Diaspora Formation and Ethnic National Mobilisation of Kashmiris in Britain: A Reflective Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary studies of ethnic, national and cultural minorities in Europe range in emphases from origin, history, migration, and global connection to local concerns. These categories are used in locating the influences on construction of the space for identification or belongingness of the minorities striving for coexistence in their acquired country or state.

While acknowledging the value of these theoretical perspectives emphasising the historical roots in investigating the diaspora formation, this paper will focus on how the concept of diaspora formation can be used to study the mobilisation of Kashmiris as ethnic/national entities within the South Asian cultural minorities in Britain. The focus will then be on the way the cultural minorities develop strategies to resist the processes of exclusion and marginalisation from the institutional life of the societies they choose to live in.

The shift from early policies of assimilation to multiculturalism, i.e., respect for diversity and choice, though successful in achieving some of its goals, removing barriers to socio-economic and political mobility of the majority of Asian cultural minorities, has resulted in separation and further exclusion of some of these minorities from the mainstream of the British society rather than producing integration. This is partially due to an uncontested acceptance of multiculturalism, rooted in cultural relativism, without any strategic concerns and resultant policies for democratic unity of diversity. In this context the analysis of the presence in the lives of and interaction with the politics of 'the homeland' by the Kashmiris settled in Britain will be of central significance. The links with and the influence (on the British Kashmiris) of the political movements of the state of Jammu Kashmir will be explored. Finally, an evaluation of the effects of radical Islam in the post-1979 globalised era will be examined.

The central arguments of the paper are that the contributory factors in religious radicalisation of the Kashmiri diasporas in Britain lie, firstly, in globalised effects of the creation and celebration of the phenomenon of 'Mujahidin' by the US and Britain, during the post-1979 Russian intervention in Afghanistan. The most significant casualties of this phenomenon were the democratic/secular forces in Pakistan and the state of Jammu Kashmir, which succumbed under the onslaught of religiously extremist forces financed and armed in Afghanistan/Pakistan by the US, Britain and Saudi Arabia; and the democratic/secular character of the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain. Secondly, the uncontested acceptance of multiculturalism rooted in cultural relativism, without any strategic understanding and resultant policies for democratic unity of diversity, has paved the way forward for a tiny minority of religious fanatics overshadowing the aspirations of the vast majority. The paper concludes with some considerations for democratic cohesion and unity of diversity.

Introduction

The presence of Kashmiris in the UK can be traced back to the turn of the 19th century as employees of British Shipping companies. Certainly, during the periods between the two great wars their presence can be traced as settlers rather than as transients, going through the passages of their service in the merchant navy. The Kashmiris are amongst the South Asian communities (with Bengalis and Punjabis) who 'discovered' the 'Walayat' first. The term Walayat is a reference used by Kashmiris as well as Punjabis, from the Indian Subcontinent, to their newfound country (the UK) as migrant workers. During the early part of the 2nd World War these migrants were entering Britain without any restriction, a status and resulting entitlement acquired as 'subjects' of the British Empire. The main route used was the entry into the service of the British merchant navy (Visram: 1986), which offered the opportunity and freedom of entry, exit or staying on for a short period to work and save money to return. The favoured ports of entry used are identified as Tilbury, London, Liverpool and South Shields, Newcastle. These early migrant workers were scattered mainly in the Midlands, the North of England and as far as Scotland. Unable to speak, read or write the language these earlier 'pioneers' were making their living as pedlars (selling provisions, draperies, lingerie etc,) working in such cities as Birmingham, Newcastle and Kirkcaldy (Scotland).

The reference to 'Walayat' (originating in Persian language, meaning 'country') by these early migrants, though it covers Britain as a whole, may have derived from the fact that some of these earlier entrants found dwellings in a small village/town near South Shields, called 'Blyth'. The bulk of migrants from the South Asian subcontinent, in particular of Kashmiri origin, arrived in the post 2nd world war period.

