

***Azadi!*: Syed Ali Shah Gilani and the Movement for Political Self-Determination for Jammu and Kashmir**

By Yoginder Sikand

Introduction

Not many Kashmiri Muslims might share his particular hardliner version of Islam or his passionate advocacy of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, but, still, 82-year old Syed Ali Shah Geelani commands widespread respect among his people for his firm stance on azadi or freedom of Jammu and Kashmir from Indian rule, a stance that he has never wavered from. Geelani's popularity among vast numbers of Kashmiri Muslims rests principally in the fact that he is seen as one Kashmiri leader who has never compromised with India, and who has had to face considerable personal privation, including long bouts of imprisonment, for denouncing what he, like many Kashmiris, regard as India's illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and its violation on a massive scale of human rights in the region.

With Kashmir up in flames again, Geelani's word is now almost law to the intrepid Kashmiri youth out in the streets defying the might of the Indian state with stones. The overwhelming response to his calls for strikes and demonstrations that have rocked the Kashmir Valley for several weeks now in protest against the killing of youths by Indian armed forces clearly indicates that Geelani is back at the centre-stage of Kashmir politics. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that he is regarded by many Kashmiri Muslims as the unparalleled icon of their resistance to Indian rule.

Geelani is one of the few Kashmiri leaders to have written extensively on the Kashmir conflict, authoring over a dozen books (all in Urdu) on different dimensions of the issue.¹ A collection of press statements, letters to Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers and other leaders (many written during long bouts in various Indian prisons), interviews given to Kashmiri, and, especially, Pakistani journalists, and public addresses, Geelani's *Kashmir: Nava-e Hurriyat* ('Kashmir: Voice of Freedom') deals with various aspects of the Kashmir issue as he views them.²

Based on an analysis of *Nava-e Hurriyat*, this article lays out Geelani's understanding of the genesis of the Kashmir conflict, his critique of Indian rule, his advocacy for Kashmir's accession

¹ I have discussed some of these writings in my essay, 'For Islam and Kashmir: The Prison Diaries of Sayyed 'Ali Gilani of the Jama'at-i-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol.18, no.2, 1998, pp.2413-45.

² Syed Ali Shah Geelani, *Kashmir: Nava-e Hurriyat*, Mizan Publications, Srinagar, 1995. The book, written in Urdu, was originally published in Pakistan by the Islamabad-based Institute of Policy Studies, an affiliate of the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan.

to Pakistan, his opposition to independence for Jammu and Kashmir or the ‘third option’, his understanding of the relationship between Islam, politics and the state, and his views on jihad, nationalism and inter-community relations within what he deems as the normative Islamic paradigm—all issues very central to the ongoing conflict in and over Jammu and Kashmir. The article also discusses a central paradox: If, as numerous surveys indicate, only a minority, and a diminishing one at that, of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir support the state’s accession to Pakistan, why is it that Geelani, who has consistently advocated the state’s merger with Pakistan, continues to be regarded as the icon of the Kashmiri Muslim resistance movement? Related to this is another paradox: If many, if not most, Kashmiri Muslims, do not agree with, or even vehemently oppose, the Islamist version of Islam, as represented by Geelani and the Jamaat-e Islami, what accounts for Geelani’s charismatic appeal among many non-Jamaat Kashmiri Muslims?

Geelani on the Genesis of the Kashmir Conflict

Throughout the book Geelani reminds us that the roots of the Kashmir conflict lie in the Partition of India, when the then Indian princely states, which numbered almost 600, were given the choice of deciding between joining India or Pakistan. In making this decision, the rulers of these states, of which Jammu and Kashmir was one of the largest, were to be guided principally by the wishes of the majority of their subjects, which, in turn, were seen to be determined by their religion. Thus, if the majority of the population of a princely state were Muslim, the state was seen to be rightfully part of Pakistan, while states with a Hindu-majority were to join India. In addition, the decision of these states was also to be determined by other factors, such as geographical contiguity with either India or Pakistan, as the case might be, the direction of the flow of rivers that ran through them, and the presence of routes connecting them with either India or Pakistan.

On all these counts, Geelani argues, Jammu and Kashmir ought to have acceded to Pakistan. It had an overwhelming Muslim-majority that enjoyed not just religious, but close historical, economic and cultural ties with the inhabitants of Pakistan. The only land route connecting the state with the outside world throughout the year led to Pakistan. The rivers that passed through the state all flowed into Pakistan. All the factors that needed to be taken into account in determining the princely states’ future political status—accession to India or Pakistan—therefore, logically demanded, Geelani stresses, that Jammu and Kashmir join Pakistan.³ Hence, he writes, India’s repeated claims that the state is an ‘unbreakable part’ (*atoot ang*) of India are without any merit whatsoever.⁴

³ Ibid., p.61.

⁴ Ibid., p.15.

Further building his argument that Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir should have formed part of Pakistan, rather than what he calls ‘Hindu’ India, Geelani claims that Muslims are a community/nation (*qaum*) wholly separate from the Hindus. He equates India with Hindus, overlooking the fact that India’s Muslim population outnumbers that of Pakistan. He projects Muslims (as he does Hindus) as a monolithic, homogenous community, defined by a singular interpretation of religion, and bereft of cultural, ethnic, and other divisions. He depicts Muslims as radically different from Hindus, and as allegedly having nothing at all in common with them. ‘It is absolutely true’, he wrote in a letter written in 1994 to the then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, ‘that the Muslims are a complete separate nation on the basis of their religion, culture, civilisation, customs and practices, and thought. Their nationalism and the foundation of their unity cannot be based on their homeland, race, language, colour or economic system. Rather, the basis of their unity is Islam and Islam alone, and their belief that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah’s prophet’. Hence, he insisted, Hindus and Muslims were ‘two different nations’⁵, implying, possibly, that they were simply incapable of living together amicably. That is why, he argued, the Muslim League had demanded, and had won, a separate Muslim Pakistan based on this ‘two nation theory’. This is also why, he suggested, Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir must be a part of Pakistan, rather than India.

With Muslims and Hindus being seen as by definition opposed to each other on virtually every count, Geelani argues that the logic of the ‘two nation theory’, which he claims even Hindu leaders had finally accepted by 1947, demands that Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir should become part of Pakistan. On the other hand, he suggests, if the state were to be part of India, it would be tantamount to a virtual apostasy for the Kashmiri Muslims, who would, so he claims, have to give up their nationality, based on Islam, for one based on Indian-ness, which he implicitly equates with Hinduism. Given the underlying Hindu framework on which Indian nationalism is based, Geelani seems to argue, this would result in the Kashmiri Muslims losing their sense of separate identity based on Islam. Accession to India would result, he claims, in the Kashmiri Muslims having to live perpetually under ‘Hindu slavery’.⁶

In order to further reinforce his argument for the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan, Geelani indicates what he regards as the inconsistencies, indeed contradictions, in India’s stance on Kashmir by comparing its policy with regard to two other erstwhile princely states in 1947 which, like Jammu and Kashmir, were ruled by princes whose religion was different from that of the majority of their subjects: Hyderabad and Junagadh. Both these states had a Hindu-majority but were under Muslim rulers. Both the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Junagadh chose to join Pakistan, but India protested, arguing that this would be a violation of the wishes of the majority of their subjects, who were Hindus, and that, therefore, both the states were logically part of India. With regard to these two states, Geelani points out, India’s claims rested in the

⁵ Ibid., p.14.

⁶ Ibid., p.13.

argument that the factor of paramount significance in their deciding between India and Pakistan was the religion of the majority of their subjects. That being the case, Geelani contends, India's claims on Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir are illegitimate and clearly contradict the principle it adopted in order to annex Hyderabad and Junagadh.⁷

Challenging the Claim of Kashmir's Accession to India

Despite what Geelani argues was the compelling case for Jammu and Kashmir joining Pakistan, events dictated otherwise. Geelani's description of critical events in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the Partition provide an interesting and compelling counterpoise to the official Indian narrative, highlighting various aspects that are ignored in the latter in order to build the case for justifying Indian control over Jammu and Kashmir. By excavating numerous developments that are conspicuously absent in the official Indian narrative—the slaughter of tens of thousands of Muslims in Jammu by Hindu mobs, anti-Muslim Hindu chauvinist groups and the Hindu Maharaja's forces, the perceived Hindu and anti-Muslim nature of the Indian state, the pathetic conditions of India's Muslims, and India's refusal to act on its promises to the international community to allow the Kashmiris to determine their own political future—Geelani's counter-narrative brings out vividly the underlying roots of the pervasive and continuous opposition to Indian rule among many Kashmiri Muslims.

Geelani argues that the 'Hindu' rulers of the newly-independent Dominion of India plotted to prevent what he regards as the natural and logical accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. To begin with, he writes, they prevailed upon the departing British to have the district of Gurdaspur, in present-day Indian Punjab, to be given to India although it then had a Muslim-majority and, therefore, ought to have become part of Pakistan. The reason for this departure from the logic that informed the partition of the Punjab was, he argues, to provide India land access to Jammu and Kashmir, the road to Jammu leading through Gurdaspur.⁸ Then, in July 1947, a month before the Partition, he goes on, the Hindu Maharaja of Jammu, in league with Hindu chauvinist forces, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, ordered the disarming of all Muslim soldiers and policemen in the state and confiscated all weapons owned by Muslims. The Maharaja, Geelani relates, 'left no stone unturned in order to suppress and destroy the Muslim-majority in Jammu and Kashmir'.⁹ Shortly after, on the orders of the Maharaja, the state's army, working in tandem with these viscerally anti-Muslim Hindu groups, set about slaughtering Muslims in the Jammu province on a vast scale. In this orgy of violence, tens of thousands of Muslims lost their lives, and many more were forced to flee across the border to Pakistan. Geelani notes that even as this dance of naked violence was taking place in Jammu, calm prevailed in the Muslim-dominated Kashmir Valley, where the small Hindu

⁷ Ibid., p.15.

⁸ Ibid., p.17.

⁹ Ibid., p.16.

minority remained unaffected by the horrors of the Partition, being protected by their Muslim neighbours.

Following the disarming of the state's Muslim population, who, for over a century, had labored under heavy disabilities under Hindu Dogra rule, and the large-scale violence directed against them, Geelani writes, Muslim tribesmen from Pakistan's northern regions entered Kashmir in order, as he puts it, 'to save their Kashmiri Muslim brethren'. In contrast to Indian authorities and scholars, who term this as a 'tribal invasion' and as having been motivated by the lust for loot and plunder, Geelani describes this armed incursion as a well-meaning response of the tribesmen to the plight of 'their oppressed Kashmiri Muslim brothers'.¹⁰ Indian accounts focus on widespread destruction wrought by the tribesmen, including rape, robbery and murder, but this is completely absent in Geelani's account. Presumably, this is too embarrassing for Geelani to admit, or else he considers the Indian account to be false and motivated. Indian accounts portray the tribesmen as having been mobilized, armed and facilitated by the Pakistani army. In contrast, Geelani sees them as spontaneously rushing to the rescue of the beleaguered Kashmiri Muslims. While Indian sources attribute the failure of the tribesmen to capture Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, to their being diverted by engaging in widespread loot and mayhem, Geelani claims that this was because 'they were not organised' and that, therefore, 'their actions were not effective'.¹¹

In the wake of the tribal incursion/invasion, Geelani writes, the Maharaja fled Srinagar and headed to Jammu, appealing to India for help. India agreed to do so only if the Maharaja acceded to India. Thereupon, the Maharaja is said to have signed the Instrument of Accession, but whether this actually happened, so Geelani claims, is 'doubtful'.¹² Even if one supposes that the Instrument of Accession were at all genuine, he says, it was, in any case, 'conditional', 'temporary' and 'limited'. Even Indian leaders agreed, he relates, that this was a stop-gap measure and that once peace were restored in the state the people of Jammu and Kashmir would be given the right to determine their political future through a free and fair plebiscite. In other words, he contends, the Instrument of Accession did not mean that Jammu and Kashmir had become an integral and permanent part of India. Further, Geelani argues, the Maharaja's decision to join India did not represent the desire of most Kashmiri Muslims, who, if given the chance, would have opted for Pakistan instead.¹³

Reminding his readers of undeniable historical facts that the Indian establishment might no doubt now find embarrassing, Geelani notes that it was India—and not Pakistan, nor the people of Jammu and Kashmir—that took the Kashmir issue to the United Nations.¹⁴ In late 1948 and then

¹⁰ Ibid., p.132.

