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# (Re)shaping “Homes” in Kashmir: The Impact of War on Kashmiri Pandit Women’s Lives in the Name of Nation

Christine Show

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**(Re)shaping “Homes” in Kashmir:  
The Impact of War on Kashmiri Pandit Women’s Lives  
in the Name of Nation**

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in Women’s Studies with Honors

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APPROVED

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## Abstract

The state of Kashmir is positioned between India, Pakistan and China. The region has been the site of four wars since 1947 in the name of claiming a nation. There is an ongoing ethnic and religious battle between India (Hindu majority) and Pakistan (Muslim majority) over who can claim the state of Kashmir. As part of this battle, the people of Kashmir have been deeply affected as targets of militancy. In particular, Kashmiri Pandit women, those who are religiously rooted as Hindus, have seen violence and trauma as Muslim militant forces have invaded women's "homes" inside the state and within their physical "homes" to inflict violence in the name of the "nation."

This thesis will look at the meaning of "home". Herstories of three Pandit Kashmiri women in the post-partition era will be examined. Their voices and experiences demonstrate how nationalisms, masculinity and sexual violence have created a (dis)appearance of "home" in the making of a nation. In addition, other important themes and issues arose during the research for this project. These include both the loss of belonging and feelings of longing for many displaced Pandit women from Kashmir. Further, examinations of how the Kashmiri Pandit diaspora has begun constructing a new identity as a result of displacement are important. How does the scattering of a group of people with a shared history and culture contribute to new identities away from a "home"land? Diaspora has had profound effects on how women relate to their territorial "home" of Kashmir, and this thesis investigates how diaspora and new or reconfigured identities influence women's "homes."

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By Christine Show

## **Introduction**

*“I realize I was dreaming of my home, the place I had left behind.”*  
-Shakti Bhan Raina, “Leaving Home”

Women are represented as a symbol of nation in war-torn Kashmir, and this has shaped the way Kashmiri women have understood “home” for almost two decades. Kashmir is not unfamiliar with war. The region was divided among India, Pakistan and China in a 1947 partition, and the people of Kashmir have been significantly affected by four wars fought between India and Pakistan. While the region’s conflict has been historically documented, the main focus is primarily on national politics rather than the suffering of civilians. These histories are often written from male perspectives, and exclude women’s ideologies and thoughts. In order to fully understand the Kashmiri conflict, feminist interpretations of women’s national identity in relation to the place they claim as “home” needs to be addressed. I will look at the meaning of “home” through the eyes and words of three Kashmiri Pandit women in the post-partition era, demonstrating how nationalisms, masculinity, and sexual violence have created a (dis)appearance of “home” in the making of a nation.

In this thesis, I address ideas of belonging and longing for “home” that many displaced Pandit women from Kashmir deal with on a daily basis. I have included quotation marks around the word “home” in order to demonstrate that the term is not defined as only a physical house, but rather the term carries various meanings that explain a range of experiences

Kashmiri Pandits have had as a result of displacement. The quotation marks also serve to illustrate the different ways in which women connect to the concept of “home” in efforts to prevent possibilities of exclusion of Kashmiri Pandit women’s voices.

I will also look at how the diaspora of Kashmiri Pandits has begun the making of reconfigured or even new identities as a result of displacement. How does the scattering of a group of people with a shared history and culture comprise a separate identity<sup>1</sup> away from a “home”land? Diaspora has had profound effects on how women relate to their territorial “home” of Kashmir, and this thesis investigates how diaspora and new identities influence women’s “homes.”

This topic is of particular importance to me because of the lack of attention given to Kashmir in the United States. As a student in the U.S., it is easy to view the world through a U.S. centered perspective. After studying abroad in Florence, Italy in 2005, I was first introduced to research that addressed the atrocities that have occurred in Kashmir. Given my experiences living in an Italian culture where views from the United States were not at the forefront of every piece of news I came across, I learned and craved to think beyond the scope of the United States. After I realized how little was known in the U.S. specifically concerning women within the Kashmir conflict, I decided that researching the history of women’s lives and “homes” through the violence of war in Kashmir and through a transnational feminist lens

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<sup>1</sup> One could even argue that an identity that did not previously exist is beginning to form in diaspora, but that is the topic of another thesis grounded primarily in diaspora studies literatures.

would make a contribution to ending some of the ignorance and invisibility surrounding the topic matter. Since I was in a privileged position to write and research this history, I concluded that this work could contribute in general to awareness of violence against women across borders in global contexts.

The fight for nationhood in Kashmir has created a region that is presently divided into three areas. Kashmir's northern area, which is called Azad Kashmir, or "Free Kashmir," is controlled by Pakistan. The southern and central area is known as Jammu and Kashmir and is under Indian control. The third part of Kashmir is controlled by China (see appendix). The basic "ownership" of the territory was established during the India-Pakistan partition in 1947. As the people of Kashmir attempted to restructure their "homes" and lives in the following 40 years after the partition, the threads that began to shape the nation-state were again pulled apart when the Hindu Brahmins—about a half a million people—were told to leave the Kashmir valley within three days in January 1990 as violent attacks in the area increased. As fundamentalist Islamic codes were reinforced, about 98 percent of the Brahmins were forced from their physical and geographical "homes" and displaced outside of established Kashmiri borders. Within the last 17 years, militancy and security force raids between the Indian and Pakistani controls of Kashmir have contributed to the detriment of the lives of the Kashmiri people.

The longing for a sense of "home" after the partition was a common theme for millions of people whose lives were destroyed. "Twelve million

people were displaced as a result of Partition. Nearly one million died. Some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the 'other' religion, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and destroyed, villages abandoned" (Butalia, 35). The violence against Pandit women continued when violent uprisings became a reality in Kashmir during 1990. As explained, all Hindus were forced to leave Kashmir at this point creating a sense of longing and need for belonging throughout Pandit women's lives. Themes of longing and belonging, which are central to this thesis, demonstrate how nationalist movements, which thrive on masculinized ideals, can create a continuous loss within women's lives.

Women have been significantly affected by the ongoing conflict in Kashmir as specific targets of militancy and state force. Kashmiri women's bodies have become instruments to be used to reflect the nationalistic struggles between India and Pakistan. Women's "purity" is seen as necessary to uphold the "honor" of either side of the nation-state. As an effort to destroy this male-defined honor and to establish power amongst the two sides, women's territorial and physical "homes" are infiltrated by militants and their bodies violated. Performances of hyper-masculinities are key to these attacks, as the men involved use particular modes of male power to reinforce female subordination as a way to craft a nation in a masculine image. In the process, women's identities within the physical spaces they live, as well as their position in the greater national struggles, are up for grabs and are out of their

control. While Kashmiri women do have “homes,” they are and have been regularly violated resulting in unsafe “homes.”

In this thesis I will examine in chronological order three different moments in Kashmiri history that play a role in the shaping and reshaping of women’s “homes.” These include the first attacks of the 1947 partition, the violence in 1990 when Pandits were told to leave Kashmir, and how the conflict has unfolded during the 1990s into present-day Kashmir. As stated earlier, herstories of three Kashmiri women anchor my discussion of the various definitions of “home” and their meanings. These were chosen from Urvashi Butalia’s *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices in Kashmir*.

The edited book documents Kashmiri women’s experiences since the partition in their own words. The first story is from an excerpt from Krishna Mehta’s *This Happened in Kashmir*, which shows Mehta’s (re)shaping of “home” in the historical moment of the 1947 partition. Farida Abdulla, in “A Life of Peace and Dignity” looks at her personal experiences of militant violence that infiltrated her “home” during the 1990 insurgency. It also addresses issues of dignity for the Kashmiri people. Shakti Bhan Raina gives a personal account of her search and longing for a place to call “home” after leaving Kashmir for many years. I will use transnational feminist thought to demonstrate how these women’s ideas of “home” as part of their identities are connected to nationalistic struggles, where boundaries and borders are created through war and violence.