The number of Kashmiris Settled in the UK, according to latest surveys, is estimated at around 80% of approaching 1 million of those classified as Pakistanis amongst the South Asian minorities. Most of these have originated from Mirpur region, under the Pakistani part of the state, Jammu Kashmir, divided between India and Pakistan. A sizable number have also come with their families to the UK, after the 1989 armed conflict, in Indian-held Kashmir, mainly from Srinagar and surrounding areas.

The transitions from the male migrants, of the early settlers, to 'settled communities', denoting the composition of family with husband, wife and children rather than a single male worker, of the south Asians, particularly the Kashmiris, could be analysed in terms of undergoing /evolving through different stages of: 1. 'Differentiation' (due to cultural differences), producing shocks and cultural clashes; 2. 'Positive Self-reference', discovering anchoring points for belongingness and positive assertion of this self-discovery; 3.'Recognition by the other', denoting the acceptance by the host community.

Conversely, the transition through these stages can be analysed in terms of the interaction with the newly found environment producing the experiences of discrimination, marginalisation, oppression and disempowerment. Here, the reference is to the institutional discrimination by the British national and local state through racist immigration laws/rules and assimilationist policies in education and health. This negative/discriminatory exercise of power by the socio-economically and politically

dominant section of society resulted in producing reaction, or for the use of a better and clearer term, in Foucault's tradition, resistance (where there is power there is resistance). Coupled with this quest to 'belong somewhere' and preserve the 'heritage,' the South Asian minorities, and the Kashmiris in particular, embarked on campaigns demanding equality based on acceptance, thus entering the stage of 'positive self reference' emphasising the aspects of their identities based on perceived cultural ethnic and national heritage. Local and central government responded in developing a strategy of inclusion through policies for provisions based on diverse cultural needs resulting in a host of initiatives, such as 'Race' Relations Acts, Positive Action, 'Equal Opportunities' policies and programmes etc, finally paving the way for the third stage, of 'recognition by the Other', informed by the concept of 'multiculturalism' as the basis of the state/institutional policies.

This form of analysis uses the theoretical framework of Agency Structure, interacting in a given environment with strategies for power sharing and access to resources. This presupposes struggle and conflict among the diverse sections. It also assumes the role of an elite in mobilising the groups into political action, who act as the 'architects', 'entrepreneurs' of ethnic, national or cultural identities. It is here that the concept of Diaspora formation is used in this paper to analyse the mobilisation of the Kashmiris as a distinct national/ethnic entity amongst the cultural minorities of South Asian origin in Britain. The presence of the 'homeland' in the lives of and the interaction with it by the Kashmiris in Britain is of crucial significance in Diaspora formation.

A closer examination of this theoretical framework merits allocation of space here, before its application to our case study: the Kashmiris in Britain.

Theoretical Framework

The approach to investigate ethnic/national mobilisation, in this paper, is informed by a constructionist perspective. It therefore, by implication, views ethnic identity historically emerging/evolving in a given time and space, rather than 'pre-given'. This way of conceptualising ethnicity rejects 'primordialism', or 'essentialism.' On the contrary it views ethnic or other group identifications as the result of social constructions born out of dynamic interactions between diverse social groups. In this sense the process of ethnic construction is seen as mobile and moving, undergoing change rather than static and fixed in time and space. In using insights from the works of Barthes R, Therborn G, Hall S, Laclau and Mouffe, this paper conceptualises ethnicity in terms of a dialectical relationship between 'Self' and the 'Other' underlying the process of identification/construction. It deals with questions such as human subjectivity as well as collective actions. It examines the processes of formation of human subjectivity or subject positions, and practices and actions of these subjects based on their purported identities. It intends to explore the issues of collective/group identities and their political projects linked to their claims entailing specific identities. They are always in the process of being constructed, deconstructed and re-constructed. As such they are unsettled as well as settled. In addition, identities involve a plurality of 'subject positions' as well as contradictory elements. The presence of power relations in this process is conceived as an integral part of the process. Ethnicity thereby results from a process of boundary formation between 'us' and 'them'.

My focus will be on 'relatively settled' identities for the purpose of political struggles. I begin with the conceptual exposition, which will then be followed by commentary on the political mobilisation of the Kashmiri by elites espousing different ideological outlooks in Britain.