¹¹ Ibid., p.132.

¹² Ibid., p.61.

¹³ Ibid., p.15.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.51.

again in early 1949, the UN Security Council passed two resolutions, which were accepted both by India and Pakistan, calling for the settlement of the Kashmir conflict through a free and fair plebiscite in which the people of the state would be allowed to decide for themselves to join either India or Pakistan. Geelani points out that Indian leaders repeatedly issued statements wherein they promised to hold such a plebiscite. He quotes several public statements of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in this regard, including one in which Nehru is said to have solemnly declared, 'with the whole world as witness' that India would uphold its promise to the people of Jammu and Kashmir of allowing a plebiscite to choose between India and Pakistan, and that India 'would certainly fulfill this promise even if the people voted against India'. If the majority of the people of the state voted against India, Nehru added, India would be saddened but would still accept the peoples' verdict.¹⁵

Despite this, Geelani notes, in 1954 India's rulers began singing a different tune, renegeing on their promise to the international community to grant the people of Jammu and Kashmir the right to determine their political future through a free and fair plebiscite. In that year, he says, India maneuvered to seek to incorporate Jammu and Kashmir as a part of India and to bring it under what Geelani terms 'Indian imperialistic control'.¹⁶ This, he says, it sought to do by instigating what he considers the unrepresentative Jammu and Kashmir state assembly (elected, he suggests, through widespread rigging of votes so as to form a pro-India government) to declare the state's permanent accession to India.¹⁷ Since then, he says, India has used this action as its main argument to justify its control occupation of Jammu and Kashmir.

Contradicting the official Indian stance, Geelani argues that the declaration of permanent accession to India by the state assembly cannot be said to have any validity at all. The state assembly, he claims, was not representative of the people, and in any case it did not have the mandate of the people to make a declaration of this sort. In other words, he contends, this declaration cannot in any sense be a substitute for the plebiscite that the UN Security Council Resolutions call for and that Indian leaders, till 1954, repeatedly promised to hold in the disputed state.¹⁸ Furthermore, Geelani points that according to the 1951 UN Security Council Resolution on Jammu and Kashmir, the state assembly did not possess the power or prerogative to alter the political status of the state, and so its step did not have any validity in international law. He quotes the then Indian representative to the UN, BN Rao as having affirmed before the Security Council in March 1951 that no opinion of the state assembly on the political status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir would impact on the issue of plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir that India had agreed to hold.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.108.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.97.

It is for this right of self-determination through plebiscite that what Geelani repeatedly refers to as ‘the people of Jammu and Kashmir’ or, simply, ‘the Kashmiri people’, have been consistently demanding ever since 1947. This is something, he says, that the world community, as represented by the UN, and India itself have solemnly promised them. It is also a basic human right, he insists. By continuing to deny the Kashmiris this right, which, Geelani says, is their birth-right and a basic human right, India’s claim of being the ‘world’s largest democracy’ is very evidently a complete sham.²⁰

The Militant Path

Geelani repeatedly stresses that the ‘people of Jammu and Kashmir’ have, since 1947 onwards, been pressing for India to live up to its promise of arranging for a plebiscite for them to determine their political future on the lines called for by the UN Security Council Resolutions. This, he says, they have been consistently struggling for, using peaceful means of protest, ever since 1947.²¹ Groups like his own Jamaat-e Islami, he says, even decided (in the early 1970s) to contest elections for this very purpose so that, as elected representatives, they could forcefully articulate the demand for self-determination and plebiscite. Geelani himself was elected to the state assembly as a candidate from the Muttahida Muslim Mahaz (‘The Muslim United Front’), most recently in 1987. That election, he writes, that proved to be a turning point in the history of the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination. He claims that the Muslim United Front was poised to win the elections by a considerable majority but that this was sabotaged by the Government of India, which feared that it would refuse to toe its line if it came to power.²²

Geelani repeats a point made by numerous observers—that the widespread rigging of this election in Jammu and Kashmir (as well as all previous ones) and the indiscriminate arrests and brutal treatment of Muslim United Front workers and candidates clearly suggested to the Kashmiris that peaceful methods to win the right to self-determination would never work due to Indian intransigence. Once again, he says, India’s slogans of democracy were exposed as a complete farce. It was now clear to the people of Kashmir, he says, that India would never allow a truly democratically-elected government to come to power in the state, for, he claims, such a government, reflecting the genuine aspirations of the majority of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, would advocate the state’s separation from India.²³ It was then, he says, and faced with no other option, that, in 1989, some Kashmiri youth decided that the time had come to take to the militant path to seek to force India to agree to live up to its promise of allowing the people of Jammu and Kashmir to determine their own political future.

²⁰ Ibid., p.111.

²¹ Ibid., p.49.

²² Ibid., pp.119-20.

²³ Ibid., p.51.

By explicating this background to the launching of the militant struggle in Kashmir, Geelani is careful to point out that it was resorted to more than half a century after 1947, when over five decades of peaceful struggle for the right to self-determination had completely failed. In other words, he suggests, the ongoing militant movement in Kashmir is not at all meaningless violence for its own sake that its Indian critics accuse it to be. Geelani denounces the Indian state's and media's description of the militant movement as 'terrorism', which, he argues, is a crude means to seek to rob it of its legitimacy and to defame it in the eyes of the world. He charges India with hypocrisy in describing the struggle in Kashmir as 'terrorism' or 'communalism', arguing that it is no different from, and as valid as, India's struggle for freedom from British rule. In a letter written in 1990 from prison in Naini jail, Allahabad, to Chandrashekar, the then Indian Prime Minister, Geelani stressed:

'Indians fought the British for the sake of freedom both at the political level and through armed struggle. Gandhi used non-violence and the political platform, while Bhagat Singh and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose used the path of armed struggle. So, then, how can you [India] deny the Kashmiris the same right and seek to crush them militarily? The British tried to use force to quash the Indian freedom struggle [...] but failed and had to leave India. The same will happen to India [in Kashmir].'²⁴

Geelani also reminded the Indian Prime Minister that in the years following its independence India had supported numerous liberation struggles for self-determination of oppressed peoples, such as the Palestinians and the black South Africans. It had even intervened militarily to create Bangladesh.²⁵ How, then, he asked him, could India deny the same right and freedom to the Kashmiris, and crush their struggle through force, indiscriminate killings and widespread violation of human rights?²⁶

The militant movement in Kashmir, Geelani claims, is not aimed at spreading terror in India, unlike what Indian sources often allege. Rather, he insists, it aims at forcing India to agree to let the people of Jammu and Kashmir decide their own political future. Once that happens, he says, the people of Jammu and Kashmir would be willing to have good neighbourly relations with India. In other words, Geelani points out, the movement is not impelled by a blind, irrational hatred for India (or the Hindus), as is alleged by numerous Indian commentators. But, he repeatedly insists, the armed struggle will carry on till India relents and agrees to act on its promises to the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the international community. No stop-gap or half-way measures, such as more autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir within the ambit Indian Constitution, restoring the pre-1953 status of the state, or elections, he says, can or will lead to the Kashmiris calling off their armed resistance to Indian rule. This can only happen, he says,

²⁴ Ibid., p.49.

²⁵ Gilani repeatedly bemoans the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, attributing this to an alleged 'Indian conspiracy' against Islam, the 'two-nation theory' and Pakistan.

²⁶ Ibid., p.49.

when they are able to exercise the right to political self-determination through plebiscite as envisaged by the UN Security Resolutions, which India has solemnly promised the international community to allow for.²⁷ In repeatedly stressing this point, Geelani makes very clear that no amount of economic assistance from India would cause the Kashmiris to weaken their resolve to press India to allow them to determine their own political future. ‘So as long as the rulers in Delhi keep parroting the slogan that [Jammu and Kashmir is] an inseparable part of India,’ he stresses, ‘no solution to the Kashmir problem can be found. The only way out is by acting on the UN resolutions, which India itself has accepted’.²⁸ In a letter to the then newly-elected American President Bill Clinton in 1993, Geelani wrote:

‘As long as the Government of India refuses to accept the basic and inherent right of the 12 million people [of Jammu and Kashmir] to determine their political future and act on the UN Security Council resolutions in this regard, this [militant] movement will continue’.²⁹

At the same time as Geelani insists that the people of Jammu and Kashmir be allowed to decide between joining India or Pakistan, he repeatedly stresses that what he terms as the ‘people of the state’ would never agree to being with India and would accept no deal brokered between India and Pakistan that legitimizes Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir.³⁰

Kashmir: Pakistan or Independence?

As numerous surveys have indicated, perhaps a significant majority of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir, including even in the Kashmir Valley, where the ongoing militant movement is most intense, aspire to a separate, sovereign, state, independent of both India and Pakistan. These surveys also indicate a sharp decline in support among the Muslims of the state for merger with Pakistan. This owes principally to increasing awareness of the realities of Pakistan—its chronic political instability, its slavishness to American dictates, its lack of democracy, Punjabi hegemony resulting in the many grievances of non-Punjabi ethnic groups, the corruption of Pakistan’s rulers, the deep-rooted military-bureaucrat-landlord nexus, pervasive and mounting sectarianism and violence perpetrated, among others, by self-styled Islamic groups, and the country’s dismal educational system and widespread poverty. In the face of all this, many Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir would rather live in an independent country of their own than be part of Pakistan, or of India for that matter.

In contrast to many other Kashmiri Muslims, including Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, however, Geelani, like the Jamaat-e Islami of Jammu and Kashmir and several other Islamist

²⁷ Ibid., p.172, p. 254.

²⁸ Ibid., p.54.

²⁹ Ibid., p.109.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 178.

groups active in the region, passionately advocates Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and has been consistently opposed to the project of an independent Jammu and Kashmir. The slogan of *azadi* or 'independence' that fired the imagination of many Kashmiri Muslim youth is given an entirely different twist by Geelani. For him, it does not mean, as it literally does and as many other Kashmiri Muslims take it to be, 'freedom' from Indian rule and an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir, but, rather, independence from India and accession with Pakistan. Throughout *Nava-e Hurriyat* Geelani evokes the slogan of *azadi* but interprets it to mean both accession to Pakistan as well as unrelenting opposition to an independent Jammu and Kashmir. It is as if only by joining Pakistan that Kashmir can find *azadi*, the term here being reduced simply to anti-Indianism or freedom from Indian rule. Arrogating to himself the right to represent and speak for the entire anti-Indian constituency in Kashmir, completely silencing the substantial pro-independence (as well as the minority pro-India) voices among the Kashmiri Muslims, he declares, 'There can be no two opinions on the fact that the entire struggle of the Kashmiri people is for the sake of Islam and for accession to Pakistan'.³¹ Islam and Pakistan are thus conflated with, and projected as inseparable from, each other. Conversely, pro-independence Kashmiri ethno-nationalists (as well as, of course, pro-Indian Muslims and non-Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir) are by definition treated, in Geelani's scheme of things, as being, by definition, opposed to Pakistan as well as to Islam.