Further, Asha Hans' essay "Women across borders in Kashmir: the continuum of violence" will be used to trace the (dis)appearances of "home" throughout Kashmiri history. Hans describes the displacement of women and the violence used against them throughout the past 60 years in border areas within Kashmir. The Line of Control, which is used to identify the division between India and Pakistan, is discussed in-depth in her work, leading to a focus on Kashmiri women's roles based on this divide. Hans is concerned with the ways the established boundaries contribute to varied understandings of the meaning of "home."

While Hans' essay and *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* will be the foundation of my work, I will also include selected scholarship that theorizes ideas of "home," masculinities and nationalisms while connecting them to violence (against women) in war conflicts. Some of this scholarship focuses solely on the history of the changing views of "home" within the Kashmiri conflict, including *Rape and Molestation: Women as a Weapon of War in Kashmir*. Other research will draw on more broad ideas such as masculinities in R.W. Connell's work. Analyzing masculinities and nationalisms within societies in a general sense will help demonstrate how these concepts interrupt the shaping and reshaping of the history of Kashmiri women's "homes." The more specific sources on violence against women in Kashmir support feminist interpretations of the direct effects the Kashmiri conflict has on women's lives.

The Hans essay will be used as an analytic base to ground the voices of the three women, Krishna Mehta, Farida Abdulla, and Shakti Bhan Raina. My analysis shows how nationalism produces masculinized power relations and violence, encouraging a cycle of ongoing oppression against women. It should become clear that the way women view their “home” in geographical, physical and emotional ways in Kashmir is consistently evolving throughout history, because the borders of this nation continue to be challenged and debated.

## Literature Review

For women in Kashmir, concepts of nationalism and masculinity play an integral part in situating the meanings of “home” within the greater narrative of war. Several analyses of transnational feminism define concepts of “home,” nationalism and masculinity, and I connect this to women’s national identity in Kashmir (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; Gellner, 1983; Balibar & Wallenstein, 1991; Butalia, 2002; Enloe, 1989; Natarajan, 1994; Menon, 1998; Raina, 2002; Mehta, 1960; Dutt, 2004; Vemuri, 2000; Connell, 1995; Messner, 1997; Hans, 2000). Using the works of feminist scholars and theorists, my thesis contributes to understandings of how nationalism and masculinity influence the way women’s “homes” have been shaped in Kashmir and beyond.

### “Home”

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in *Feminism Without Borders*, defines the concept of “being home” as a place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries (Mohanty, 90). Mohanty also suggests that “home” is a political location that extends past a single geographical space (Mohanty, 126). “Home” is not bounded by fixed border lines, and its fluid definition reflects the political frame surrounding an individual or groups of people. Mohanty, though, does not define “home” as a simple term, explaining that the concept of “home” does not consist of a single meaning. She asks “what is home?” (Mohanty, 126) and her writing indicates her personal search for the meaning of “home.” As I write about Kashmiri women and their

relationship to “home,” I want to examine the various meanings of “home” and how these definitions can influence the lives of millions of women.

“Home” in the Kashmiri conflict is a constantly changing definition as the borders of this region have continued to shift since the 1947 partition. I am arguing that the borders of Kashmir continue to move throughout time, and this has influenced the way Kashmiri women understand their lives as they search for an answer to questions of “home” (Hans, 2000; Butalia, 2002; Marquand, 1999; Vemuri, 2000 Dutt, 2004).

For many Kashmiri women, the idea of “home” has moved through time and crosses borders. Urvashi Butalia’s *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices from Kashmir* (2002), features Kashmiri women as they search for understandings of “home.” Butalia notes that while focusing on the way war conflict changes the realities of the public world, it is also essential to analyze the familial “home,” as there are “transformations, both positive and negative, that it creates within the home” (xvi). The meaning of “home” for Kashmiri women is consistently presented and evaluated in *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices in Kashmir*, providing readers an opportunity to explore women’s personal understandings of “home” in relation to political and historical contexts. The essays address ideas for the possibilities of ‘normalcy’ and ‘peace’ both inside the Kashmiri state and within the physical space of a “home” (xvi). In my own work, I contribute to this literature of “home” by examining some of the ways “home” changes for Kashmiri women through time and across borders.

## **Nation and Nationalism**

Representations of nations and nationalism(s) are deeply connected to women's lives, bodies and their views of familial and national "home." It is important to understand the role of nation and nationalism(s) to groups of people around the world in order to address women's connections to nations. A nation is a system that is continuously constructed by historical and political influences from groups of people with shared beliefs and a common past (Liu, 1994; Wallerstein, 1991). In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe (1989) describes nation as "a collection of people who have come to believe that they have been shaped by a common past and are destined to share a common future." (45). Summarily, utilizing this definition, a collection of people have established a national "home" of belonging; they are connected through this particular "home" as a nation and through nationalism.

Nationalism is a particular ideology based in systems of symbols used to hold nations together. It is in this ideology where women are specifically used as symbols of the nation (Grewal & Kaplan, Layoun, Natarajan, 1994). Since women are symbolically related to the nation, patriarchy is upheld. As symbols, women are objectified in connection to national interests. Although women's individual views can exist outside or distinct from national ideals and interests, these perspectives are often left out of historical and analytical literatures in efforts to support masculinist ideals of nationalism (Butalia, xii). At the same time, since women symbolically serve to represent the nation,

their ideas of “home”—their “home” within the nation and within its history—are shaped by their connection to national identity.

In *Scattered Hegemonies* (1994), the essays written by Liu, Layoun and Natarajan show national identity can serve patriarchies in various ways in different locations. Layoun, for example, describes women’s relationships with national identity by examining rape in post-1974 Cyprus in her essay “The Female Body and ‘Transnational’ Reproduction; or, Rape by Any Other Name?” Through a discussion of rape and women’s bodies as a representation of the Cypriot national story, Layoun shows how sexual violence against women is not just a “woman’s” story, but it becomes a representation of the social and political story of Cyprus (Layoun, 73). Layoun’s supports similar bodies of literature that suggest women’s lives—their identities and their “homes”—are politicalized within national interests. A similar argument can be made in relation to Kashmiri women’s lives as their identities are shaped by the national identity. Their “homes” are then defined in relation to national interests.

### **Masculinity**

Masculinity is a social construct. In Kashmir, like many places around the globe, ideas of masculinity are constructed according to national agendas, which are defined via power struggles within regions and at the expense of women. Existing literatures on masculinity examine how the normalization of hyper-masculinity supports power structures that oppress women (Messner, 1997; Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity, according to Michael

Messner, is a type of masculinity that successfully serves to dominate women and is defined in relation to marginalized groups (Messner, 7,8). I will add to this body of knowledge, referring to the Kashmiri conflict as a site of hegemonic masculinity in practice.

R.W. Connell supports Messner's understanding of masculinity, and adds in his *Masculinities*, that the construction of masculinities are "inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change" (Connell, 44). This would suggest that masculinities contribute to the direction of the Kashmiri state, influencing the way in which the people—particularly women—understand their role in relation to the state. Kashmiri women's experiences are politicized along with their understanding of "home" in relation to views and constructions of masculinities. The safety and security women may or may not have within their geographical and physical "homes" is determined by the way masculinities are constructed and how they are used to control women's lives.

### **Influence on Kashmir**

The literatures of "home," nationalism and masculinity help to understand the way women's lives have been shaped throughout history in Kashmir. Concepts of nation and nationalism(s) influence the ways women are viewed in relation to national interests. In some cases, violations against women, as well as the exclusion of women's accounts of the nation, are

justified or rationalized because national identities render women as symbols and not full human beings (Liu, Layoun and Natarajan, 1994).

This transnational feminist grounding in the literatures on “home,” nationalism and masculinity anchor my analyses with regard to the roles of women “as nation” in Kashmir’s ongoing conflict. These works show how normative ideas of masculinity and nationalistic agendas are integral in the structuring of the way women in Kashmir may understand the concept of “home.” The following discussion of Kashmiri women’s relationships to concepts of “home” will show masculinity, nationalism and “home” intersect in their lives.