Identities are formed in a dialectical relationship involving the unity of opposites in a given social space. The presence of the 'other' in the space occupying the identification of the 'self' is a precondition. The 'other' has a primacy over the 'self' in the process of identification. In fact, without the presence, and recognition of the presence of the 'other', there is no possibility of the discovery of the 'self'. In other words, proclamation of us, for example, as Kashmiris, is inconceivable without acknowledging the existence of 'non-Kashmiris'. That is, the 'non-Kashmiris' are not only already present in that space where we find the necessity for our recognition as 'Kashmiris'; they (the 'non-Kashmiris') are also an inseparable part of 'us' – the 'Kashmiris'. The two opposites are united in the 'whole'.

The process of identity formation, according to Goran Therborn (95), may be seen as composed of three crucial moments: ***a) 'by differentiation', b) 'by the settlement of self-reference or self-image', and c) 'by recognition by others***.

Differentiation refers to the separation of the potential ***'me' or 'us'*** from the environment. In this process of differentiation there are two aspects: experience of an other, and discovery of a self. Differentiation is a social construction of a boundary. While inscribed in the dynamics of identity formation, it has no intrinsic basis within a system of social interaction. As a social construction of boundaries, differentiation, therefore, in modern societies must be seen as the outcome of competition among possible demarcations. The latter includes not only the delineation of different collectivities but also deciding the issue: group/community or individual/aggregate.

Like other constructions, collective identities have their architects, their entrepreneurs and their builders, who vary in their competitiveness in terms of their motives, ideological proclivities and political agendas. The prospects of the success or the failure of the identity projects and campaigns based on these depend on the scope, skills and the commitments of their architects and builders.

However, identity should not be conceived as just a blank negation of the other. Identity is also, normally, positive identification with somebody or something, after an awareness of separateness. This second aspect of identity formation is referred to as '***the settlement* of a *self-reference'*** or self-image (including the possibility of '***several settlements'***), used to cover the outcome of the process, whether by deliberate self-selection, deliberate other-socialisation or by some subconscious process of adaptation. Finally, ***self-identity*** depends upon the **other,** not only in separating from him/her or them, but also upon being recognised by the Other. '***Recognition'*** is the third crucial process of identity formation.

Moreover, these opposites instead of, ideally, forming the '***relationship of equivalence'*** result into that of ***'hierarchy'*** and inequality in society, based on religious, class, ethnic, gender, disability, and sexual divisions. It is during the process of the production of the

conditions of identity formation that the relation of dominance and oppression and inequality takes over. For example, the fact that the Kashmiris and the Muslim communities (like women and Gay rights people before them), are demanding equal rights and recognition as distinct ethnic and religious groups, indicates that they are discriminated against and marginalised, in Britain, from having equal access to the resources of our society. And their demands articulate the need for equal recognition with equal rights as those of other sections/groups. What follows is an exploration, from this theoretical perspective, of the political struggle of the Kashmiri settlers in Britain, influencing, as a result, the processes of ethnic/national identification and diaspora formation.

The evolution of Kashmiris as a Diaspora Community in Britain

The term diaspora is a contested one. Scholarly disagreement exists as to its precise meaning and application, with emphases ranging from historical to modern and transient to settled diaspora communities. The central features common in these variants are focusing on studies of sizable migrant communities settled in host countries with regular and dynamic socio-economic, cultural and political links. These cross national and global networks established between these co-ethnic groups and the countries of their origin not only provide these communities with a strong sense of identity, through belonging to their roots/homelands, they also become a major source of political and material support for the ethnic/national movements (in homelands) in their aspired causes. These mobilisations of resources in the service of their ethnic/national causes, in turn, are subject to successful mobilisation of ethnic/national minorities, settled in the host countries, by their elites. This process of mobilisation undergoes change in time and space.

The Kashmiri community, like any other newcomer to Britain has undergone rites of passage of identification processes during the last 50 years from such categorisations as 'male migrant workers' to 'coloured immigrants', 'black and Asian minority', 'minority ethnic group', 'Pakis' and 'Kashmiris'. Each of these terms indicates an active or passive involvement of either the 'Self' (the diversity of Asian settlers) or the 'Other' (the variety of central/local state institutions, political, ideological parties/groups).