Throughout the book Geelani stresses that Kashmir must join Pakistan, and he offers various reasons for this, besides the principles mentioned earlier regarding the rules that princely states were to abide by in choosing between India and Pakistan. These follow from his particular understanding of Islam and of Muslim communal identity, shaped particularly by his ideological mentor, Syed Abul Ala Maududi (d.1979), the founder of the Islamist Jamaat-e Islami.

Like other Islamist ideologues, most notably, Maududi, Geelani argues that the only identity a Muslim can, or, rather, should, possess and recognize is that of being Muslim. Maududi regarded nationalism, even Muslim ethno-nationalism, as being un-Islamic, akin to polytheism and idolatry, and as divisive of the world-wide Muslim *ummah*. In his view, which Geelani shares, Muslims all over the world share the same nationality or *qaumiyyat*—that of being followers of Islam. Hence, Maududi insisted, Muslims the world over must strive to form a single global polity on the basis of (his understanding of) Islam. For Muslims in different parts of the world to set up their separate nation-states, based on the notion of ethnic nationalism, was, for him, nothing short of anathema. This is why Maududi fervently opposed the Muslim League in pre-Partition India and its demand for Pakistan, which was based on Indian Muslim nationalism rather than Islam. It is, of course, another matter that no sooner had Pakistan come into being than Maududi decided to shift to the newly-established country.

³¹ Ibid., p.119.

Geelani shares Maududi's visceral opposition to Muslim ethno-nationalism. This extends also to Kashmiri Muslim nationalism which underlies the Kashmiri Muslim nationalist project of an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir and that probably reflects the aspirations of the majority of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir. For him, such an ideology and political project are divisive of the global Muslim *ummah*. They also threaten to promote alternate, indeed rival, forms of identity to that of the one and only identity that, in his view, Muslims should possess and publicly articulate—of being Muslims and nothing else. As Geelani argued in an essay published by the Jamaat-e Islami of Jammu and Kashmir in 1992, which is reproduced in *Nava-e Hurriyat*, Muslims the world over are a single community (*millat*), whose 'point of unity' (*nukta-e ijtimaiyyat*) is the *kalima tayyiba*, the declaration of belief in Allah as the sole deity and in Muhammad as Allah's Prophet. Accordingly, he went on, 'it would certainly violate this concept of Muslim unity if a Muslim community sets up its separate identity when it has ideological, cultural and communal relations with another Muslim country with which it shares a border'.³² In other words, he suggested that because Muslim-majority Kashmir has a border with Muslim-majority Pakistan, and because the Muslims of Kashmir and Pakistan enjoy close 'ideological, cultural and communal relations' with each other, it was impermissible, and, indeed, 'un-Islamic', for the Kashmiris to set up an independent state of their own. He argued that for the Kashmiris to establish an independent state would 'be against the wider, collective interests of the global Islamic community (*millat-e islamiya*)'.³³ In an interview with a Pakistani journalist, he stressed that talk of the 'third option'—an independent Jammu and Kashmir—was 'harmful' for the Kashmiris themselves³⁴, contending that Islam itself mandated that Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir merge into Pakistan. Intriguingly, in thus defending Jammu and Kashmir's merger with Pakistan and opposing the project of an independent Jammu and Kashmir, Geelani remained studiously silent on the existence of multiple Muslim-majority countries, many of them styled as 'Islamic states', which have borders with other such Muslim states but yet show no enthusiasm to dissolve their borders into a grand, single Muslim political entity, which, presumably, Geelani regards as Islamically normative.

Further reflecting his visceral opposition to Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalism and the demand for an independent, even though Kashmiri Muslim-dominated, state of Jammu and Kashmir, Geelani repeatedly stresses in the book that the most acceptable solution to the Kashmir conflict lies in implementing the UN Security Council Resolutions that provide for a plebiscite allowing the people of Jammu and Kashmir just two choices—deciding to join either India or Pakistan. He repeatedly, and enthusiastically, points out that the Resolutions do not envisage a third option—an independent Jammu and Kashmir. He is confident that if the UN resolutions were followed, a demand that he makes numerous times in the book, the majority of the people of the state would, because they are Muslims, vote for Pakistan. He stresses that in such an eventuality he and his

³² Ibid., p.76.

³³ Ibid., p.76.

³⁴ Ibid., p.160.

Jamaat-e Islami would urge the people to opt for Pakistan, because this, he says, is what is mandated by (his understanding of) Islam.

Critique of Pakistan

Although Geelani remains a fervent supporter of Jammu and Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, he is not uncritical of how the idea of Pakistan has unfolded over time, which he regards as a betrayal of the ideals of the Pakistan movement. Indeed, comparing the two—the ideals, as represented by the vision of such key figures as Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mohammad Iqbal, and Syed Abul Ala Maududi, and the present-day realities of Pakistan—Geelani sees them as almost complete contrasts. He does not regard this contrast as an indicating the failure of the 'two nation' theory, however, and repeatedly appeals to Pakistanis in general, and the leaders of Pakistan in particular, to seek to build their country and mould their personal and collective lives according to the teachings of Islam and the 'two nation theory', which, he argues, were the very rationale for the creation of Pakistan.

The leaders of the pre-Partition Muslim League were heavily criticized by Maududi for being 'secular' and 'irreligious' in their personal lives, for basing their demand for Pakistan on Indian Muslim ethno-nationalism rather than on Islam, and for envisaging Pakistan as a modern, secular, democratic Muslim-majority state, rather than one ruled by medieval conceptions of the *shariah*. Geelani cleverly ignores Maududi's critique of Jinnah and other founding-fathers of the Pakistani state, and presents them, along with Maududi, as having been fired by an irrepressible Islamic zeal and a passionate commitment to establishing a model 'Islamic state' in the country of their dreams. Pakistan, he says, is a 'God-given state' (*mamlakat-e khudadad*). 'The Islamic Republic of Pakistan', he writes, 'emerged on the map of the world in the hope that, with God's blessings, the word of God would be exalted in this land and the individual and collective life of its people would be based on the Quran and the *sunnah* [the practice of the Prophet Muhammad].' Pakistan, he claims, was envisaged to be 'an ideal for the entire world of a just state and system and a model of a righteous society'.³⁵ In a letter to the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, in 1993, Geelani argued that 'Pakistan was created for the hegemony (*ghalba*) of Islam and for establishing an Islamic system (*islami nizam*)'.³⁶

When Geelani is forced to confront the dismal reality of contemporary Pakistan, he admits that the vision that he claims had inspired the leaders of the Pakistan movement has miserably failed. He puts this somewhat circumspectly when he says that the course of Pakistan's evolution, ever since its inception, 'has not lived up to the hopes and desires of the Muslim *ummah* to the desired extent'.³⁷ He does not locate the cause of the failure of Pakistan to live up to his dream of it

³⁵ Ibid., p.85.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

³⁷ Ibid., p.85.

becoming a model Islamic state in the impossible utopianism of the dream itself, however. Rather, he attributes this primarily to what he critiques as the lack of seriousness among successive Pakistani rulers about Islam as a system of governance and their flirting with ‘anti-Islamic’ ideologies.³⁸ He does not absolve the Pakistani populace as well for the failure of the Pakistan dream. He laments that in successive elections in Pakistan, ‘Islam-loving’ (*islam pasand*) parties have received relatively little public support, taking this to indicate, much to his disappointment, that ‘the people of Pakistan have shown coldness towards Islam’.³⁹ However, he repeatedly insists, the only way for the Muslims of Pakistan to live up to the demands of Islam, as well as for Pakistan to remain united and stable and to progress, is for the country to establish what he regards as an ‘Islamic state and system’.⁴⁰

Throughout *Nava-e Hurriyat* Geelani lashes out at India for its treatment of the Kashmiri Muslims as well as the wider Indian Muslim community, seeking thereby to further justify his advocacy for Kashmir’s merger with Pakistan. However, he does not spare Pakistan from critique either, although this he articulates only when pressed to do so by journalists. In a lengthy telephonic interview with a group of Pakistani journalists in 1994 shortly after his release from jail, Geelani was asked to comment on Pakistan’s chronic political instability. He confessed that this ‘pained and troubled’ him a great deal, and that it had made him ‘terribly disappointed’. This was a reaction, he said, that he shared with many other like-minded Kashmiris, who were, as he put it, so ‘upset’ about the situation in Pakistan that ‘the peace of our days and the sleep of our nights have been snatched away’. He referred to the continuing and mounting inter-ethnic violence, indiscriminate killings and riots in Pakistan, for which, he lamented, the Pakistanis had ‘not found the proper solution’—allusion to his recipe of an Islamic state as the cure for all of Pakistan’s ills. Also ‘extremely distressing’, he said, was the subversion of democracy in the country and the federal government’s refusal to allow opposition parties to rule provinces where they had won elections.⁴¹ He berated what he called the ‘immoral culture’ being promoted by Pakistan Television, which, he claimed, ‘was every day leading Kashmiris further away from Pakistan’. He even contrasted India’s government-controlled television channel Doordarshan favourably with its Pakistani counterpart, claiming that ‘as regards immorality, Pakistan Television has gone far ahead of Doordarshan’.⁴² He referred to the abysmal levels of literacy in Pakistan, pointing out that because a substantial majority of Pakistanis were illiterate, they were unable to read Islamic literature and study the Quran and the life of the Prophet, as a result of which, he lamented, they were not enthusiastic about establishing an ‘Islamic system’ in their country. This ‘ignorance’, he went on, was the basic cause for ‘anti-Islamic views prospering in Pakistan’. In addition, he criticized the hold of capitalists and landlords in Pakistan and the power of the custodians of Sufi shrines, all of who, he said, flourished in a society characterized

³⁸ Ibid., p.134.

³⁹ Ibid., p.191.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.193.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.22.

⁴² Ibid., p. 224.

by high levels of illiteracy and consequent lack of what he regarded as appropriate Islamic awareness.