## Part One-Loss of Home and Partition

*“My prayer goes to them, I’ll sing them psalms,  
May the new moon, Ever shine in their sky”*

-Naseem Shafai, Kashmiri poet

Naseem Shafai has been described as a poet of a lost paradise. (Dutt, 2004). She is a native of Kashmir, a region in South Asia that is surrounded by mountains and rivers. It has been called one of the most beautiful places in the world. The state of Kashmir was once known as a place of nonviolence where permission was needed from a person’s elders before a chicken could even be killed (Butalia, xv). The concept of nonviolence among Kashmiris comes from a long tradition—700 years—of religious and ethnic tolerance. “So legendary was the Kashmiri spirit of amity and nonviolence, in fact, that when Mohandas Gandhi despaired about Hindu-Muslim relations in pre-partition India in the 1930s, he said, ‘If I see a ray of hope it is only from Kashmir’” (Marquand, 1999). Peaceful living among individuals and communities was the general sentiment within the lives of Kashmiri peoples.

In 1947, this ideal of peace changed as a partition divided governance of the region of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. A militant movement, which spurred a conflict that now involves hundreds of militant groups (Butalia, xi), changed the lives of the thousands of Kashmiris transforming their views of a peaceful and stable “home” to one of a place of fear. Women’s ideas of “home” were particularly altered as they were specific targets of war during the 1947 partition.

The first attacks throughout 1947 created a climate of terror. An ethnic and religious divide between Muslims and Hindus came to a head as militant groups from both sides occupied Kashmir. Indian (from a mostly Hindu state) and Pakistani (majority Muslim) influences clashed creating a conflict based on ideologies of identity. A war grew between Indian and Pakistani groups (mostly militant groups and security forces) in order to claim the region of Kashmir as a location of a single “identity” and religion. As a result, millions of Kashmiris have been removed from the state causing a widespread global diaspora. Since 1947, the possibility of new or reconfigurations of identities among displaced Kashmiris has changed women’s identity in relation to their geographical and familial “home.”

The partition’s militant movements forced women from their houses and separated families as Kashmiris moved across borders, thus indefinitely changing lives. The trauma and pain that resulted from the partition because of family separations, deaths and disappearances had a profound effect on the way the Kashmiri people understood their sense of belonging to this region. While written history has documented the partition in the scope of a political divide, the personal accounts of women were left out of this history. Women, though, were at the forefront of the changes the partition brought to Kashmir, as they were often the ones separated from their families, killed or known to disappear.

For those women who were directly affected by the changes presented due to militant violence at the time of the partition, their desires and visions

for a future were stripped away. Women became the source of financial stability for the family, and many women were also responsible for rebuilding the family. Women were thus expected to either rebuild the family or to struggle alone.

Urvashi Butalia, in *The Other Side of Silence*, described the life of one Kashmiri woman, Damyanti Sahgal, who was in a continuous search for “home” after the partition. As the two began working on interviews of Sahgal for Butalia to use in the book, it became evident how much the partition influenced the way Sahgal understood “home.” In an excerpt from her book, Butalia provided an example of how the partition shaped Sahgal’s relation to “home” as she described Sahgal’s repeated requests to be interviewed only in Butalia’s house. “Later I realized that Damyanti’s insistence on meeting in my house came from an essential sense of homelessness that had stayed with her since Partition, such that there wasn’t any home that she would call her own” (Butalia, 83). Although Sahgal found a new place to live after being removed from the house she had before the partition, her understanding of “home” became a concept she searched and longed for up until her death. Her insistence on living alone and her refusal to refer to her new location in India as her “home” shows how the violence and fear women of the partition experienced caused an ongoing suffering that destroyed women’s relationships to “home.”

The concept of “home” is a complicated one, and it is even more complicated in an attempt to connect to Kashmiri women at the time of the

partition. Mohanty, a feminist theorist, has addressed the issue in her writings of “home” by raising an important question: what is home? As Mohanty tackles this question in her essay, “Genealogies of Community, Home, and Nation,” she is able to demonstrate the complexities of this concept.

What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are ‘my people’? Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional, sensory space? Home is always so crucial to immigrants and migrants—I even write about it in scholarly texts (perhaps to avoid addressing it, as an issue that is also very personal?). What interests me is the meaning of home for immigrants and migrants. I am convinced that this question—how one understands and defines home—is a profoundly political one (Mohanty, 126).

It is clear that the answer to the “home” question varies, with differing political, religious, ethnic and other ideologies at its core. Pandit women in Kashmir exist within and negotiate daily a religious conflict between Muslim and Hindus. In addition, ethnic differences between India and Pakistan create an environment in Kashmir where Pandit women are excluded. The political agenda of Kashmir is based on these religious and ethnic differences, in which Pandit women do not belong. This causes those who do not fit closely in specific religious or ethnic roles—as is the case with Kashmiri Pandit women—to be left with a feeling of homelessness.

### **Krishna Mehta**

The longing for an idea of “home” is present in the life of Krishna Mehta. She is the wife of a former assistant governor of Srinagar who later became a district officer in Muzaffarabad shortly before the first attack occurred in Kashmir at the start of the partition. As a Kashmiri Pandit woman, Mehta was among the many Hindu women who were driven from

their “homes” inside Kashmir in fear of retaliation from opposition groups.

Mehta, a mother of six children, reluctantly moved with her family to

Muzaffarabad, a town near to the northwest border of Kashmir.

Mehta discusses her experience in Muzaffarabad as one that is uncomfortable. “The place was not unfamiliar to me, but on this occasion I could not somehow like being there. I was filled with a vague fear of my surroundings, though I did not quite know why, and felt like running away from the place” (Mehta, 7,8). Her connection to her house in Srinagar creates an illusion that “home” as a geographic location includes a sense of safety and familiarity. Mehta related to “being home” as a place that is safe, which is not how she originally viewed her bungalow when she first arrived there. She refers to her “home,” the physical space of a “home,” as one with security. Mehta writes, “I considered mine an ideal home and I was never bored looking after it. We knew that in our home nothing happened which we had to be ashamed of” (Mehta, 9). This shows how Mehta viewed the notion of “home” as a spot which is free of struggle or despair. It was a place of comfort away from any outside problems.

This illusion, however, ignores the histories of oppression and particular struggles that have existed within geographic spaces called “home.” Mohanty claims that “being home” (as Mehta feels when she is in Srinagar) is a place with safe, protected boundaries, whereas “not being home” consists of realizing that “home” was an illusion of safety as it excluded specific histories of oppression and resistance (Mohanty, 90). In Mehta’s case, her

understanding of “home” is within a geographical space in Srinagar where she feels safe with her surroundings. After Mehta moved to Muzaffarabad, an unfamiliar location for her, she has come to terms with the realization that her notion of “home” as a safe space is undercut by the historical and political forces that have contributed to her living in a new “home.”

The establishment of a physical “home” serves to demonstrate Mehta’s family honor and purity. The stability of the structure of her family’s house has worked as a symbol of the strength of the family itself. Kashmiri women were considered saviors of family honor, and women were expected to sacrifice their own lives if it became necessary in order to uphold the family honor. This was especially so during the partition, and it illustrates the significance of dignity for Kashmiri people.

Many women in Kashmir gave up their lives during partition because of the fear of sexual assault. Rape was used by militants in order to fight against enemy forces. If women were raped, family honor would be destroyed. Thousands of Kashmiri women were compelled, and often forced, to kill themselves if the threat and fear of sexual assault was present. “By choosing violent death for themselves rather than submitting to sexual violence by men of other communities, women are enshrined in these narratives as saviours of family honour” (Das, 63). These narratives, which highlight sacrifices made by Kashmiri women, often do not look at whether women chose to give up their lives or if it was something placed upon them, since women were viewed as family “saviors.”

In Krishna Mehta's case, the sacrifice of a woman's life in order to protect family purity and honor was extremely important. It was reinforced as a family duty to make sure that no one in Mehta's family was sexually assaulted. In one instance after the first raiders' attack in Muzaffarabad, Mehta's daughters were separated from her. Mehta wrote about a discussion she had with her daughters about upholding the family honor at all costs just before she was forced to separate from them.