The post 2nd World War period witnessed an increase in the inflow of migrants from Afro-Caribbean Islands and the Indian subcontinent. The active recruitment of cheap labour to fill the needs of the expanding economy at the time of reconstruction immediately after the war was followed by the closed-door policy in the 60s by the British state. A variety of immigration laws designed to control and limit the inward migration, specifically from ex-African/Asian colonies produced the dual effects of 'racialised categorisation' of the new settlers and discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion and oppression. The culturally blind policies of assimilation produced reaction and resistance resulting in activities in self-organisation and mobilisation.

During the decades of 60s and 70s the Asian and Afro Caribbean Communities grew stronger in self-organisation (Campaign against Racist Laws, Black People Alliance. Indian Workers' Association, Pakistani Workers' Association, Kashmiri Workers' Association and Bangladeshi Workers' Association) and put pressure on central and local governments for policy changes.

The Workers' Associations of South Asian origin, in particular The Kashmiri Workers' Association, during this period, were campaigning for equal rights and equal access to resources in Britain as citizens. Though organised and identified in terms of the country of origin, they were strongly allied in the purpose of defending the collective interests of all involved. The source of their recruitment was the workplace. Most of the members were employed with membership of a trade union. The leadership of these associations was of radical socialist ideology. This brought them closer to the British labour movement, predominantly English in ethnic origin.

Despite the prevalent racism in the trade unions in the U.K., the Workers' Association did enjoy support from and solidarity with the Trade unions. In this sense, the interests and identity based on these interests proved an overarching concern providing the sources of unity and solidarity amongst the ethnically diverse identities. In other words, class, 'race' and ethnicity converged at this conjuncture. In addition to campaigning against racism and fascism, the Kashmiri secular nationalist organisations such as United Kashmir Liberation Front (UKLF) and Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKPF) also mobilised the Kashmiri community in support of trade union causes/disputes (participation in national demonstrations against the Tory government's Industrial Bill in 1970, participation in Greenwich strike and pickets in mid-70s). It is important to note the role of the 'architects' and the 'mobilisers' of these identities during this stage. Most of the elite from minority ethnic communities aspired to secular/democratic/egalitarian ethos and were involved in the trade union and labour movements. The majority of them supported the Labour party electorally and were content with being represented at the parliament by English MPs. The sectional (ethnic) identity got submerged in a collective/broader (class) identity at this stage.

The leading organisations of the Kashmiri community, during this phase, were though primarily preoccupied with the strategies to counter and combat racism, discrimination and oppression of the dominant section in Britain. Some of these were also influenced by and organised around the national question of the Jammu Kashmir state divided between India and Pakistan. The United Kashmir Liberation Front, formed in 1969; The Jammu Kashmir Plebiscite Front, formed since the 1950s (both merged into Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, in 1977) were the leading political organisations mobilising the Kashmiris on a nationalist agenda. The national identity in relation to India and Pakistan was an integral part of the Kashmiri ethnic identity in the British context. The elite and the architects of the nationalist identity and programme espoused a democratic secular ethos and ideology. As a result, the goals and political ideology brought them closer to the democratic forces in the mainstream of the British society. It also provided the context of social interaction between them.

The forcibly divided state of Jammu Kashmir between India and Pakistan, and its sovereign status being usurped by the two, provided an anchoring space for their national aspiration and the political mobilisation of the Kashmiris in Britain. The presence of a strong secular nationalist movement inside Jammu Kashmir striving for the reunification and independence of the state ensured a continuous link with their expatriates in the UK, thus providing the material conditions for diaspora formation. A lost homeland and the state are the reference point for and the ultimate object of the

source of belongingness for the Kashmiri migrant. The desire to maintain links with it and ensure its safe and secure maintenance also provide a secure sense of self-identity.