‘Witnessing all this’, Geelani concluded, ‘one’s heart trembles at the realization that Pakistan today is not’ what its founders had imagined. ‘Whatever is happening in Pakistan today’, he commented, ‘is certainly not in accordance with our hopes and expectations’.⁴³ All of this, he confessed, was proving to be deeply problematic for pro-Pakistan Kashmiris and was having an ‘extremely negative impact’ on their struggle. This was a somewhat oblique reference to the fact the alarming situation in Pakistan had led to a very definite disillusionment with that country on the part of many Kashmiri Muslims and a consequent sharp decline in their enthusiasm for Kashmir’s merger with it. Geelani also lamented that ‘If Pakistan could not become a fort of Islam (*islam ka qila*) it would be a great tragedy for the whole Islamic *millat*’.⁴⁴

Significantly, in enumerating the myriad forms of violence and conflict in Pakistan Geelani did not mention militant Islamist movements and groups, without accounting for which Pakistan’s present predicament can hardly be understood. Far from critiquing or them or even appealing to them to introspect, he argued that the solution to all the ills of Pakistan was for such forces to take over the country and establish an ‘Islamic system’. Thus, he commented that Pakistan’s present instabilities were a result of the fact that in that country ‘no talk is happening about promoting [Islamic] knowledge [...] and no efforts are being made to enable Islam to rule over the minds and bodies of the Pakistani people and the society as a whole.’ ‘Till Islam is established, and the Islamic stamp seals the hearts and minds of the people of Pakistan,’ he predicted, ‘these conflicts will continue.’ ‘If the leaders of Pakistan truly want the country to become strong, secure and stable in terms ideology, politics, morals, economics and society’, he contended, ‘sincere efforts must be made to mould Pakistan on Islamic lines, and make Islam prevail in all spheres, not just with empty slogans.’⁴⁵

Yet, despite lamenting the conditions of Pakistan, which he regarded as far from satisfactory, Geelani continues to plead for Kashmir’s accession to that country, even in the face of widespread and increasing disillusionment with Pakistan among many Kashmiri Muslims.

Opposing an Independent Jammu and Kashmir

What, then, of the third option—of an independent Jammu and Kashmir? It is clear that a significant majority of the Muslim population of the state would indeed support this project, although, of course, the non-Muslims of the state, being almost wholly with India, would oppose

⁴³ Ibid., p.226.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.223.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

it, fearing Kashmiri/Muslim domination.⁴⁶ That relatively few Muslims of the state, particularly from the Kashmir Valley, would choose to remain with India is undeniable. The continuing and mounting human rights violations, including widespread killings and torture, in Kashmir by agencies of the Indian state (which Geelani describes in chilling detail) has, admittedly, only hardened the resolve of many Kashmiri Muslims to seek *azadi*, freedom from India. But, this does not mean that anti-Indianism in Kashmir translates automatically into pro-Pakistani sentiment. Indeed, it can be safely said, as mentioned before, that the desire for a separate state of their own, independent of both India and Pakistan, among a substantial number of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir has been further reinforced in recent years with the ongoing developments in Pakistan, where chronic political instability, economic crisis, sectarian violence, terrorism in the name of Islam, continued sabotage of democracy, and Pakistan's subservience to America—to name just a few factors—have convinced many Kashmiri Muslims that joining Pakistan, instead of being independent, is definitely not a worthwhile proposition.

Yet, even in the face of the desire for an independent state of their own on the part of probably the majority of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir, Geelani has consistently continued to press for the state's merger with Pakistan and to vehemently oppose the demand for an independent Jammu and Kashmir. Stressing his opposition to the 'third option', Geelani castigates it as a 'play' (*khel*) of Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, whom he refers to contemptuously as mere 'elements' (*anasir*).⁴⁷ In order to counter this popular demand, he claims that talk of the 'third option'—an independent for Jammu and Kashmir, based on the state's August 1947 boundaries—is an 'Indian conspiracy' to strengthen India's claim on the disputed territory. In an interview in 1993 with a Pakistani journalist, he insisted that Jammu and Kashmir must become a part of Pakistan, rather than an independent country, arguing, 'If we win the right to self-determination, we want to restrict the choice to just two options [India or Pakistan], and we will appeal to the people to vote for Pakistan'. To 'bring up the issue of the third option', he went on, was 'destructive (*nuqsandeh*)', adding that 'we want to save the entire Muslim community from this tragedy'.⁴⁸ He contended that if the 'third option' were allowed, anti-India votes would be divided between supporters of an independent Jammu and Kashmir and those who wanted the state's accession to Pakistan, and that in such a situation those in favour of the state's accession to India might easily win. Thus, in a press conference that he addressed in 1992 on being released from a long spell in jail, Geelani declaimed:

'The ongoing struggle in Kashmir has brought the issue on the world stage, and so the rulers of India have devised a dangerous political trap by talking of the third option.

⁴⁶ Advocates of an independent Jammu and Kashmir and those who urge the state's accession to Pakistan have failed to take into account the vociferous opposition to their political projects among the state's substantial non-Muslim minority, who would regard both such options as seeking to impose Kashmiri/Muslim domination on them, in the same way as many Kashmiri Muslims regard Indian rule as Indian/Hindu domination.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.190.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.159.

Through this they want to divide the people. India knows that some people will want to join Pakistan and that some will raise the slogan for independence, and then these will fight each other and their votes will be divided. This will benefit India. In my view this [talk of the third option] is a crafty weapon that India is wielding in order to divert us from the basic position on the issue of Kashmir [the choice between India and Pakistan through a plebiscite as envisaged by the UN Security Council Resolutions].⁴⁹

At the same time, it appears that Geelani is indeed aware that the majority of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir may not be enthusiastic about his plea for their state's merger with Pakistan and may actively support the 'third option' that he so vehemently denounces. This is why he appears to reluctantly admit that if it is no longer possible (for reasons he does not elaborate) for the UN Security Council Resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir to be implemented, then the three parties to the conflict—India, Pakistan and what he terms as the 'authentic representatives' (*haqiqi numainde*) of the people of Jammu and Kashmir—should organize a tripartite conference under UN supervision, and that if in this conference they unanimously agree on an independent Jammu and Kashmir conforming to the state's boundaries as in August 1947 he would agree to this proposal.⁵⁰ It is clear that this is not the ideal solution for Geelani, however, who indicates that he would accept such a deal 'only as a last measure'⁵¹ and 'under duress'.⁵²

Claiming the Authoritative Voice

A key issue involved in the tripartite conference on Jammu and Kashmir that Geelani calls for is: How are the 'authentic representatives' of the people of Jammu and Kashmir who would participate in this conference to be decided? This is a particularly complex question given the extreme heterogeneity of the people of the state, in terms of religion, sect, caste, ethnicity, and language, not to speak of gender and class.

Geelani insists that the Kashmir conflict is not a bipartite dispute between India and Pakistan. Rather, there are three parties to the dispute: India, Pakistan and the 'people' (*awam*) of Jammu and Kashmir. Hence, he argues, the dispute cannot be solved between just the Governments of India and Pakistan. The conflict is not a territorial one between India and Pakistan, he points out, but, rather, one that relates to the life of the over twelve million inhabitants of the state.⁵³ Hence, no solution to the conflict is acceptable, he says, if it goes against the wishes of 'the people of the state', who must have a central say in such a solution, because the conflict and its solution concerns their very existence and future.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.66.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.178.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.160.

⁵² Ibid., p.178.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.64.

Scattered throughout Geelani's book are repeated references to the need for the 'authentic representatives' of the *awam* or 'people' of Jammu and Kashmir to be represented in any tripartite conference on Kashmir to decide the state's future. But as to who these representative individuals and groups are Geelani remains, perhaps deliberately, fuzzy. It would appear that, to him, these 'representatives' are essentially Kashmiri Sunni Muslims who seek independence from India, given that whenever Geelani speaks of 'the people of Jammu and Kashmir' or 'the Kashmiri people' it is in such a manner as to seem to equate the terms with the anti-Indian Muslim constituency state, in particular the Sunni Muslims of the Kashmir Valley. This is clearly indicated throughout the book, as, for instance, when Geelani argues that 'the people of Jammu and Kashmir' are vociferously opposed to India, and that 'every person' in the state 'hates India'⁵⁵, ignoring the undeniable fact that the non-Muslims of the state, as well as significant sections of Muslims outside the Kashmir Valley (and not an insignificant number of Muslims in the Valley as well) do not share this perception at all. When Geelani announces that, 'There is not a single person in Jammu and Kashmir who is agreeable to dialogue and compromise with India or living under its control'⁵⁶, it is clear that the vast numbers of people of the state—the non-Muslims of the state as well as many Muslims—who believe otherwise simply do not exist in his imagination, and that, as far as he is concerned, their aspirations have no value at all in determining the political future of the state. It is as if these inhabitants of the state, non-Muslim and Muslim alike, who do not share Geelani's project, of a Maududist-style 'Islamic state' and merger with Pakistan, are completely dispensable and are not part of what Geelani refers to as the 'people of Jammu and Kashmir', on whose behalf he claims to speak.

In this way, in Geelani's writings anti-Indian Kashmiri Sunni Muslims come to be seen as standing in for all the people of the state, while the sizeable remaining population of Jammu and Kashmir (Hindus, Dalits, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, many Shia Muslims and non-Kashmiri Pahari Muslims, as well as not a negligible number of Kashmiri Muslims) who are definitely pro-India are completely ignored and silenced as if they are not part of 'the people of Jammu and Kashmir'. But it is not every Kashmiri Muslim leader who demands freedom from India who is seen as an 'authentic representative' of the people of the entire state in Geelani's scheme of things. Rather, to Geelani, the mantle of 'authenticity' falls on people like himself, Islamists who advocate Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. Secular and/or nationalist Kashmiri Muslims who advocate an independent Jammu and Kashmir are depicted as 'inauthentic' and, hence, as disqualified from claiming to represent the Kashmiris in tripartite negotiations. This, for instance, is suggested in Geelani's response to a query from a Pakistani journalist in 1993, when he claimed that 'there can no doubt that the Kashmiri people have been engaged in this struggle for the sake of Islam and for accession (*ilhaq*) to Pakistan'.⁵⁷ Likewise, in a letter written in 1993

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.197.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.92.

to the then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Geelani described Pakistan as the ‘land of the dreams’ of ‘all Kashmiris’ because it was ‘won in the name of Islam’.⁵⁸ In this letter, he argued, ignoring completely the aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, that accession to Pakistan is ‘what the Kashmiri people have been demanding since 1947’.⁵⁹ Geelani thus appeared to claim that Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists who are as opposed to their state joining Pakistan as they are to it being part of India have no resonance at all with the ‘people’ of Jammu and Kashmir, whom he erroneously describes as homogenously pro-Pakistan and Islamist. This would logically mean (although he does not say so in so many words) that they are in no way ‘authentic’ representatives of the people, and hence are not qualified to speak on their behalf in any tripartite conference to chalk out a solution to the Kashmir dispute.

Given this, it is not surprising, therefore, that when Geelani talks of the ‘authentic representatives’ of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, he refers to people like himself. In a pamphlet he penned in 1992, titled ‘Solution to the Kashmir Conflict’, which was published by the Jamaat-e Islami of Jammu and Kashmir and which is reproduced in *Nava-e Hurriyat*, he argued that the ‘third party’ in negotiations over the status of the state would be ‘the real representatives who desire freedom (*azadi pasand*)’.⁶⁰ He remained, perhaps deliberately, ambiguous as to who these individuals and organizations would be. Asked by a Pakistani journalist to identify them, he cryptically answered, ‘The people who can reliably represent Kashmir are present. Searching for them will not take much time’.⁶¹ He even went to the extent of arguing, presumably referring to himself and people of his ilk, ‘We can form this representative group ourselves’⁶², adding that this group would consist of people from both Pakistan-administered Kashmir (‘Azad Kashmir’) and from Indian-ruled Kashmir ‘who are fighting for *azadi*’, and who would ‘truly represent the wishes of the people’.⁶³ Further underlining his argument that, in his view, the ‘true’ representatives of the people of the state would be those who shared his position (Maududist-style Islamist politics and merger with Pakistan), he argued that in any proposed tripartite talks the delegation of ‘the true representatives of Jammu and Kashmir’ and the Pakistani delegation ‘would certainly support each other.’ ‘They will be close to each other and will not oppose each other’, he went on. ‘I believe’, he insisted, ‘that there cannot be any difference in the thinking of the representatives of Kashmir and that of the Pakistani delegation’.⁶⁴ Quite naturally, then, the individuals and groups whom Geelani considers ‘authentic representatives’ of the people of Jammu and Kashmir who, in his view, would be qualified to participate in the tripartite talks would be ardent advocates of the merger of the state with Pakistan. This effectively excludes the voices of the non-Muslims of the state as well as pro-independence Kashmiri ethno-nationalists from his definition of

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.133.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.175.