Before we separated I again whispered to my daughters what I had told them so often before: 'Don't let them touch you, my daughters. Jump down the hill or throw yourself into the river if need be.' Veena [one of Mehta's daughters] had by now imbibed some nobility of desperation. She said, 'Don't you worry, mother. You better look after my little brothers. We will see to it that we do not disgrace you' (Mehta, 39).

Mehta's daughters were given a lesson in family honor, if they were threatened or experienced sexualized violence, they would ruin the family. This shows how Mehta's life was regulated by the fear that rape would ruin the sanctity of family and of the "home," and it is one example that describes women's lives in the partitioned Kashmir.

### **Leaving "Home"**

Krishna Mehta was inside her Muzaffarabad bungalow when the first raiders' attack struck the town in late 1947. Her husband and children were in their beds at the time of the early morning attack. Her belief in "home" as a safe, protected place instantly changed: "...in a split moment an unconscious fear had burst forth into expression" (Mehta, 13). While she initially felt uneasy living in Muzaffarabad, Mehta found a sense of belonging in the bungalow once the attacks hit. As it came time for Mehta to leave

Muzaffarabad to escape potential violence from invaders who were infiltrating the houses in Mehta's community, she discussed her longing for her "home" as she witnessed the way her bungalow physically changed before her eyes.

For a moment I looked back lingeringly at our house; a forlorn and deserted look had already come over the place. How comfortable I had been in it, I thought with gratitude. Significantly, darkness was gathering round this forlorn habitation. It was highly symbolic of the unknown future in store for us (Mehta, 16).

After Mehta left the bungalow during the first attacks, her understanding of what "home" meant to her shifted. The connection to a physical "home" to call her own is something Mehta struggled to reclaim, as she and her children searched each night for shelter and safety after their initial removal from their bungalow.

### **A Changed "Home"**

Hours after Mehta and her children escaped from their bungalow, they were able to view its remains from a distance. The raiders had entered the house and stole the jewelry and clothes inside. At this point, there was no sign of Mehta's husband, who had left at the time of the attacks to fulfill his duties as an officer of the town. Mehta described her confusion as she saw her house from afar.

I turned round and looked in the direction of my bungalow. Good Lord! It was burning...It was staggering looking at that house going up in smoke. Heaven knew what I was to do. Where was my husband and what was he doing? Where could I take these children? I was tired of brooding and my mind wandered around (Mehta, 18).

As Mehta described her state of mind while viewing her burning bungalow, it is clear that a sense of homelessness overwhelmed her. In addition, one can

see Mehta's loss of dignity as her "home" (in this case her "home" became the inside of the bungalow) had been a place tied to her identity. It was a place she took pride in having. Without this "home," Mehta's dignity slowly died, and her identity changed. She became a woman whose self not only changed, but her idea of "home" had shifted from a safe, protected space to one no longer in existence.

The feeling of homelessness was a common theme for thousands of Pandit women who fled their houses in 1947 due to threat or force. The struggle, beginning as families were initially removed from the places they lived, grew into a lifelong sense of homelessness for thousands of displaced women. Several women survived horrific events of violence and family separations that occurred because of the attacks during Partition and physically moved to places outside of Kashmir, but the longing for the "home" they once had in Kashmir (whether it be a physical place of shelter, acceptance as a part of the state or a connection to a Kashmir they were no longer allowed to have) remained with many Pandit women for the rest of their lives.

For Mehta, as with many women pushed out of their houses in Kashmir, leaving her bungalow meant embarking on a journey for recovery of a loss of "home," literally and figuratively. After viewing her bungalow with her children for the first time since they initially left during the raiders' attack, Mehta discussed the sadness that overcame her children as they witnessed the destruction of what was once the place that had kept them protected.

It was a sad thought that we had lost everything and we were all in for further trouble. We did not even know what the future was going to be like. Bare-footed the children walked on; time and again they turned to look at the burning house—now turned into a mass of flames and smoke (Mehta, 18).

Mehta, along with her children, lost a piece of their identity and sense of safety when they saw how their bungalow was gone along with the life they once knew.

### **The Journey to a “Home”**

As Mehta documents her travels through Kashmir in order to escape the continuous threat of attack, it is clear that locating a “home” that she could claim as her own would be a difficult process. Every night Mehta needed to search for a safe, protected place to stay with her children. After her search ended each night and Mehta thought she could find some peace inside someone’s “home,” she would quickly be pushed out onto the streets again as those who provided temporary shelter to Mehta feared getting caught by raiders.

Several times throughout Mehta’s journey to find safety in a new “home,” she was able to view the remains of her bungalow. Now separated from her husband and, at times her daughters, she looked at her bungalow with a surreal understanding that her physical “home” did not belong to her anymore, but rather the life she once knew fell into the hands of the raiders.

We eventually reached a spot from where we could see the wall of our bungalow. Even though it had been burnt down it looked so familiar that I almost began to feel that the house was the only reality and what happened for the last few days a part of a bad dream. In a fleeting moment of happiness I exclaimed, ‘That is our house.’

‘Is that so? But our men are staying there now,’ my guard informed me. I wanted to stay on and look at the remains of my home but we were hustled on (Mehta, 52).

This passage exemplifies the longing for “home” that Mehta felt as she lived to escape possible conflict from raiders. In her thoughts of the exchange of conversation between Mehta and the guard who was watching her, she demonstrated how her ideas of “home” were taking shape due to the partition. It became her only connection to a safe place she could identify, but it also served as a reminder that her life had changed.

Another example of her longing for a “home” is evident when she returned to the bungalow to collect the ashes of her husband, who had actually died in the house during the raiders’ initial attacks. Mehta’s reflections on returning to the bungalow were directed at how affected her emotional state had become. She had to face the reality of a loss of “home,” family, and her life companion. These were all too common themes resulting from the trauma of Partition politics and violence endured by Pandit women. In her book, Mehta names one of the chapters, “At the Ruined House,” to accurately depict her emotions as she returns to her bungalow after getting word that her husband had been killed. Mehta views her bungalow as unsafe. It is not a protected boundary anymore; it is “ruined,” dishonored, destroyed and dignity has been lost.

We came back to our home—to the ruins that were once our home. I walked with obvious effort. I went into my bedroom where my husband had been shot down. His body had been consumed by the fire that had burnt down the bungalow. All that remained of him now were the ashes strewn over the floor. His death, the ashes reminded me, was a reality. I had unconsciously resisted accepting it all this time, but it was forced on me when I entered the room. The image of his tall handsome form, his animated face in multitudes of situations flashed through my mind. Then something snapped within me and there was complete darkness.

I felt lonely, fondling my grief and strangely comforted by it. The restraints that make one's behaviour normally acceptable had suddenly relented. I was intensely aware of my momentary existence in a different world with other norms of feeling and expression. Others did not belong nor could they enter here (Mehta, 65).

The partition had deeply influenced Mehta's life so that in a short amount of time, it had completely evolved into "a different world." Interestingly, the bungalow where Mehta originally had reservations about living became the place—no matter how distorted or unrecognizable it physically became—Mehta felt most connected to after the attacks. She was continuously drawn to the bungalow; even as she was taken away from it, she would manage to find ways back to her house. It was what she understood, and as she situated herself within the leftovers of the bungalow it brought her a sense of comfort and relief from the pain and trauma the violence of the partition had created for her. It also gave her a sense of nostalgia for the past. It seems as though this attachment to her bungalow in Muzaffarabad, and the life she had known while she lived there, would be something Mehta would always hold on to, secretly wishing for its return.

The haunting of trauma that remained within survivors from the attacks during the partition demonstrates the varied views of "home" that existed for those whose lives changed as a result of the partition. Urvashi Butalia spoke in her book, *The Other Side of Silence*, about conversations she had with her uncle, Ranamama, about his "home" in Pakistan. He had converted from Hinduism to Islam during the partition as a way to find acceptance and peace as he remained in Pakistan. He described Pakistan as the only "home" he had ever known. But Butalia offered a different point of

view, suggesting that his relation to “home” will always be connected to the “home” he had left behind during Partition.