The dual mobilisation of the Kashmiri community during 60s and 70s to resist and combat discrimination in Britain and gain political support for the cause of independence for their divided state can, therefore, be identified as the **'self- reference' or 'settlement stage'** in the process of identity construction or identification, producing multiple identities. The practical manifestation of which can be described in terms of the emergence of a host of social cultural and political organisations, (from funeral associations to education welfare organisations, etc.) demanding culturally sensitive/relevant provision of services in housing, education and welfare domains, on the one hand. On the other, the maintenance of strong social, cultural and economic links with the country of origin becomes an integral part of political activities of the Kashmiri community. The mobilisation of political support for their national cause was also an important part of the Kashmiris' activities during this period, which witnessed some form of unity between and amongst migrants and host political groups.

The celebration of Diversity and the Emergence of Identity Politics

This consistent struggle for acceptance through self-organisation provided confidence in self perception and self reliance on the one hand and, on the other, **'recognition by the other'.** This produced a response from the state, taking initiatives at the central and local levels. The legislative initiatives such as The Race Relations Act, 1976, with sections 35-37 and 76 recommended the local authorities to take 'positive' actions to improve community relations and proportionate representation of ethnic minorities in employment, education and health institutions. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and Community Relations Councils (CRCs) were set up under this legislation to monitor and implement the Law. The local government Act, 1968 also provided the local education authorities with extra resources to meet the needs of minorities. For example, section 11 entitled the education authorities to spend 70% of the expenditure of the special courses designed to overcome the language deficiencies in the children of Asian settlers. The policy measure of these legal instruments resulted in services responding to the cultural and religious needs/aspirations of the ethnic minorities, thus giving rise and expression, during the 80s, to the politics of 'identity and celebration of diversity' incorporated in the concept of 'multiculturalism'. This was translated into policy provisions for minorities by central and local government. The London Metropolitan Authority, the Greater London Council (GLC), led the initiatives in this direction.

The aftermaths of civil disturbances in the early 80s in Brixton, Bristol, Birmingham and Liverpool resulted in the Scarman Report with recommendations for the police and local authorities to take positive measures to overcome institutional discrimination. This provided the added impetus for an equality drive based on 'difference'. Thus, the setting up of the black caucuses in the trade unions and the labour party, and the increase in the creation of 'race' equality units in the local authorities can be seen as the arriving home of the 'ethnic minorities' - a period reflecting self-confidence and a sense of achievement, which did not last long.

The drive for recognition of the 'difference' was also producing internal division amongst the ethnic minorities on the one hand, and on the other, drawing them further apart from the mainstream of the British society. Demographic changes such as exclusive or predominantly ethnic districts, schools with exclusive or dominant mono-ethnic rather than multiethnic populations, in Bradford, Burnley, Manchester and Birmingham are the negative outcomes of the polices and initiatives driven by the ideas/ policies of 'celebration of diversity' under 'multiculturalism'.

The rise of religiously and culturally based organisations and mobilisation of the communities around these identities resulted in disputes, conflicts around the control of mosques, for example in the Muslim community. Luton, Bradford, London are the well-known cases. The attempt by Birmingham City Council to elect a formal Consultative Forum representative of its Ethnic Minorities in a plenary session in 1986, for example, resulted in a split between its Afro-Caribbean and Asian delegates as well as between Muslims and Hindus amongst the Asian representatives. This trend of separatism and the divisions based on it have since escalated further. Thus, the quest for recognition of 'difference' and acceptance based on it, rather than producing social cohesion and integration, has brought seclusion, separation and further marginalisation of sections of ethnic minorities from the mainstream of British society. The culmination of this trend has resulted in violent expression of difference (particularly affecting some disgruntled members of Muslim communities who were won over by terrorist organisations) beyond the bounds of the British state. The reference here is to 9/11 and 7/7 and 21/7 events in the US, Britain and elsewhere, where some of the participants in these acts of violence against innocent people were British citizens of Kashmiri origin.