⁶² Ibid., p.178.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.179-80.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.181.

‘authentic’ representatives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, although, taken together, they reflect the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the population of the state.

Geelani on the Non-Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir

Various non-Muslim communities occupy more than a third of the population of the Indian-administered part of Jammu and Kashmir. Hindu-majority Jammu and Buddhist-majority Leh account for well over half of the geographical area of the state. They have consistently opposed the *azadi* movement, being vehemently opposed to the state’s accession to Pakistan and even to an independent Jammu and Kashmir, and are almost entirely pro-India. Despite their significant numbers, these non-Muslim inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir are, as noted before, almost wholly invisibilised in Geelani’s representation of the ‘people’ of the state.

As mentioned earlier, Geelani routinely refers to the ‘people of Jammu and Kashmir’, a term he uses interchangeably with another term, the ‘Kashmiri *awam*’, as being united in their fierce opposition to Indian rule. In this way, ignoring the immense religious and ethnic diversity in the state, he conflates the entire population of the state with the Muslims (specifically Sunni Muslims) of the Kashmir Valley. Accordingly, the desire for freedom from Indian rule of the majority of the Sunni Muslims of the Kashmir comes, in his view, to represent the will of the entire people of the state. The political aspirations of non-Muslim/non-Sunni, non-Kashmiri inhabitants of the state, which differ completely from those of most Sunni Muslims of the Kashmir Valley, are thus completely ignored, marginalized and silenced by Geelani, replicating, in a sense, the Indian state’s own silencing of the political aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslims.

Only once in *Nava-e Hurriyat* does Geelani refer to the need for the non-Muslim inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir to be represented in any proposed talks about the Kashmir conflict. He makes this passing reference not on his own volition but only when specifically asked (by a Pakistani journalist) if the non-Muslims of the state, too, would have any representation in the talks. His answer to this question is brief and somewhat vague. All he says is, ‘In the tripartite talks, Kashmiris from both sides of the Line of Control will be represented, as will the non-Muslims who live in Jammu etc.. We accept their rights’.⁶⁵

Geelani appears wholly indifferent to the political aspirations of the non-Muslims of the state and to their apprehensions about the prospect of living as obviously marginalized and severely-discriminated against minorities in Pakistan if Kashmir, as he insists, merges with that country, or in the Maududist-style ‘Islamic state’ that he so passionately argues for. Thus, in a reply to a question by an Indian journalist as to what his reaction would be if the Hindus of Jammu and the Buddhists of Ladakh voted in the proposed plebiscite to join India, he said that he would

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.178.

ascertain their views and ‘act accordingly’, but quickly dismissed the possibility of this happening at all by denying outright that they would like to join India.⁶⁶

How Geelani perceives the non-Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir is indicated in the different standards he adopts with regard to human rights abuses, by the Indian armed forces, on the one hand, and by Kashmiri Muslim militants, whom he terms as *mujahidin*, warriors engaged in what he regards as an Islamically-mandated jihad, on the other. *Nava-e Hurriyat* is replete with detailed narratives of atrocities committed by the Indian armed forces against unarmed Kashmiri Muslim civilians. Yet, Geelani, willfully or otherwise, ignores the numerous atrocities committed by Muslim militants on unarmed non-Muslim (as well as Muslim) civilians, including loot, rape, and massacres. Geelani seeks to create the image of the militants as uniformly pious, committed Muslims engaged in a religiously-legitimate jihad, who, by definition, are incapable of deviating from the moral rules that are supposed to guide jihad. Thus, for instance, he places the entire blame for the mass exodus of the Hindu Pandits from the Kashmir Valley on the Indian state, absolving the militants of any role at all in this affair. He argues that the Indian state, under Jagmohan, the then Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, conspired to evacuate the Pandits from the Valley so that the Indian armed forces could brutally crush the Kashmiri Muslims and project the Kashmiri Muslims’ struggle as a narrow, ‘communal’ one so as to rob it of legitimacy in the eyes of the world community. There is undeniably some truth in this charge, of course, but when Geelani insists that not a single innocent non-Muslim has been killed by militants in Jammu and Kashmir⁶⁷, it is obvious that he willfully seeks to cover up a long list of brutal attacks by militants that numerous other Kashmiri Muslim leaders themselves have publicly condemned.

Geelani’s indifference to the political aspirations of the non-Muslims of the state are evident throughout *Nava-e Hurriyat* in his answers to the journalists—never on his own—who happen to mention them. To them he hastens to insist that the ongoing militant struggle is not a narrow, Kashmiri Muslim one, although critics would remark that his claim is completely disingenuous and utterly fails to convince. In reply to a question about the implications of the struggle for the substantial non-Muslim population of Jammu and Kashmir, he replied, ‘If our struggle was based on religious hatred, it would certainly have impacted on the non-Muslims on Kashmir, but the world knows that nothing of this sort has happened.’ ‘In Kashmir’, he went on, referring to allegations about non-Muslims being targeted by militants, ‘you will see no such thing.’⁶⁸ The non-Muslims of the Kashmir Valley, Geelani insisted, obviously concealing numerous instances of violence by militants directed against them, were fully protected by their Muslim neighbours, and ‘they have not been made to be victimized in any way by a sense of insecurity.’ Throughout the book, Geelani refuses to even acknowledge, leave alone refer to, the selected killings of non-Muslims that have taken place over the years at the hands of militants in the state, the

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.197.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.253.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.207.

overwhelming opposition of the non-Muslims of the state to the militant movement and to the demand for the state's freedom from India, and the climate of fear in which non-Muslims in many Muslim-dominated parts of the state continue to live. Wholly insensitive to the aspirations of the non-Muslims of the state, and contradicting his own consistent claim that the ongoing movement in Kashmir is inspired by and for Islam and for the cause of an Islamic state, Geelani argued that 'right from 1947, our struggle for self-determination has been non-communal (*ghair firqavarana*) and still is and shall remain so in the future. It is based on moral values, and will not discriminate on the basis of religion, colour, race, caste and region. This is not just our politics but also our religion and faith'.⁶⁹ Accordingly, he dismissed Indian claims that the movement was 'communal' as 'baseless propaganda' aiming at delegitimising and defaming it.

Geelani insists that the 'Islamic state' that he sees the Kashmiri Muslims as struggling for will not discriminate against its non-Muslim citizens. 'Ever since Muslims became a majority [in Kashmir]', he claims, 'we have been expressing our commitment to love of humanity, religious tolerance, peace and communal harmony. We have behaved well with our Hindu, Sikh and Christian brethren, and, with God's help, will continue to do so in future'.⁷⁰ But how this claim squares with his insistence on establishing an 'Islamic state' on the model devised by his mentor Maududi, wherein non-Muslims would definitely occupy a second-grade status as *dhimmi*s, is, not surprisingly, left wholly unaddressed. At the same time, in an implicit admission of the very obvious fact that the non-Muslims of the state would refuse to willingly live in the 'Islamic state' that he aspires to establish (they being well aware of the dismal conditions of non-Muslims in neighbouring Pakistan, the record of various self-styled Islamic states of mistreating their minorities, and the forced exodus of almost the entire non-Muslim population from Pakistani-administered Kashmir in 1947), Geelani acknowledged that if India, Pakistan and the 'representatives' of the people of Jammu and Kashmir unanimously agreed on the division of the state, giving non-Muslim-majority Ladakh and Jammu to India, he would also accept the proposal.⁷¹

Islam and Politics

Echoing his mentor Maududi, Geelani argues that Kashmir, whether as an independent country, or, ideally, for him, as part of Pakistan, must become an 'Islamic state'. 'Our goal is the establishment of Islamic government (*islami hukumat*)', he contends.⁷² The 'freedom', he says the Kashmiris are struggling for, 'is for the sake of Islam'.⁷³ Indeed, and quite contrary to obvious reality, he regards the ongoing struggle against Indian rule in Kashmir as motivated

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.52.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.172.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.182.

⁷² Ibid., p.20.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 173.

primarily by this concern, not by economic impulses, and not even by ethno-nationalist concerns as Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists would see it. Thus, viewing the struggle through the prism of Islam he seeks to delegitimize the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalist agenda at the same time as he seeks to present the struggle as a distinctly religious, as opposed to a mere political or ethno-nationalist, one.

To Geelani, Islam is ‘incomplete’ without state power. The ‘Islamic state’, he believes, is a pivotal node of Islam, for it is only through such a state, he seems to argue, that what he regards as Islamic laws, that cover every conceivable aspect of a Muslim’s personal as well as collective lives, can be imposed on its subjects. A secular, democratic state, by definition, is anathema, for that would mean, as Maududi had repeatedly claimed, the ‘rule of man’ rather than the ‘rule of God’ (*hukumat-e ilahiya*). Geelani insists, providing his own example, that every Muslim must struggle to establish an Islamic political dispensation wherever he or she lives, regarding this as an essential task in the struggle for the ‘establishment of the faith’ (*iqamat-e din*).⁷⁴

Geelani paints a striking contrast between the ‘Islamic state’, on the one hand, and a secular, welfare state, on the other, bitterly denouncing the latter even if it is able to better serve and meet the secular needs of its Muslim citizens. Islam and secular democracy being, in his view, wholly opposed to each other, the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir are incapable, so he suggests, precisely because of being Muslim, from accepting to live in India, a state that officially defines itself as a secular democracy, especially since India, as he describes it, miserably fails to live up to its secular and democratic claims. Even if India were to meet the secular or ‘worldly’ needs of the Kashmiri Muslims better and more effectively than Muslim Pakistan, he seems to suggest, it can by no means serve as a replacement for the ‘Islamic state’ that he insists on. In a public address delivered after his resignation, along with other members of the Muslim United Front, from the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly in 1989, shortly after the outbreak of the militant movement in Kashmir, Geelani claimed that he and his colleagues had participated in the 1987 elections solely for the sake of Islam, suggesting that this was a strategy to facilitate Kashmir’s transformation into an ‘Islamic state’. Defending, in this way, his controversial decision to participate in the elections held under the Indian Constitution, he claimed, ‘We were elected not to give water, hospitals, schools, and solve small problems, and we did not ask you for votes for this. Rather, we asked, and got, votes for certain principles. Foremost of these was the service of Islam (*islam ki khidmat*) so that in the state assembly we could champion Islamic principles and oppose laws opposed to Islam.’ He went on to relate that when the then Chief Minister of the state, Farooq Abdullah, mocked him for ‘asking people to vote for him in the name of the Quran’, he ‘boldly answered, “Yes, we asked for votes for Islam”’. When Abdullah retorted that ‘the Quran cannot give the people water, roads, hospitals, employment and improve people’s economic conditions’ but that he could, Geelani countered him by saying, ‘We are proud that Islam is a complete system. Under every condition we will work for its supremacy. Islam

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.65.

removes people from the slavery of people, but your secularism makes the people slaves of Delhi. Islam provides a practical message of peace and wisdom, but your political bargaining has given the Kashmiris years of humiliation, poverty, moral corruption and horrendous slavery, and nothing else, and now you are proudly trying to get people even more entangled in the chains of slavery of roads, hospitals, water and jobs. Under no conditions do we want these. We cannot accept nationalism, secularism and slavery'.⁷⁵

Interestingly, although Geelani repeatedly insists that the goal of the Kashmiri 'movement' is an 'Islamic state', he does not provide any details at all about the polity that he dreams of and which he sees as mandated in Islam. At his hands, the 'Islamic state' is reduced to a mere slogan, conjuring up visions in the minds of his listeners and readers a system allegedly providing perfect social justice and equality, which he repeatedly contrasts with the unrelenting oppression that he describes the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir laboring under Indian rule. That Geelani simply bandies about the 'Islamic state' as a slogan, a device to mobilize popular support for his opposition to Indian rule, without providing any blue-print of such a state or explaining how it would be able to deal with the complex demands of modernity is hardly surprising. In this he is simply following in the footsteps of scores of other Islamist ideologues across the world for whom the 'Islamic state' is little more than a tool to mobilize support against ruling regimes by evoking memories of an alleged 'golden Islamic past'. It is also probable that their silence on the details of the 'Islamic state' is a well-thought of tactical move. Were these ideologues to spell the details of their political project in clear, detailed terms, it is likely that it would cost them the support of a sizeable section of otherwise potential followers whose understanding of Islam, and of the relationship between Islam and politics, differs widely from theirs.