Home for him was defined in many different ways...Although he had told me that his home in Lahore was the only home he had ever known, it was to India that he turned for a sense of home...When a Punjabi speaks of his or her watan [ie. homeland, country, etc.], you know they are referring to something inexpressible, some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness. For Ranamama, in a curious travesty of this, while he continued to live on in the family home in Pakistan, his watan became India, a country he had visited only briefly, once. His children and family found this bizarre. They could not understand these secret yearnings, these things that went on inside his head (Butalia, 30).

While the story of Butalia’s uncle does not offer a Kashmiri Pandit women’s account of Partition, it is evident that his story is essential in a feminist interpretation of displaced Hindus’ connections to “home” as a result of the partition. Butalia’s analysis of her uncle’s relationship to “home” is important in understanding the depths of emotional challenges faced by those displaced because of the partition’s impact on their lives.

### **To India At Last: Finally “Home”?**

It had been several months before Krishna Mehta would be able to find a sense of freedom in her journey to find peace. She traveled through Kashmir, and within time, was granted the opportunity to move to India where she finally settled as a Hindu woman with her family. The trip to India, though, was nothing less than a continuation of struggle for Mehta. She described having to face confrontations with Pakistani soldiers and coming to grips with the reality of her situation since the first raiders’ attacks tore her life apart.

In the last stages of her journey to India, Mehta was able to reflect on how her experiences influenced the way she viewed the world around her. As

she witnessed a conversation between a young couple, she feared a violent reaction from the man. During this experience Mehta confronted her lack of faith in other people and realized her expectations of violence from men. Mehta's fear represents a grappling with new masculinities, in which violent acts and patriarchal attitudes are linked to Kashmiri masculine identity. Because Kashmiri Pandits have left the region of Kashmir, men can no longer perform the masculine ideals of "home." They are "displaced" from these ideals when pushed out of their "home" regions. Men must learn and perform their masculinities differently, shifting the way masculinities were once understood and creating new kinds of masculinities. In fact, the constructions of new masculinities have led to continued violence and intimidation inflicted on Kashmiri Pandit women. Research on the violence and intimidation as a result of new masculinities is imperative if feminist understandings about violence against women in general are to expand.

In her discussion about the incident with the young couple, Mehta wrote that "during the past few months at several stages I had been so desperate that I all but lost faith in people and eventually even in myself. Apart from losing all hope, there was also the egotistic fear of being proved wrong in one's choices of values" (Mehta, 163). To her surprise, while the man she had assumed to be violent was in fact nonviolent, Mehta was also finding that she was moving closer to safety away from a place full of masculinist violence as she made her way to India. She understood that soon she would again have a sense of "being home."

In Mehta's writing of her experience of entering India, she locates an important element of how the displacement of Kashmiri women had an enormous influence on how women related to ideas of freedom and of identity. Mehta recorded her emotions as her train pulled up in Amritsar, India:

As it pulled up, everyone in my compartment rushed out to have a peep at the platform but I deliberately sat on in my bunk to heighten my suspense. I sniffed up the air to imbibe the new freedom. It was good to be back in one's country. It meant freedom from fear, freedom from indignity and for the first time now in months I relaxed (Mehta, 166).

This description shows how Mehta is able to regain a sense of one aspect of what Mohanty calls "being home"—she is able to find comfort in a place that brings her a sense of safety and protection away from fears of violence.

Further, having a "home" gives Mehta an increased sense of dignity because she is able to regain a sense of belonging, which includes security. In a sense, having a physical or geographical place to call "home" allowed Mehta to have some dignity, as she didn't need to resort to poor living conditions to survive.

### **Krishna Mehta's Importance**

Krishna Mehta's story of being a Pandit woman in Kashmir during Partition is distinct in that her experiences present a particular aspect of the history of the partition that is often unaccounted for in documents relating to the impact of the partition. While Mehta serves as a voice to help in understanding how women's idea of "home" were shaped and reshaped because of the partition's trauma, her voice is not the only one. Her history is not the complete picture of women's history of the partition.

The story she presents of her life, however, forms a foundation to better understand the difficulties and tragedies Kashmiri Pandit women faced as a result of the violence during Partition. The 1947 Partition is an important moment in the history of India, Pakistan and Kashmir, both for its political influence of the region and for its strong human impact. Through the learning of the stories of Krishna Mehta, and the many other brave women who have shared their stories of Partition throughout time, it is important to acknowledge how these moments in time personally affect individuals.

These stories also serve as a reminder to reflect on our own relationships to the meaning of “home.” It is a relationship that most people have in common, and its influence on the course of people’s lives indicates its strengths and importance. Most people want to have a sense of belonging to people who share commonalities, and when this sense of belonging is missing, a longing for this belonging is set in motion.

## **Part Two: In the Name of Azadi (Freedom)?**

*“In an atmosphere of oppression, militarization and social and moral control,  
what is to be the status of women and who is to define it?”*

-Farida Abdulla

During the post-partition stage, a genuine tension grew among Kashmiri people frustrated by the 50 years of uncertainty in their lives. While Kashmiris hoped to be taken seriously as an independent state, the region was treated as a piece of territory to be claimed. “Fifty years of unfulfilled hopes and an uncertain status, very strong feelings of being on the fringes and very definite indications of being treated as a border territory rather than as a people, culminated in 1988-1989” (Abdulla, 263). By this time, in the late 1980s, a religious disparity came to the forefront as Islamic codes were enforced and pressed upon Kashmiri communities. The Islamic influences changed the way children learned in schools. The wearing of veils for women and young girls became compulsory. Hans notes: “Women’s lives have been inevitably affected, as they are perceived to be the representatives and emissaries of culture” (2000). Here Hans is referring to a central concept that places women’s roles in post-Partition Kashmir into perspective: women’s individual identities in Kashmir are inevitably linked to the identity of the “nation.” Kashmiri women’s identities are shaped by nationalistic discourse and agendas making their existence a major part of the power struggle between India and Pakistan.

Thus, Kashmiri Pandit women’s “homes” are (re)shaped. The power struggle between nationalist forces changes the way Pandit women can

understand their connection to a territorial “home” given that they are excluded from being a part of this territorial “home.” The fighting between India and Pakistan lasted long after the partition in 1947, and the violence peaked in 1990 with increased uprisings from both sides. On January 19, 1990, loudspeakers broadcasted from mosques across the Valley of Kashmir told the approximately 500,000 Hindus living in the state to leave immediately (Hans, 2000).

Women left all that is familiar and secure to adapt to a new life of uncertainty. There is not safety even in other areas of Kashmir, outside the Valley, as conflict has entered Kashmiri lives in every part of the state. Women, wherever they are, remain targets of militancy and state controlled force (Hans, 2000).

The Hindus that did leave Kashmir that year—98 percent of them—were left homeless without a physical, familial “home” to live in nor a territorial “home” to claim as their own. While a physical land area, Kashmir was a “home” for millions of Pandit women. There was hope that Kashmir would one day become an independent nation, in Cynthia Enloe’s terms, “a collection of people who have come to believe that they have been shaped by a common past and are destined to share a common future” (Enloe, 1989). But this dream of a collective nation called Kashmir became lost amidst a battle for power between two strong national forces—India and Pakistan.

What evolved from the conflict in the early 1990s is similar to the violence that erupted during the partition in 1947. Pandit women were forced to leave their “homes,” both the physical, familial “home” as well as the geographical “home” they claimed as Kashmir. Through fear and

intimidation countless Pandit women were left in a position of homelessness when they were pushed out of Kashmir.

### **National Symbols and Honor**

As symbols of nation, Kashmiri Pandit women were used as pawns to reflect nationalistic ideals of how Kashmir “should” develop as a state. It was of utmost importance for families throughout Kashmir to uphold their honor and dignity. Opposition groups would work to “destroy” this honor and dignity by raping or molesting women. If women were sexually violated, and their honor destroyed, this would disgrace the authority of the occupied state they were linked to and give strength to the other side. If the bodies of women, who were from a particular side of Kashmir, were ruined, the entire reputation of that side of the state was also ruined.