The traditional analyses and explanations pointing out the prevalence of racism in general, and in particular the 'flight of the indigenous' from the areas and housing estates absorbing ethnic minorities, of this demographic separation producing ethnic ghettos with claims of 'ethnic absolutism' resulting in social exclusion are inadequate. There is a need for re-examining the concept of 'multiculturalism' capable of providing a contingently arrived at value consensus, setting the boundaries for the coexistence of diversity within unity in a plural democracy like Britain. This would presuppose the engagement and involvement with the inner space of the 'cultural diversity', in terms of ensuring that its contents are designed to produce unity rather than separation. The concept of multiculturalism and its policy ideals, in Britain, as practised since the 80s betray the 'absolute relativism' inherent in the concept. It therefore needs re-evaluation.

Mobilisation of Kashmiri Diasporas

The Kashmiri Community settled in UK, Europe and elsewhere has been affected by the national political struggle in the 'homeland'. Though it has been involved, making positive contributions and inroads in the institutional life of the British society (representation in local councils nationally), it also suffered with internal divisions. This fragmentation is visible in its mobilisation around National Identity. The political struggle in Jammu Kashmir around the national question has historically been of a secular nature and led by secular forces based on the ethos of democratic pluralism. The mobilisation of the Kashmiri Diaspora in Britain was also led by the elite aspiring to and representing this secular tradition. The rise of global religious movements, radical

Islamist forces and the aftermaths of the 'Afghan Jihad', and the post-80s armed conflict in Jammu Kashmir, have transformed the secular nature of the indigenous Kashmiri nationalist movement to religious extremism taken over by an exported version of 'Jihad' by outside forces. The most contributory factors in religious radicalisation of the Kashmiri diasporas in Britain lie, firstly, in globalised effects of the creation and celebration of the phenomenon of 'Mujahidin' by the US and Britain during the post-1979 Russian intervention in Afghanistan. For example, it is well documented that the US and Saudi Arabia provided financial means, military training and supply of armaments to a section of radical Islamists within Afghanistan to fight the Russian-backed secular Government in Afghanistan from various bases in Pakistan. (Some of the earlier groups of fighters were trained in Scotland by the British military elite force SAS). This attracted a large number of 'foreign' fighters with global Jihad ideologies. Thus, the phenomenon of 'Mujahidin' was created in discourse and practices to counter the spectre of communism in South Asia. This also coincided with a military coup in Pakistan, and a programme of Islamisation of the Pakistani state and society ensued under the new military regime. The military regime opened the floodgates for religious organisations to be involved in civil society initiatives as well as participation in political processes. The opening of Madrasas (religious schools) on a vast scale with financial support from Saudi Arabia became the foundation for the long term aims of the religious groups in Pakistan. The resultant militant Islamist Jihadist groupings like Jamat-e-Islami, Lashkar-E-Tayibah, Jaish-E-Mohammed and Sippah-E-Sahabah came into being in Pakistan with open advocacy for the revival of the Islamic Khilafat globally with violent means. It may be pointed out here that the notion of Islamic state these groups propagated is of an over-centralised, authoritarian and undemocratic character. In fact, the very concept of sovereignty in their version of Islam transcends human bounds and resides in a metaphysical realm of the Almighty God whose true representatives on this life are the Mullahs (the clergy). It is therefore not surprising that the financial and material support by Saudi Arabia, the US and Pakistan for anti-Russian resistance in Afghanistan was passed onto Jamat-e-Islami of Afghanistan rather than more liberal Muslim organisations aspiring to Sufi traditions.

The most significant casualties of these phenomena were the democratic and secular forces in Pakistan and the state of Jammu Kashmir, which succumbed under the onslaught of religiously fanatic forces financed and armed in Afghanistan/Pakistan by the US, Britain and Saudi Arabia. Having declared 'victory' in Afghanistan and established a radical Islamist State under Taliban, the Jihadist forces wanted to globalise their ideological struggle to the rest of the sub-continent. The spill-over of the Jihadi forces in Afghanistan was then exported to Jammu Kashmir during the late 80s and early 90s under the direct control and supervision of the then Pakistani military and intelligence services.