The 'Jihad' in Kashmir

Much confusion exists about the role of religion, specifically Islam, in the ongoing Kashmiri Muslim struggle against Indian rule. Many Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists who aspire to an independent, democratic, and secular state would publicly announce, particularly before non-Muslims, that their struggle has nothing to do with religion *per se*, and that it is purely 'political'. Since they aspire to establish an independent state with borders corresponding to those of the state of Jammu and Kashmir as in August 1947, including Hindu-majority Jammu and Buddhist-majority Leh, they feel it necessary to claim before non-Muslim audiences that their movement is not inspired by religion, or, related to it, religious communalism. To admit the contrary would, they feel, taint their movement as 'communal', even 'fundamentalist', and as representing Muslim hegemony over the non-Muslims of the state, thereby robbing it of legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Further, since for them their Muslim-ness may be simply incidental, no more than an identity inherited at birth, they may not regard Islam as the essential driving force of their struggle just as it is not of paramount concern in their own personal lives.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.35-36.

Thus, before non-Muslims they would insist that their movement is entirely ‘secular’ and ‘non-communal’, a purely political struggle to secure the right to self-determination, although they might equally readily evoke Islam when addressing a Kashmiri Muslim audience. Yet, as the non-Muslims of the state see it, even Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists are motivated by their religious and communal identity in very fundamental ways, and that their discourses and demands are very powerfully shaped by Kashmiri Muslim communitarian concerns and what they might regard as hegemonic designs. Were they not Muslims, even in a cultural sense, they rightly point out, it is unlikely they would be clamoring for independence from India.

In contrast to the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, who tactically and deliberately fudge over the issue of the role of Islam and Muslim community identity in the *azadi* movement, Geelani frames the movement entirely in Islamic terms. He declares that the ongoing militant movement against Indian rule in Kashmir is not an ordinary war, but, rather, a jihad, a struggle mandated by Islam and for the sake of Islam, quite distinct from the nationalist/political struggle that Kashmiri nationalists see it as. He does not invoke references to the Quran, Hadith or the *fiqh* texts, the Muslim juridical tradition wherein rules of jihad are elaborately discussed, to justify this claim. Presumably, he does not need to, assuming that for his Kashmiri Muslim audience such justification is unnecessary and that his claim is self-explanatory. Not being a traditionally trained ‘*alim*’ or Islamic scholar, despite the public image of him as one, it is also possible that his familiarity with these texts is limited.⁷⁶

In his Introduction to *Nava-e Hurriyat*, Saleem Mansur Khalid, a leading ideologue of the Jamaat-e Islami of Pakistan, presents Geelani as the ‘most reliable of all *jihadi* leaders in Kashmir’, and his book as ‘the most reliable expression of this jihad’. Khalid alleges that ‘oppression and cruelty’ is ‘inherent’ in the Hindus. He speaks of ‘hypocrisy and cruelty’ and ‘animalism’ as being ‘integral’ to the ‘very nature of the leaders of the Hindus’, and of the various non-Hindu communities of India being ‘heavily oppressed’ by the Hindus.⁷⁷ The very

⁷⁶ However, it is interesting to note, not a single well-known Indian Muslim scholar has issued any statement or *fatwa* declaring the militant movement in Kashmir as a jihad. On the contrary, many such scholars, with far greater Islamic scholarly credentials than Geelani himself, consider it to be, at best, a nationalist movement or a political struggle that erroneously invokes Islamic legitimacy, and several have even gone to the extent of declaring it to be an Islamically-unacceptable *fitna* or *fasad* or ‘strife’, the very opposite of jihad, and, therefore, illegitimate. They also claim that the Kashmir case does not fulfill all the various requirements for declaring a jihad according to their understanding of the Islamic scriptural sources. See, for instance, Wahiduddin Khan, *Peace in Kashmir* (<http://www.islampeaceandjustice.blogspot.com>, accessed on 14th September, 2010). Geelani, however, does not refer to these scholars or engage with their arguments.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.7.

‘nature’ of the Hindus, he appears to suggest, necessitates jihad against them. In this way, he seeks to sanction the militant movement in Kashmir as an Islamically-legitimate jihad.⁷⁸

Geelani does not make such gross essentialist arguments about the Hindus as a people, although, revealingly, he does not contradict Khalid. At the same time, he seeks to justify his argument that the ongoing militant struggle is a jihad, as distinct from a political struggle or an ethno-nationalist liberation movement, by framing Indian atrocities in Kashmir, and, indeed, India itself, in religious terms, by arguing that the underlying motive of those engaged in the militant movement is Islam, rather than Kashmiri nationalism or simply anti-Indianism, and by projecting final goal of the movement to be the setting up of an ‘Islamic state’. In framing the struggle in this way, he also seeks to delegitimize the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists who do not share his Islamist vision.

Geelani depicts India as inherently and viscerally anti-Muslim and anti-Islam, using this as his basic argument to justify his claim that the ongoing militant movement in Kashmir is a jihad. ‘India’, he claims, ‘is a bigger enemy of Islam and Muslims than even Israel’.⁷⁹ He refers to the dismal conditions of the Indian Muslims, whom he describes as ‘heavily oppressed’⁸⁰ at the hands of what he portrays as a Hindu state and Hindu chauvinist forces, and mentions the frequent bloody anti-Muslim pogroms, often sponsored by agencies of the state, as ‘proof’ of India’s alleged anti-Muslimism and of India’s ‘Hindu’ identity.⁸¹ He mocks India’s claims to secularism and democracy, dismissing them as a ‘complete sham’. Ever since India won its independence, he writes, ‘not a single day has passed when the blood of innocents has not been shed’. All of India’s minority communities, including the oppressed ‘low’ castes, he contends, have been victims of this ‘barbarity’, being allegedly faced uniformly with grave and continuous threats to their lives, properties, self-respect, culture, religion, places of worship, language and identity, but the worst off have been India’s Muslims. Hence, he points out, ‘it is but natural’ for the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir, to refuse to live with India and to oppose Indian rule, even by force, in the form of what he calls jihad.

That Indian Muslims are, as a whole, heavily marginalized, and often the victims of state-sponsored violence, is undeniable. So, too, is the fact that the Indian state has done little, if at all, to address their manifold concerns. However, to claim, as Geelani does, that India is viscerally

⁷⁸ Needless to say, this is a view that many Indian Muslim scholars would vehemently oppose as representing a complete distortion of the teachings of their faith.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.147.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.189.

⁸¹ Gilani does not concern himself with the implications of his characterization of India as ‘anti-Islam’ and of his call for jihad against India for the Indian Muslims, who vastly outnumber the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir. The future of the Indian Muslims in the face of what he characterizes as a jihad binding on all Muslims does not concern him, and nor does he refer to what role he thinks the Indian Muslims should play in the ‘jihad’. Describing the Indian Muslims as heavily oppressed by the Indian/Hindu state and Hindu chauvinist groups, presumably he feels that their position could hardly get worse if jihad is declared against the Indian state.

anti-Islam, even more so than Israel, is, needless to say, a complete travesty of facts, a gross and wholly unwarranted exaggeration. It can even threaten to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Geelani is indifferent to that prospect, however. One is tempted to imagine that he might even relish that possibility, for it would only reinforce his claim about India's credentials and his insistence that the Kashmiri Muslims can at no cost accept to live under Indian rule, which he characterizes as 'an oppressive and imperialistic system'.⁸²

Geelani interprets the large scale Indian army atrocities in Kashmir as an expression of what he claims is India's inherent anti-Islamism and anti-Muslimism. This perception must be recognized as a major factor for the widespread and continued opposition to Indian rule among many Kashmiri Muslims. Under Indian rule, Geelani claims, 'the Islamic identity' of Kashmir, and the 'life, property, respect, religious places, religion and faith' of the Kashmiri Muslims are under grave threat. The Kashmiri Muslims, he writes, without adducing any proof, are faced with deadly Indian 'cultural aggression'.⁸³ India, he adds, has consistently denied the Kashmiri Muslims 'all opportunities to progress economically and educationally'.⁸⁴

Geelani depicts Kashmir under Indian rule as a veritable hell in order to justify the waging of what he calls a jihad against Indian occupation. It is as if half a decade of Indian rule has brought no good at all to Kashmir. The considerable economic and educational progress of the Kashmiri Muslims since 1947, and the state's impressive infrastructural development, all made possible because of the Indian presence, are conveniently denied. The fact that Indian-administered Kashmir is considerably ahead of Pakistani-administered Kashmir on major social and economic indices is completely glossed over. That the Indian state has placed no hurdles in the free practice and propagation of Islam in Kashmir is rudely denied—all this in order to reinforce anti-Indianism and justify the cause *azadi*, 'freedom' from India.⁸⁵

Geelani considers what he calls the jihad in Kashmir to be a trans-local phenomenon, not limited just to the confines Kashmir itself. He argues that the oppression of the Kashmiri Muslims, which he attributes to account their faith, is not unique to them alone, however. It is, in fact, so he claims, something that they share with all the Muslims of the entire world. 'Today, all the Muslims of the world are being tightly bound up in chains of oppression, coercion and slavery. The imperialist forces are creating an unending series of problems for the entire worldwide

⁸² Ibid., p.50.

⁸³ Ibid., p.31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 253.

⁸⁵ In my several visits to Kashmir, I have been told by Kashmiri Muslim friends of Pakistani militants who were sent to Kashmir, fed on fanciful stories of how the Government of India and the Hindus allegedly refuse to allow Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir to follow their religion and even to pray in mosques. On coming to Kashmir they were confronted with a completely different reality. Gilani's depiction of Islam being under grave threat and attack in Kashmir fits in with this pervasive anti-Indian and anti-Hindu discourse of radical jihadist groups in Pakistan and Kashmir.

Muslim *ummah*, seeking to close off to them all the paths to progress'.⁸⁶ It is thus necessary, he seems to suggest, that all Muslims must take to the path of jihad to confront the 'imperialistic forces' that he regards as engaged in a 'conspiracy' against Muslims throughout the world.