The role women’s bodies play in the Kashmiri conflict shape their identity in relation to their national “home.” This connection to nation, while it is forced upon women, is not necessarily viewed by women as a significant component of their lives. Examining some of the problems of nationalism shows “how this construct places women in symbolic relation to nation, leaving aside all those spaces in which women see nationalism as either outside or antithetical to their lives” (Grewal & Kaplan, 22). And while nationalism, in many cases, is contrary to the issues pertinent to women’s individual lives, women have symbolically become the central focus in discussions of the development of nations. This identification of women with

nation supports various patriarchal ideals, which serve to define women and their positions in societies.

In reference to Kashmir, the concept of woman as nation allows militant groups to engage in a hetero and hyper -masculinist struggle with the use of violence and terror to invade women's national and familial "homes." Militant groups are given the opportunities to control the state through the control of women. "It is men who are fighting a war or battle for themselves, for their desires, but the hardest brunt of this battle is borne by women. Women from both sides, whether it is the side of the 'enemy' or of the men who see themselves as fighting for a just cause. On both sides the situation of women is the same" (Kaul, 185). With women's lives positioned as vital aspects of the Kashmiri conflict, their understanding of being "home"—both the external of Kashmir and the internal of a physical space—is interconnected with the masculinized political and militarized stance of the region.

### **Farida Abdulla**

The experiences of Farida Abdulla while she lived in Kashmir clearly exemplifies the effects of how nationalistic agendas shaped women's ideas of "home" in the violence of 1990. The disruption of her familial "home" caused by violence is a reflection of how her identity as a Kashmiri woman has been influenced by raging national interests. Abdulla's relation to "home" clearly demonstrates that although the "homes" of many women in Kashmir were once a place of security, it became an environment of fear due to daily

invasions, shootings and abductions. As Abdulla shares her stories, she positions women's roles in connection to the state showing how the ideals of nationalism are achieved at the expense of women's lives and individual identities.

As various militant groups fought for control of the state against security forces in the early 1990s in the name of "azadi," or freedom, Kashmiri civilians were left with few opportunities to make choices or offer a difference of opinions (Abdulla, 264). This instituted a sense of collective terror among Kashmiris as they witnessed their "homes" infiltrated. "The uncertainty of not knowing who or what one is dealing with, and the suspicion with which one comes to regard any gun-wielding group is an experience almost every home in Kashmir has witnessed" (Abdulla, 266). With this perception of "home," Kashmiri women were particularly subjected to living in a place that provided little peace of mind with the power of humiliation and fear controlling their hope for a better future.

Farida Abdulla was no exception to the many Kashmiri women whose "homes" were frequently violated during the surge in militant violence since 1990. Abdulla described an incident relating to militant invasions of her "home" in her essay, "A Life of Peace and Dignity." The dignity of keeping her physical "home" intact began to slip away as militants approached and threatened to raid her house. The boundaries of her physical "home" were no longer respected as militants attempted to enter her house. In the early morning hours, a group of men demanded to search the house looking for the

male head of household. Alone with her sister and their three young boys, Abdulla was trapped in her physical “home” in a “state of confusion and uncertainty.”

At nine in the morning, there was the sound of loud trampling of boots and a forceful and continuous ringing of the doorbell. At our front door was an aggressive and angry group of men wielding machine guns and asking for the male head of the household — my brother M. We heard the car being driven off and realized that something was very wrong (Abdulla, 265).

Abdulla’s house was invaded making their private, physical “home” a public space of terror and intervention. This is an example of how Kashmiri Pandit women’s “homes” were not respected as private places, but were used as spaces to inflict violence and trauma in the name of the nation.

With similar situations as Abdulla’s in mind, it becomes clear that Kashmiri women’s lives during the uprisings have been filled with a strong sense of fear and oppression. In Abdulla’s writing, she exemplifies the terror that is created inside her “home” because of the masculine, militant presence in the name of nation:

Minutes later as we were trying to block off entries to the house, to find safe hiding places for the boys and to make some phone calls to get help in case it was needed, there was yet another ringing of the bell followed by more banging on the doors and windows and three young armed boys asking to be fed and given some money... By then our phone lines too had been cut, we were locked within the house with no means of communication. When, four hours later, a jeep drove in and the doorbell started ringing yet again and yet another lot of armed men landed at the front door, the children were a bundle of nerves and we were all terrified at the helplessness of the situation (Abdulla, 266).

Abdulla’s description of how the militants’ insistence created a feeling of helplessness speaks strongly to the physical and mental control militants had over women and children in Kashmir. In this case, the young men who represent the militant forces act “manly” to assert themselves.

In her essay, though, Abdulla asks what should be viewed as a simple question: how can Kashmiris live in safety and freedom and dignity? The complexities and confusion that surround the answer to this question depicts the lifestyles Kashmiri women are subjected to on a daily basis. Their struggles, Abdulla insists, is not always concentrated around the larger conflicts of rape and molestation. The struggles that overwhelm and consume women's lives in "subtle and not so subtle" (Abdulla, 267) ways are necessary to discuss in the greater conversation of the Kashmiri conflict.

Focusing on the specific violations against women occurring on a day-to-day basis, such as the way their "homes" have been shaped by this conflict, allows for more women to be heard and understood. "It is imperative to highlight the human rights violations but can we ignore addressing the issues or compulsions that led a whole population of Pandits to leave their homes (however complicated and convoluted the reasons for this may have been)?" (Abdulla, 267). After learning of Abdulla's experiences with "being home," it is obvious that it impossible to ignore these issues that had driven an entire population of people out of Kashmir—their "home"land.

### **Part Three-A House is Not a Home**

*“Kashmir is my home, who does not want to go back to their home?”*  
-Shakti Bhan Raina

Violent uprisings in Kashmir continue to overwhelm the lives of its people in the present day as they are positioned in a war driven by hegemonic masculinity and identity politics. Women are at the centerpiece of the current struggle in Kashmir, as they serve as a war tool used by men in the creation of borders. “In the history of the Kashmiri ‘nation,’ it is the men who have constructed not only the ideology of freedom but also women’s space (and place) within it” (Hans, 2000). Masculinity is prominent in the production of Kashmiri women’s concept of “home” because it reinforces patriarchal attitudes, which rationalize the destruction of women’s territorial and familial “home.”

With ideas that suggest that patriarchy is a necessary norm, women’s relation to their “home” has become intertwined with their relation to gender. Hans notes that the language of nationalism is gendered (Hans, 2000). She addresses the nationalist discourse, which places women’s “home” as part of the greater context of “nation.” However, this discourse may not actually include women’s perceptions or views unless they are in subordinate positions to men:

We realize that the nationalist discourse in Kashmir today cannot be discussed in a homogenous setting of territorial space and gender. Women across contested borders are in a zone of a nowhere land. In this vacuum, the production of gender in the discourses and practices of nationalism, as elsewhere, constructs women as subordinate to men (Hans, 2000).

With patriarchy occupying a strong position in the structure of nationalist discourse in Kashmir, certain types of masculinity allow for men to hold control over women's lives in both the territorial and familial "home." Masculinity is a historical and political process, and it is used in the construction of societies to ensure male-defined roles among men and women are upheld (Messner, 1997; Connell, 1995). Men within the Kashmiri conflict utilize their hegemonic masculinity to justify the violations against women both suggesting and justifying women as inferior to men.

It is difficult for women to overcome the institutionalized masculinity that has taken control within a militarized nationalist movement. "The more imminent and coercive the threat posed by an outside power—a foreign force or the local government's police—the more successful men in the community are likely to be in persuading women to keep quiet, to swallow their grievances and their analyses" (Enloe, 56). For Pandit women in Kashmir, many of their stories about the violence against them were silenced, and this continues the masculinized control over women's lives, "homes," and history in general. The Kashmiri Pandit women who have told their stories allow those around the world an opportunity to understand how masculinity and nationalist movements work together in the oppression of women.