The national democratic struggle in Jammu Kashmir was transformed into an armed conflict, which was later taken over by these outside armed groups and was thus portrayed as a religious conflict. This directly affected the democratic/secular character of Kashmiri Diasporas in Britain creating divisions amongst its ranks. In addition, the wider contexts of Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Bosnia and Chechnia can be identified as contributing factors in the fragmentation of the Kashmiri Diaspora in Britain. Closer

examination is merited here of the mobilisation of the Kashmiri Diaspora by the elite having conflicting interests based on their diverse identities.

In recent years a frequent voice for identity campaigns, in Britain, has been that of the Kashmiri community. The other community that is striving for self-identification is that of the Muslims in Britain. It is pertinent to draw the distinction here. The question of the Kashmiri and the Muslim identity, though it points to some shared elements in their identification, entails distinction and diversity between the two. While the demands of the two communities, converge at some levels, nevertheless their objectives and ultimate goals do point to distinct and diverse concerns.

The movement for the recognition of Kashmiri identity, in Britain, for example, has as its objectives the aspirations and goals of being treated as distinct and equal group/ community as others in British society. This is also intrinsically linked with, and, in fact, stems from a wider concern, for the recognition as a national entity within the context of South Asia and, more specifically, in the Indian sub-continent. In this respect its aspirations are for the national emancipation from the occupation of India and Pakistan, and restoration of the lost sovereignty of their former princely State Jammu Kashmir. It is, therefore, the representatives of the secular national movement inside Jammu Kashmir whose ideology of nation and nation-state is based on pluralism and democracy. This wider aspiration is inclusive in spirit and character incorporating multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic entities of Jammu Kashmir society. In other words, it embraces in its aspiration all the sections, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs of the Jammu Kashmir society.

The movement for the recognition and representation of the rights of the Muslims in Britain is, by implication striving for equality for British Muslims and ‘justice’ for the Muslims worldwide (particularly in Iraq, Palestine and Chechnya etc.). Therefore, the aspirations and the goals of the two must not be conflated and confused.

In any plural society different social groups have the right to campaign for recognition of their social identity, and they have a legitimate right to strive for equal citizenship rights. These struggles for equality in democratic societies are conducted with full commitment to a democratic ethos and adherence to the collective values of that society. Moreover, these struggles are not waged in isolation, resulting in ghettoisation of the campaigning groups, but rather with the support of allies from other minority groups as well as from the progressive sections of the mainstream of the society and the state. All the political movements for social/political rights in Britain, for example, in modern times, bear witness to adherence to the above outlined principles.

But the manner in which the representation of the cause of these aforementioned sections is carried out creates confusion and concern in various informed circles. Some of this representation and related demands (introduction of Sharia law or establishing a Khilafat) indicate separatist tendencies and pose a threat to the secular democratic foundation of British society. Thus, it is of crucial importance that the needs for the articulation of diversity with democratic unity are articulated and upheld.

It needs to be borne in mind, here, that the concept of rights goes hand in hand with that of responsibilities. Therefore, it has to be recognised that the demands for equal rights need to be conducted with a commitment to the discharging of responsibilities, as citizens, in a democratic society like ours. The UK society and state are constituted by democratic values. With all the failings of liberal democracy based on the free market economy, it still provides a space for peaceful co-existence of diversity in a democratic unity. The only way diversity can be articulated in a unity is through adherence to collective, democratic values. The entire minority rights movements in Britain (women, disability, sexuality, etc.), for example, not only have demonstrated their commitment to the democratic values of the collective, they have also benefited, through their practices, by registering the support and solidarity of the progressive sections of the society. There are lessons for the Muslim and Kashmiri 'Rights Campaigns' in this precedent.

The problem, however, with a Muslim 'Rights Campaign' lies in this articulation. In demanding equal rights for the Muslims in Britain, some of their representatives blame the other minorities for the plight of the Muslims world over. For example, such groups as al-Muhajiroun (the Emigrants) and Hizib-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), which operates and recruits at the universities and colleges, blame the Jews for the global conspiracy against the Muslims. They also are anti-gay and anti-women with an authoritarian outlook, and religious extremism verging on fascism. The other outspoken voice for the Muslim cause within the Kashmiri community is that of the Labour party appointed Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, who supposedly represents the voice of the moderate Muslim majority in Britain. Even he sends out conflicting messages at times, blaming British Indians for taking over certain institutions and, therefore, holding them responsible for the causes of inequality of the Muslims or their marginalisation. Secondly, by declaring their support for the oppressed Muslims in other parts of the world they fail to draw a distinction between just and unjust and peaceful and violent means used by some Muslims. On both accounts they betray ignorance on matters of principles and lack of strategic thinking.