The trans-local aspect of the jihad in Kashmir also necessitates, Geelani writes, that non-Kashmiri Muslims take an active role in it. Thus, in an appeal issued in 1992 to the Afghan '*mujahidin*' Geelani pleaded with them on behalf of what he termed 'the oppressed people of Jammu and Kashmir' to 'come forward to help liberate them from India' and, in this way, to 'express their bond of Islamic brotherhood and religious commitment'.⁸⁷ In a telephonic interview with a group of Pakistani journalists in 1993, Geelani insisted, 'It is the duty of the people of Pakistan to help their oppressed Kashmiri brethren win freedom from slavery [...] In the light of the Quran, it has now become incumbent on the people of Pakistan to engage in the jihad [in Kashmir]. They must now stand up and participate in the practical (*amali*) jihad to help their Kashmiri brethren.' Participating in the 'Kashmir jihad', he went on, was 'now a binding duty (*farz*), incumbent not just on the Pakistani Muslims but, rather, the entire worldwide Muslim *ummah*'.⁸⁸

At the same time as Geelani characterizes India as viscerally 'anti-Islam' and 'anti-Muslim' and insists that the armed struggle against Indian rule in Kashmir is a legitimate jihad in which all Muslims across the world must participate, on occasion he appears to contradict himself by moderating somewhat his anti-India rhetoric when it suits his purpose. Thus, in an interview given to the London-based Islamist magazine *Impact International*, he explained that despite the massive oppression they had suffered at the hands of the Indian armed forces, the Kashmiris 'have no hate in their hearts for the Indian people.' He made a crucial distinction between the 'Indian people', on the one hand, and the Indian state, on the other, pointing out that it was the latter that the Kashmiris' struggle was directed against, for its oppression of the Kashmiris. Hence, he went on, if India relinquished its control over Kashmir, the Kashmiris 'would have no problem in having political relations with it'.⁸⁹ He left curiously unexplained how he could justify the latter scenario if he believed that India was fiercely and inherently anti-Islam.

Geelani betrayed a similar softening of his anti-India rhetoric in an interview given to a group of Pakistani journalists in 1994 arranged for by a Pakistani jihadist organisation. The salience of this is particularly striking in the light of the fact that numerous Pakistan-based jihadist groups have called for nothing less than the destruction of India and its absorption into what they ambitiously call 'Greater Pakistan'. On this occasion Geelani advised them, 'Emotional slogans such as "Crush India" are not realistic, and nor do they reflect the spirit of Islam.' Islam, he explained, 'invites people to welfare, truth, salvation in the hereafter, the end of oppression,

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.71.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.82-83.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

dialogue and understanding between the children of Adam. This is the meaning of the life of the Prophet.’ He cited the example of the Prophet Muhammad who, even when faced with ‘extreme oppression’ at the hands of his polytheist opponents of the town of Taif, ‘did not act to destroy them’, but, rather, ‘prayed for their guidance’. Accordingly, Geelani stated, ‘We must certainly struggle for our rights, but not through mere slogans. Instead of negative sloganeering, we must understand, in a positive way, Islam’s missionary spirit and spread the light of Islam. Slogans calling for destruction [of others] are not our identity. Rather, Islam’s identity lies in inviting [others to Islam], welfare, peace and truth’.⁹⁰

Critique of the Course of the Militant Movement

Geelani wholeheartedly commends the ongoing militant struggle in Jammu and Kashmir, blessing it as an Islamically-mandated ‘jihad’, and insists that it must continue till India agrees to let the people of the state participate in a plebiscite to decide between India or Pakistan, or, if this is not possible, to grant freedom to Jammu and Kashmir.

At the same time, however, Geelani readily admits that the militant movement has not been without its problems. The most crucial of these he identifies as internecine fighting within the ranks of what he terms as the *mujahidin*. On occasion, he appears to evade this question altogether by branding it as ‘Indian propaganda’ and insisting that ‘there is no ideological conflict at all’ in the ranks of the *mujahidin*, all of them being unanimous on freedom from India⁹¹—although here he conveniently glosses over the stark ideological differences between pro-independence Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists and pro-Pakistan Islamists.

Geelani also makes no mention at all about the fact that many men have joined the ranks of the militants not out of any ideological commitment, certainly not of pure Islamic passion, as he seems to claim, but, rather, simply to loot, plunder and target, and to settle personal scores and eliminate personal enemies. Only once throughout the book does Geelani refer to these activities, but then only with an oblique reference to what he terms as ‘irresponsible actions’ (*ghair zimmedar harkat*)⁹² of some unnamed elements. When questioned about allegations against his Jamaat-e Islami and its armed wing, the Hizb ul-Mujahidin, engaging in unwarranted violence, including against other Kashmiri Muslim groups, he refused to acknowledge the possibility, claiming that the Jamaat was committed to Islam and to the ‘establishment of the faith’ in Jammu and Kashmir.⁹³ Presumably, he thereby sought to argue that the Jamaat’s stated ideology itself rendered it incapable of doing any wrong. He accused ‘socialists, nationalists and communists’, who, he said, ‘have no relation with Islam and God’, for spreading canards about the alleged misdemeanours of Jamaat and Hizb ul-Mujahidin activists, arguing that they did so in order to

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.242.

⁹² Ibid., p. 162.

⁹³ Ibid., p.76.

indirectly attack Islam itself—since they could not dare to traduce Islam directly, they attacked the Jamaat, which stood, he claimed, for Islam. Thus equating his Jamaat-e Islami with Islam itself, and hence attacks on the Jamaat with assaults on Islam, he declared, seeking to absolve the Jamaat’s militants of charges against them, ‘Those people who level allegations against the Jamaat actually intend to abuse Islam itself’.⁹⁴

However, elsewhere in *Nava-e Hurriyat* Geelani does admit the undeniable fact of rivalry, ideological as well as physical, in the form of internecine fighting, in the ranks of the militants in Jammu and Kashmir, which, he laments, has weakened the overall struggle, to the advantage of India. He is acutely conscious of the divisions in the ranks of various militant groups. In response to a question put to him by Director-General of the Pakistan-based Kashmir Press International expressing the fear that if Jammu and Kashmir were to be freed from Indian rule it would face the same dire situation as in Afghanistan in the wake of the Soviet defeat, when different ‘*mujahidin*’ groups began warring among themselves, Geelani conceded this possibility by remarking that in Kashmir ‘unfortunately, the relations between the different [militant] groups are not very satisfactory.’ Hence, he said, the ‘apprehension’ that Kashmir might go the Afghanistan way ‘cannot be denied’.⁹⁵ On this occasion, he issued an impassioned appeal to the militant groups in Kashmir to unite—for the sake, he said, of Islam and their common goal—of freedom from India.

Geelani lists several reasons for the lack of unity in the ranks of the militants. Prominent among these is the fact that some militant groups have, he admits, gone out of the control of the political leadership that is spearheading the *azadi* movement. He refers to efforts for unity in the past by the political leadership of groups struggling for independence from India as represented by the Hurriyat Conference, but admits that the unity achieved thereby ‘has not been long-lasting’.⁹⁶ This, he bemoans, ‘has played havoc with our lives’.⁹⁷

Another major cause for the divisions in the ranks of those struggling against India, Geelani says, is the ‘lack of intellectual (*fikri*) unity’, most particularly between pro-Pakistan Islamists like himself, and Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, who aspire to an independent Jammu and Kashmir. To this he adds sectarianism, party rivalries, and personal interests of leaders of different groups.⁹⁸

A key factor that Geelani describes in the divisions within and infighting among militant groups active in Kashmir is the role of the Pakistani state. Surprisingly, he admits on numerous occasions in the book the central importance of the Pakistani state in the militant movement and

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.68.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.148.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.232.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 227.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.149.

in directing and controlling many of the militant groups active in Kashmir at the same time as he continues to insist that the movement is entirely indigenous and that India's claims of Pakistani involvement are bogus propaganda intended to rob the movement of its legitimacy and international support.

Although Geelani is quick to dismiss the Indian charge that the ongoing struggle in Kashmir is not indigenous, but, rather, instigated by Pakistan, throughout *Nava-e Hurriyat* he provides ample evidence of the central role of the Pakistani state in the ongoing militant movement, and of what he clearly describes as its culpability in promoting internecine fighting within the ranks of the militants active in Kashmir. Thus, in a telephonic interview with the Director-General of the Pakistan-based Kashmir Press International in 1993, Geelani lamented the lack of the 'required degree of dialogue and intellectual and practical unity' among the militant groups, attributing this to the role of what he cryptically termed as the movement's overall 'guardian' (using the Urdu word *sarparast* in inverted commas)—seemingly a veiled reference to the Pakistani state—which was, he bemoaned, 'directly and indirectly encouraging divisions' among the militant groups. If the 'guardian' so desired, there would have been no rivalry among the different militant groups in Kashmir, he remarked, adding, 'Without fear of contradiction, I can say that in producing these divisions and conflicts and deepening them the fault of the people of Kashmir is very minor'.⁹⁹ If there was any doubt about precisely whom Geelani referred to as the 'guardian' of the militant groups in Kashmir it was set at rest in a letter he penned in 1993 to the then Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, wherein he complained, 'Your institutions and officials have created another major problem for us by creating new [militant] groups every day, because of which here [in Kashmir] we are faced with very severe disruption and anarchy. It is becoming very difficult to control these groups'. He went to the extent of denouncing this situation as a 'calamity' (*azab*).¹⁰⁰

In another telephonic interview, in 1994 with a group of Pakistani journalists, Geelani lamented the lack of unity among the various militant groups active in the region, and frankly admitted, 'In this connection, your [Pakistan's] responsibility [for this] is more than ours'. Through these journalists he appealed to the Pakistani people and leaders to 'try to influence the militant groups so that they work with sincerity', because, he added, 'after all, they get their warp and woof (*tana bana*) from you'. He made no bones of the fact that these groups 'received instructions' from Pakistan to eliminate certain people, for which they were, he revealed, promised that 'they would become dominant'. All this, he confessed, had made the life of the Kashmiris, reeling under 'Indian oppression [...] even more miserable'.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.148.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.136-37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.225-6.

In a similar vein, in an interview given to the Rawalpindi-based fortnightly *Jihad-e Kashmir* in 1994, Geelani acknowledged the infighting among militants in Kashmir but claimed, ‘In this, our blame is less, and that of [Pakistan] is more’. Geelani further indicated that Pakistan was playing a central role in creating new militant organizations in Kashmir, and in unwittingly or otherwise promoting conflicts between them in order to suit what it regarded as its own interests. From what he added about what he frankly admitted was Pakistan’s manufacturing of new militant groups in Kashmir it seemed that he was apprehensive that this was eroding the popularity of his own Jamaat-e Islami and its militant wing, the Hizb ul-Mujahidin, and their influence within the Pakistani establishment. Thus, he advised the editor of *Jihad-e Kashmir*, to ‘convince the people where you are [Pakistan] that multiplying the number of militant groups will not help the militant struggle at all’, and that ‘only two or three groups should exist’. This, he explained, would ‘ease our difficulties’ and promote what he called Pakistan’s ‘real objectives’. In yet another frank admission of Pakistan’s central role in the ongoing militant movement in Kashmir, he added that efforts on the part of anti-Indian Kashmiri leaders to reduce conflicts among the militant groups could not succeed until ‘our base-camp’, by which he obviously meant Pakistan, ‘does not turn its attention to this problem’ and ‘influential forces there do not play an effective and positive role’.¹⁰² Given this honest recognition of the integral role of Pakistan in the militant movement, Geelani’s claim, published in a Pakistani periodical, the Lahore-based weekly *Zindagi*, that the argument that Kashmiri militants were being armed by Pakistan was mere ‘Indian propaganda’ that aimed to ‘tell the world’ that the movement was not indigenous, but, rather, ‘created and promoted by Pakistan’¹⁰³, can hardly be taken seriously.