### **Women's Bodies as a Lost "Home"**

Kashmiri Pandit women's bodies are continuously constructed by the existing nationalist movement. As previously stated, women's bodies are

symbols for the “nation” and for the “home,” which makes women targets in the ensuing masculinist violence during a militarized conflict. Vesna Kesic, in her essay, “From Reverence to Rape: An Anthropology of Ethnic and Genderized Violence,” specifies the reasons as to why women and their bodies are easily connected to the masculinized nation:

National identity—whether a victorious or victimized one—was, on a grand scale, constructed over woman’s body. The raped woman is also a fallen woman; her symbol calls for revenge, incites the willingness to fight, but also victimizes women and inspires violence against women (Kesic, 33).

Their bodies are shared and controlled within a nationalist agenda, which influences the way women live their lives within a national and private “home.” With violent acts against women being justified as a way to claim a national identity, women learn to perceive their bodies in relation to the stability of their territorial “home.”

Patriarchy continues to change and even grow in Kashmir as a means to support the nationalist movement. With patriarchal values at the core of the establishment of the nation, Kesic points out that women are “othered.” By claiming women are “others,” a nationalist movement can exclude women’s perceptions by locating women as “different” from “normative” views of the state. Women’s stories and experiences are separated from male perspectives leading the nation to stereotypically define the identities of women:

Reducing women to extreme patriarchal stereotypes (of virgin or whore) and comparing a raped woman to the disgraced country are a part of the process of creating utterly different Others, whether from the “second sex” or from different ethnicities. Both Others have to be segregated, excluded, exorcised, and expelled from the healthy body of the nation-state, which is conceived as the organic unity of the people of a certain ethnicity, religion, territory, and nationalistic leadership. In the situation of war, symbolically only one species can enjoy full sovereignty, citizenship, and rights within

such a unity. This is the national male warrior who uses rape as a war weapon (Kesic, 33).

Kesic's analysis of the way in which women can be othered in a nation accurately depicts how it is possible for women to serve as symbols in a battle within a nationalist movement where only a particular national identity and religious background can exist. Pandit women are othered in Kashmir because of religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and because of the ethnic differences that exist across border lines of Indian-controlled Kashmir and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. These identity conflicts influence the way in which Pandit women can identify themselves and their ideas of "home." Many women are physically torn away from their "homes" in Kashmir, but various Pandit women also experience the emotional separation from their "homes" and identities as sexual targets of the ongoing conflict. "Men, attacked for their ethnic background, had their political or ideological standpoint always kept in focus... Women's sexuality, on the other hand, was always targeted, even when their ethnicity or political standpoint was the aim of the campaign" (Kesic, 31). This demonstrates the double standard present in nationalist movements, in which women's bodies and "homes" become sites for violence and trauma, yet men, as a group, are not as deeply affected. In fact, nationalist movements affirm men's identities allowing different types of masculinities to justify violence against women's bodies, which include violations inside women's physical "homes." "This is how women's bodies become, first symbolic, then real battlefields, where all kinds of violence can be inflicted on them" (Kesic, 31). Women are symbolized as possible tools to

use in war encouraged by masculinities, and this influences the way women view their (geographical and physical) “homes” since the threat of violence against their bodies controls their living situations. Their bodies shift from symbols to sites of “real battlefields” when women are physically or sexually violated. Women’s “homes” within the state and inside a physical location change because the possibility for safety can no longer be found.

The idea that a “disgraced” woman is the equivalent to a disgraced country, as Kesic points out, suggests that a nationalist movement must continuously violate women in order to uphold patriarchal values. As an environment supported by hegemonic masculinized principles, which leaves out women’s individual thoughts and ideas, where is the place for women to express their own ideas or to live with autonomy? Where is their “home” located if they are pushed out of their physical houses and ordered to leave their geographical “home” of Kashmir?

The answers to these questions are not easy. In a study done by the Institute of Kashmiri Studies in Srinagar on the accounts of violence against women inside their Kashmiri territorial “home” and within their physical “homes,” researchers ask similar questions in hopes that one day there will be concrete answers. They write of the Kashmiri people:

these are the people who are soft spoken, non-communal, peace loving and most hospitable. But today their hearts and homes are burning. They are denied democratic rights indirectly and subtly. Their younger generation is being crushed and destroyed under the guise of curbing militancy. What is the fault of the common Kashmiri? Why are they being ill-treated, hurt, abused and killed like this? (IKS, 41 and 42).

While these questions are not easy to answer, women's accounts of this violence need to be taken seriously and analyzed in order to transform their for the everyday lives in the name of social justice.

### **Shakti Bhan Raina**

The effects of masculinized violence on the lives of Kashmiri people, and specifically Kashmiri Pandit women, can be clearly seen in the experiences of Shakti Bhan Raina. Her story is a prime example of the struggles Pandit women face after being forced to leave Kashmir. In addition to her personal experiences with displacement and loss of home, Raina also discusses the lives of Kashmiri Pandit refugees she has come in contact with describing the loss of dignity present in many refugees' changed lives. Her relation to the concept of "home" is an everyday struggle for Raina—it's a struggle she must work through as she attempts to recover from her loss of "home" since she left Kashmir in 1989. Her story of the attempt to find a new sense of "home" after being forced to leave Kashmir demonstrates the incredible longing thousands of displaced women face on a daily basis as a result of violent uprisings in the name of nation, identity, and religion.

As a Pandit woman, Raina needed to leave her house in Srinagar for fear of retaliation from militants who were searching to remove Hindus in the area. Raina describes the day she left for Kashmir as a day that started like any other day. "We did all the routine things one does at home" (Raina, 178). This shows the safety and protection Raina felt in "being home." She was not prepared for the instant rupture in the course of her life that was soon to come.

The immediate change in her life occurred later on in the evening hours of that particularly ordinary day where a man called Raina's house stating that riots were occurring in town. She was told she needed to leave as soon as possible unless she wanted to risk a home invasion. Thus, she was told that there was a possibility for a direct assault on the physical "home" she lived in in Kashmir. There was little time to decide on whether to leave or go as militants were expected to bombard the "home."

Quickly after this warning, a group of people with guns and other weapons gathered outside her house demanding that she come out of her house. In this moment, Raina's idea of "home" as a safe, ordinary place changed.

That night—or maybe I should say that morning because by now it was quite late—we drove to Jammu. We took nothing with us but the clothes on our backs, and one or two other things. I have not seen my house since then. I don't know what condition it is in now, who is using it, where all my things are. I have never gone back (Raina, 180).

Raina's separation from her house created a longing for an idea of "home" that she could relate to as a displaced Kashmiri Pandit woman. The abruptness in her decision to leave is one that many Kashmiri Pandit women experienced because of fear of violent actions from militant groups. It was a mode of survival.

Her association and identity as a Pandit woman marked her in the eyes of the militants as an outsider, as "other," though it was the place she lived—it was her "home." This was a common occurrence for Pandit women throughout Kashmir who were removed from their "homes" and displaced to different parts of the world. "Though unheard and isolated by the state, many

women have however managed to support themselves and their children in the unknown places where they have been relocated. They learn to network with local communities in an attempt to overcome hostilities and contract solidarity” (Hans, 2000). While women were and are able to recover in many ways in new locations away from Kashmir, the internalized trauma from being forced from their physical “homes” and/or facing physical violence is of immense importance. Recovering from such trauma, a trauma inflicted because of nationalistic ideals, is a long, slow process.

This slow process can be seen through Raina’s experiences after leaving Kashmir. She was able to live in India with her family, many of whom were already living in India before she had to join them. While fortunate to be able to move so easily, her longing for her “home” in Kashmir was not such an easy task to overcome. Her thoughts on returning to her “home” reflect her longing: “Do I want to go back? Yes I do, Kashmir is my home, who does not want to go back to their home? But I, we, we will not go back unless we have achieved our aim of a separate homeland within Kashmir for Pandits” (Raina, 180). In making this statement, Raina discusses the problematic conditions many Pandit women had to face (and many are still facing): while Raina yearned to return to her territorial “home” of Kashmir, she understood that she couldn’t return because the political climate—which distinguished the Kashmiri territorial “home” as one of a particular identity and ideology—excluded her from developing a “home” inside the invented borders of Kashmir.

