Pakistan. . . . They did not expect it to be an ordinary floor of an ordinary home with ordinary things. . . . Suspecting militants to be in hiding behind the gunny sacks, they poked the bayonets of their rifles into them. They slashed open the large rice bags, callously unleashing rivers of grains on to the part-stone, part-mud storeroom floor. (97)

This represents how a meaningless door in a house of a person gains significance merely out of the identity beholden by that resident. The repetition of the word 'ordinary' emphasises the indifferent approach of the security forces towards the family based on their identity. Heightened suspicion due to national emergency and security instigates aggressive surveillance measures towards the populace. This act of surveillance, though meant for the welfare of the people induces the negative aspect of victimisation. Here, Farah Bashir's family had their winter supplies in the *voggeh*, which were destroyed in the process of the search operation. Being innocent and not related to any unlawful activities, the family experiences second hand encounters of the insurgency. This instance portrays how an action of suspicion can bring economical, physical and social disadvantage to the victims. In both the cases, none of the characters propagate any ideologies or consents of affirmation towards any organisation, however, despite their innocence in the conflict concerns, these people encounter instances of dehumanisation purely based on their identity. The indirect victims of the conflict are constantly exposed to vulnerability and are victimised in the course.

Place-based Perspectives on Peace

The place-based attributes constructed by individuals as a community on subjective and social levels undergo a transformation with the influence of politics. In case of Kashmir, the local orientation of the place attains a national recognition, moreover, impacts the understanding of home as a place of resort and peace between the communities with the effect of politicised identity and place-based attributes. Kashmiri Pandits mark the valley as a lost homeland, and a place that holds their indigeneity, history and identity, whereas, for Kashmiri Muslims, the place represents their culture and livelihood embedded within it. With the influence of politics, the pre-existed cultural and social attributes to the place like Kashmiriyat, shifted to their currently

prevailing political significance. Similarly, the conflict situation has also developed different perspectives on peace among the communities. Johan Galtung views peace as “*negative peace* which is the absence of violence, absence of war — and *positive peace* which is the integration of human society” (Galtung 2). Pandits, the victims of forced displacement, who were terrorised to leave their homeland holds a negative attachment towards the place. Lasa’s emotions of resentment towards his homeland and the fear associated with it expresses vulnerable situation of the community, collectively:

‘Life is good at the camp. We have nothing to lose now. Nothing that can be snatched! Near our camp, there is a field where some residents grow vegetables. It resembles the kitchen garden we had in our house in Kashmir. The persons who tend the saplings seem very happy. I long for such a happy life.’ (Gigoo 143)

Here, Lasa expresses his displeasure in returning to his homeland. Though, Kashmir offers him with his lost economic and social capital, the negative attachment associated with the place pursues him to resent the idea. The negative attachment of the pandits towards Kashmir represents the dark nights of terror, fear and memories of their lost family members. Whereas, the act of reconstructing places that resemble Kashmir in the Jammu camp exhibits the positive attachment of pandits towards the place despite their traumatic experiences symbolising “*empathological places*” (Manzo 183). The sense of place and the desire for a violence free environment encourages the pandits to envision a peaceful life in returning to Kashmir Valley. Speaking of peace, while the pandits seek peace in returning to the valley, Farah Bashir and her family earn for a life outside Kashmir. The incessant surveillance and militant activities affect normalcy in every aspect of life, which include education, entertainment, social interaction, mobility and cultural activities. Being a young girl, Farah Bashir addresses her thoughts on simple aspects of life that take place outside Kashmir, “The newsprint smiles on the faces of the models in the advertisements made me wonder if I would be a different person altogether had I grown up away from a conflict zone, outside of a disputed territory” (122). According to the protagonist, the smiles and advertisements always raised questions on the lack of peaceful environment in Kashmir to experience such emotions. The newspapers and magazines of Kashmir often portrayed the events of conflict along with the related photographs of either people dead or empty streets with traces of unrest. Being raised in an environment that spreads terror and the resultant makes it impossible for her to experience the simple emotion, happiness. This explains the protagonist’s desire to experience an ordinary life outside Kashmir, especially, in a non-violent environment. The perspectives of Lasa and Farah Bashir sums up their contradictory, yet, similar visions on peace. As the characters represent collective population, the pandits view peace with their community’s return to Kashmir without any communal prejudices

and differences, whereas, the Muslims desire for life at Kashmir without terrorisation and militarisation. Though both the communities share the same space and experience similar encounters of violence, their visions of peace differ as the pandits living in Jammu expect a peaceful life at Kashmir and the Muslims desire an ordinary life outside. The communities that were spatially united, are divided due to the place-based politics in various aspects including their vision of peace. In both cases, the populace's sense of peace is related to their settlement in Kashmir, explaining the exclusive interdependency of social activities with place. With the influence of political expression formulated based on the geographical orientation, the region undergoes division in personal, communal, and platial levels.

Conclusion

The geographical inclination of Kashmir and the aspect of multiculturalism in the territory emphasise the role of politics in defining the relationship between society and place. The communal perspectives on Kashmir provide the dynamics of political influence in determining the place meaning, place identity and place attachment. The early place-based attributes of Kashmir solely depended on the cultural, communal and social aspects whereas the interference of place-based political expression added the space to mainstream national politics. This association of communities to place highlights the role of politics in changing a region-specific place meaning to an attribute that marks national politics. The interdependency of place and politics not only impacts the platial significance of Kashmir but politicises identity which eventually exposes the populace to victimisation. The development of place-based political identity demonstrates the prevalence of victimhood among both the pandits and Muslims of Kashmir. With this, the study expounds how place acts as a foundational element in all phases of human existence—vulnerability and peace building. By comparing the narratives, *The Garden of Solitude* and *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, the study discerns the role of politics in fractionalising the attitude of pandits and Muslim towards their place of existence, Kashmir, in terms of place-based attributes, identity and attachment.

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