At the same time as Geelani accuses the Pakistani state of fomenting divisions in the ranks of the militants, thus playing into the hands of India, he continues to appeal to the rulers of Pakistan to support him, his Jamaat-e Islami and the Jamaat’s militant wing, the Hizb ul-Mujahidin, as against other anti-India factions, most notably the Kashmiri nationalists, whom he depicts as inveterate foes on par with the Indian state. In this way, too, he admits the central role that Pakistan, both the Pakistani state and its agencies as well as various Pakistan-based militant Islamist groups, are playing in the ongoing, self-styled ‘jihad’ in Kashmir. In order to curry favour with the Pakistani establishment, and competing with other rival groups for such patronage, Geelani argues that he and his Jamaat-e Islami are Pakistan’s best bet in Kashmir, its most reliable and trusted ally, and fully committed to Pakistan’s interests which lie, he argues, in the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. Thus, in the letter addressed to Nawaz Sharif mentioned above, Geelani declared, ‘The Jamaat-e Islami of Jammu and Kashmir and its militant wing, the Hizb ul-Mujahidin, are the most appropriate and reliable group [in Kashmir] for the ideological existence (*nazariyati wujud*) of Pakistan’¹⁰⁴, as they were committed to Islam, rather than Kashmiri nationalism, and Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan, rather than independence.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.243.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.255.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

Despite this, he complained, Pakistan ‘provided help’ and ‘gave greater importance to [...] secular and so-called nationalist elements’—a reference to pro-independence Kashmiri groups, opposed to both Indian as well as Pakistani rule—although these groups, he claimed, were ‘not sincere, neither about Pakistan, nor about Islam’.¹⁰⁵ He lamented that the Pakistani state and its various organs, such as its official media, ‘did not give weight to the activities of the Jamaat-e Islami [of Jammu and Kashmir] and the Hizb ul-Mujahidin’, describing this as a ‘lamentable and saddening state of affairs’ that was having a seriously deleterious impact on the ongoing movement in Kashmir. He lambasted Pakistan’s policy of patronizing Kashmiri groups of divergent ideological orientations, saying that this was tantamount to promoting the ‘enemies of jihad’—a veiled reference to pro-independence Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalist groups. This, he alleged, was enabling the Kashmiri nationalists to seek to ‘damage and destroy’ the ‘jihad’ that, in his view, ought to work for Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan. Geelani also reminded the Pakistani Prime Minister that ‘to enable the current struggle in Jammu and Kashmir reach its logical end, Pakistan’s role is central’, warning him that, ‘If in this last and very sensitive stage’ Pakistan continued with its ‘negative’ policy’, of patronizing rival Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalist groups, ‘Kashmir will forever be cut off from you and then it will never become a part of Pakistan, contrary to Pakistan’s desires, hopes and needs’.¹⁰⁶

From the details disclosed in the letter, Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists appear to Geelani to be as inveterate foes of (his version of) Islam and what he terms as the ‘jihad’ in Kashmir as the Indian state. Their source of inspiration, Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalism, is, as Geelani sees it, and as his mentor Maududi would have, as ‘un-Islamic’ as India’s officially claimed secular democracy, both being ‘man-made ideologies’ that represent a ‘revolt’ against Islam as God’s ‘complete code of law and way of life’, as understood by the Jamaat-e Islami. Their political project, of an independent state, is also anathema to Geelani, who regards it as a betrayal of Islam, which, according to him, demands global Muslim political unity and hence requires Kashmir to join Muslim Pakistan. They are, Geelani believes, to be stiffly opposed for another reason—they compete with Geelani and his followers for the patronage of the Pakistani state, and thus threaten to usurp the position that he and fellow pro-Pakistan Islamists claim of being the authentic voice of the Kashmiri people.

In his letter to Nawaz Sharif, Geelani spares no bones in attacking his secular Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalist rivals, whom he sees as competing with him and his fellow pro-Pakistan Islamists for representing the people of Jammu and Kashmir and for the crucial support of the Pakistani establishment. He warns Sharif that these people and groups ‘are not the means for Pakistan’s stability and welfare’.¹⁰⁷ ‘Since 1947’, he goes on, ‘I and my Jamaat have been

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.138.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.138.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.138.

consistently struggling for accession to Pakistan’, claiming that he and his organisation have made innumerable sacrifices for this purpose.¹⁰⁸ He insists that for Pakistan to attain its objectives in Kashmir it must work with what individuals in Kashmir whom he terms as a ‘sincere leadership’ (*mukhlis qayadat*). He uses this term four times in the same paragraph, undoubtedly to refer to himself and his fellow pro-Pakistan Islamist associates. ‘You also know well’, he tells Sharif, ‘that to liberate Kashmir from Indian control the militant struggle of our youth is not enough.’ India’s well-organised and large army, he writes, ‘can only be defeated by an equally strong army’, but, he adds, ‘the experience of the last 45 years and present-day global conditions clearly show that Pakistan cannot bear the burden of a regular war with India.’ Hence, he advises him that, accepting this ‘bitter truth’, Pakistan must make sure that the militant movement in Kashmir is kept under a ‘sincere political leadership’—a reference to himself and his Islamist colleagues. However, this can ‘under no circumstances whatsoever’ come about on the initiative of the Kashmiris themselves, he explains. For this, he insists, admitting the central role of Pakistan in the movement, the Pakistani state must ‘offer its full assistance’, stop ‘creating innumerable artificial militant groups’, limit the number of militant groups to ‘that which is truly required’, and, most importantly, listen to the advice of the ‘sincere leaders’ of the Kashmiris (people like himself), working in cooperation with them.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Syed Ali Shah Geelani is seen by vast numbers of Kashmiri Muslims as the symbol of their collective resistance to Indian rule, which they regard as illegitimate. Key in constructing this image of a charismatic hero has been Geelani’s consistent opposition to what he and many Kashmiris see as Indian occupation. Unlike other noted Kashmiri Muslim leaders, he is regarded as ‘honest’, ‘committed’, to have never compromised his stand on freedom from India, and as having suffered immense privations, including long spells in jail, for daring to oppose Indian rule. His charisma is also based on the perception of him as a pious, committed Muslim—an image that he also strives to project—and as having allegedly dedicated his entire life, including his long and tumultuous political career, simply for the sake of (his version of) Islam. In *Nava-e Hurriyat*, Geelani very deliberately portrays himself as the model Muslim, his every action allegedly determined by, and dedicated to, Islam. Thus, he piously proclaims:

‘I have dedicated my whole life to the establishment of the faith (*iqamat-e din*). Till this very day, all the efforts I have made, whether personal or social and collective, have revolved round this agenda. I have always tried to use all my abilities to ensure the supremacy of God’s Word.’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

Geelani's charisma also rests in the perception that, in contrast to various other Kashmiri leaders, he has never caved in to Indian pressure or blandishments. In *Nava-e Hurriyat* he relates that at the height of the militant movement, in 1990, when incarcerated in jail in Jammu, he was approached by a top Indian intelligence officer who offered him the post of Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. However, he writes, he refused the offer, telling the officer, 'Minister-ships and ambassadorships have no importance at all for me. Even if I sacrifice my life for our cause I will not think it to be that I have made a bad bargain. My goal is so lofty that it cannot be measured by any worldly criterion.'¹¹¹

In his *Nava-e Hurriyat*, as in his longstanding political career, Geelani forcefully articulates the manifold grievances of many Kashmiri Muslims—opposition to Indian rule, widespread human rights violations by the Indian armed forces, India's reneging on its commitments to the international community, its consistent denial of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiris through plebiscite, the perceived Hinduistic and anti-Muslim character of the Indian nation-state, and the plight of the Indian Muslims, which he attributes entirely to Hindu chauvinism. Consistently referring to all these, he portrays himself as the authoritative voice of the Kashmiri people and as spearheading the movement for *azadi*, which he projects as the solution to all these various challenges.

At the same time as Geelani forcefully foregrounds *azadi*, freedom from India, as the core of his political project, he remains silent on the details of the political dispensation—the 'Islamic state' and 'Islamic system'—that he sees himself struggling to establish in Jammu and Kashmir in place of Indian rule. He offers nothing even remotely resembling a blue-print of this 'state' and 'system'. This is certainly a very consciously thought-out strategy, reflecting the intellectual limitations of Islamism itself as a political project for practical governance, and of the fact that the trope of the 'Islamic state' serves, in Kashmir today as in many other cases, essentially as a slogan and device for mobilizing popular dissent and opposition to existing regimes. This silence on the details of the 'Islamic system' that Geelani aspires to must also related to deeply-contested notions of Islam itself, in Kashmir as elsewhere, with considerable opposition among many Kashmiri Muslims themselves to the very understanding of Islam and its relationship with politics and the state as articulated by Islamists such as Geelani and his Jamaat-e Islami. The desire to maintain a 'united front' and to prevent further fissures within the anti-Indian Kashmiri Muslim constituency demands, therefore, silence on the practical details of his Maududist-inspired Islamist vision that may not have many takers among the Kashmiri Muslims.

Ironically, despite the widespread perception of Geelani as the icon of the *azadi* movement, Geelani's understanding of *azadi* differs radically from that of the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, who may be said to reflect the aspirations of a sizeable majority of Kashmiri

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 164.

Muslims. While Geelani repeatedly uses the term *azadi*, it is clear that he takes it to mean not just freedom from Indian rule but also the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. This is in sharp contrast to how Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists understand the term—as freedom from India and the establishment of an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir. It can thus be posited that Geelani’s widespread popularity among many Kashmiri Muslims, based on the perception of him as a leading champion of *azadi*, is not quite what it seems. To many Kashmiris he is a hero for his consistent opposition to Indian rule and to widespread human rights violations by the Indian armed forces. But, when it comes to his advocacy of a Maududist-style ‘Islamic state’ and the merger of Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan, a large section of even those who regard him as a hero would vehemently disagree. In other words, it is largely in his fiery anti-Indianism that his charismatic appeal lies and to which his popularity among many Kashmiri Muslims today may be attributed. Many of these very same Kashmiri Muslims would, at the same time, stoutly oppose his ultimate political project—merger with Pakistan—and his particular version of Islam, as represented by Maududi and the Jamaat-e Islami.

The inconsistencies and contradictions in Geelani’s approach to *azadi* are also reflected in his understanding of the *awam*, the people, of Jammu and Kashmir, whose political voice he claims to be, equating the anti-Indian constituency among the Sunni Kashmiri Muslims with the entire population of the state. Consequently, the aspirations of the substantial non-Muslim minority in Jammu and Kashmir come to be completely silenced, while the Kashmiri Muslim ethno-nationalists, who oppose his agenda of merger with Pakistan and his Maududist-style ‘Islamic state’, are summarily branded as nothing short of traitors to Islam, as Geelani understands it. Accordingly, it can be said that despite the widespread perception of him as the icon of *azadi* and hero of the Kashmiri Muslim resistance, Geelani’s political project and his Islamist vision represent the aspirations of only a relatively small, and apparently diminishing, minority of pro-Pakistan Kashmiri Muslims.