On the first point, it is not the other minority groups such as the Jews, Hindus, Sikhs or others, who are the cause of inequality for the Muslims in Britain. Rather it is the socio-political, economic and cultural institutions of our British society, which construct and constitute the relations of dominance and subordination. It is in these sites of structural spaces where group identities and unequal relations between these are produced.

On the second point, declaring support for and campaigning to register solidarity against the oppression of the Muslims in other part of the world, they do have a just cause. However, a distinction needs to be made between those who pursue their causes by fair and peaceful means, and those who use violence in an indiscriminate manner. For example, lending support to those fanatic Muslim armed groups, such as Lashkar-E-Tayibah, Jaish-E-Mohammed, and Sippah-E-Sahabah, who are involved in mindless sectarian killings in Pakistan and export this bloodthirsty violence in Jammu Kashmir in the name of Jihad cannot be justified under any cause.

Those aforementioned “advocates” of the Muslim cause in British society, who also complained and campaigned against the British Government’s decision to ban these groups in the UK, do not represent the majority of Kashmiri populace or mainstream

Muslim viewpoints in Britain. The hollowness of their moral and intellectual stance becomes so obvious, particularly, when the present government of Pakistan not only has declared the above extreme Islamist groups illegal in Pakistan and is claiming to stamp them out. It also has made illegal any recruitment or advocacy by these groups operating abroad. These groups, though claiming to be engaged in Jihad, are rather representatives of an outmoded, mediaeval, fanatic and narrow version of Islam.

The celebrated and respected Imam Bukhari, the prominent leader of two hundred million Muslims of India and the Imam of Delhi Mosque, is not alone in condemnation of such a totalitarian and fascistic version of Islam. There are many moderate and elevated voices from liberal Muslims of Pakistan who fully support the measures taken by the Pakistan government to root out this menace endangering the whole of Pakistani society. There are equally prominent and celebrated Muslim voices, representing the liberal majority of Muslim community in Britain, who support the British government in its attempts to outlaw the terrorist version of Jihad.

It is pertinent to be reminded, here, that the struggle in Jammu Kashmir is that of a national emancipation of thirteen million inhabitants of the State - who form a plural society - against a forcible division of their sovereign state and its occupation by their neighbours. It is a political rather than a religious struggle.

The Kashmir identity campaign in Britain represents this political sentiment for the multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic diversity of Jammu Kashmir society. Its struggle for the recognition of its identity as an ethnic group/ community in Britain is intertwined with its national identity in the Sub-continent. The central question of principle and strategy for advocates of this identity campaign, therefore, is to uphold the values of democracy to articulate its demands for unity here in Britain as well as in Jammu Kashmir. The recognition by and support of the 'Other' - the oppressed communities as well as the progressive forces here in Britain and in South Asia - for the recognition of its cause as a legitimate one, then, becomes a precondition for the legitimacy of its claims. It needs to register the solidarity of the 'Other' by extending to it the same recognition and support. These are the ways of articulation of the difference and diversity with the democratic plurality for the cohesion and maintenance of a democratic whole.

The aforementioned self-appointed advocates or 'hand picked' representatives of the Muslim rights, in Britain, demonstrate a lack of tolerance, pluralism and democratic ethos. They advocate fanaticism, sectarianism and totalitarianism. This derives from their version of religion as an absolute truth negating the truth of the 'other'. Such ideology, and practices based on it, not only are incompatible with the ideals of plural democracy, they produce totalitarian systems capable of elimination, known as 'the final solution', or 'ethnic cleansing', of the 'difference'.

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An incomplete section is attached – more references to follow

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