Raina's assessment of her position in relation to her geographical "home" of Kashmir presents the difficulties many displaced Pandits battle with in recovering from a loss of "home." She was able to come to this sentiment because she was privileged to live in a geographical "home" that wasn't previously consumed in fear and violence. She felt connected to a physical "home" because she was a woman who looked after her house; it was what she understood and found comfort in in her everyday life.

### **(Re)shaping "Homes"**

Shakti Bhan Raina continued to search for a connection to her geographical "home" as a way to recover from her loss of an emotional "home." She spent quite a bit of time visiting Pandit refugees, and she located how ideas of geographical "home" for Kashmiris had evolved into a diaspora environment.

During the first year that I was here I spent most of my time visiting refugee settlements for Pandits in Delhi and later also in Jammu. The conditions they had to live in were abominable. Small, dingy rooms, no light, often just one bed and a whole family of parents, children, grandparents, huddled together around it. We're a proud people, and here we were now, being forced to beg (Raina, 180).

This quote from Raina points to the sense, and loss, of dignity that Kashmiri Pandits faced as a result of being displaced. As one reads Raina's perceptions of Pandit refugee settlements in India, it is clear that her views of the poor living conditions of Kashmir resonates with her own feelings of loss for her fellow Pandits. In a way, it seems as though Raina relates her concept of "home" to the refugees she meets in the settlements. She is inevitably tied to them knowing that her geographical, historical, and emotional concepts of

“home” continue to be shaped and reshaped after leaving Kashmir. In addition, although these “homes” are shaped differently than the refugees she meets, a connection between these meanings of “home” exists. There is a shared loss of dignity between Raina and the refugees. While Raina is privileged to be with her family, the meaning of a loss of “home” does not always have to include a loss of a familial “home.” Raina is not allowed to return to her “home”land in Kashmir, which creates a loss of belonging and longing. Although she has her family, she has lost some of her dignity and she struggles in trying to belong.

### **Recovery, But Always Lost?**

The continued loss of a territorial and emotional “home” is present in Raina’s current living conditions in Delhi. She has physically moved on, but the emotional scars and internal longing for Kashmir has not disappeared. This longing appears to be as prominent in Raina’s life as it has ever been. The diaspora of Kashmiri women has had a profound effect on the ways in which women relate to their own selves and to the world around them. There is a clear disconnect that prevents women from fully recovering from their removal of “home” (whether it be a removal of a geographical, physical or emotional “home”). The influences on this diaspora has historically shaped the way women view concepts of “home,” and at the foundation of these concepts lies a political undertone that helps to shape the way women understand an ideological “home.”

The displacement of Kashmiri people led many women and their families to scatter across different parts of the subcontinent. The term diaspora is used to describe “any group of people who are so dispersed” across the world (Jayaram, 16) and who identify with a common “home” land. While Pandit women were told to abandon their “home” within Kashmir, they were still left with a sense of belonging to the region—to the “home”land. This is what N. Jayaram refers to in his book, *The Indian Diaspora: Dynamics of Migration*, when discussing the effects of diasporic migrant movement.

They themselves may retain physical and/or mental contact with their homeland, often characterized by what is called ‘the myth of return.’ Their significant others, their folk back in the homeland as well as sections of the population in their land of adoption, may identify them as originating from and/or belong to their homeland (Jayaram, 16).

By still holding onto the connection to the “home”land, Kashmiris have participated in the forming of a specific identity that positions them into a group separate from other groups in a community or nation. Although diaspora comprises groups of people who were pushed out of their “home”land, as seen with Kashmiri Pandits, they still manage to find a sort of solidarity among similarly displaced individuals. In doing so, a common identity is established for those to share in their longing for their “home”land and in creating a place of possible peace.

Although Raina was able to physically move on from Kashmir, the emotional scars and the longing for her geographical home within Kashmir remains present in her daily life. Although she was able to live in a relatively peaceful manner in Delhi, it appears as though she always remained lost in

some manner. She knows she wants to go “home,” but only wants to do so “in safety, not in fear.” (Raina, 182). Unfortunately, returning to her geographical “home” of Kashmir seems unlikely in the present time.

With this in mind, Raina still wishes for the life she once knew in Kashmir. In a chilling account of the paintings inside her new house in Delhi, Raina uncovers the depths to which the loss of “home” exists within the lives and bodies of various displaced Kashmiri Pandit women.

You know, I am very fond of paintings, I like to have my walls covered with pictures, and in my Srinagar house, this was the case. In the Delhi house, I had brought across just one painting and put it up, and then, for some reason (maybe because we were having the house painted or something like that) I took the painting off. And you know what happens when you take off something that has been hanging on the wall: it leaves a sort of mark, made by dust or dirt or something. So there was a sort of empty rectangle where the painting had been. And I often used to dream of this rectangle, and wake up wondering what it was: thinking, where has my painting gone. I realize that I was dreaming of my home, the place I had left behind (Raina, 182).

After understanding her sense of “home,” it is difficult to ignore the complexities and hardships women endure in the name of a masculinized struggle for nation.

### **“Home” Today**

The plight of the Kashmiri people continues due to the continuing violence occurring even now. Are Pandit women able to locate a sense of “home” in the many contexts that it exists? And how are the women still living within the border lines of Kashmir expected to find a sense of peace and justice in a territorial “home” infiltrated with violence? The paths taken by or forced on Kashmiri Pandit women have not been easy, but within the conflict women have gained their voices and exercise their own agency.

In present-day Kashmir, particular groups have formed, which are run by women to help serve women. A strong organization, the Association of the Parents of the Disappeared Persons, helps families to both locate their displaced family members, and to work in collective struggle, where boundaries are redefined and shifting as they work to see a change in the meaning of “victimhood” (Husain, 251). This organization has been run by Parveena Ahangar, whose son was displaced more than ten years ago. By keeping APDP alive, Ahangar is challenging her sense of “victimhood.” She is transforming the organization into an active, productive initiative to improve the lives of Kashmiri peoples.

The many women writers mentioned in this project and those countless others who have also contributed to Kashmiri literature on the subject of violence against women with their personal accounts have created an environment where women can feel as though they can regain a sense of control within their territorial and familial “home” both from within the arbitrary boundaries that make up Kashmir and outside these border lines. They are lending their voices, their time and even activism in the fight for healing from trauma. They are exercising agency in the name of social justice and in efforts to expose their invisibility historically on the global stage.

In the counter movements against the violence and trauma Pandit women have been forced to associate with their “homes,” Kashmiri women have been fighting back in a manner that is nonviolent, in the name of peace and for those whose lives have been touched by this conflict. “Having crossed

the threshold of their homes, their patience and endurance, women are now negotiating at different levels in pursuit of justice, for an end to the mindless violence which has not only claimed thousands of lives but has also created unprecedented challenges and transitions for them. Their men who are missing may never return but there is hope in their hearts that peace will” (Husain, 251). Pandit women have worked tirelessly to establish a diaspora community that includes women’s rights as human rights and also acknowledges the systemic and continuing trauma and pain inflicted onto Kashmiri Pandit women.

In a message to all nations of the world, the ‘Daughters of Vitasta’, the Women’s Wing of Panun Kashmir, issued in May 1999 an appeal to the violations attached to their lives. Their words best describe the way in which women’s concepts of “home” (varied in both their ideas of “home” and the kinds of “home” that can exist) has been shaped by the masculinized violence of war within the nationalist movement in Kashmir. “We, appeal once again to all apostles of peace to stand and support the restoration to the community of its Homeland, where we can revive our lost identity, nurture our endangered rich cultural heritage and live in dignity and honour, without fear and terror, and uphold the honour and dignity of the Kashmiri Pandit women as well as the secular traditions of this great county — India.” (“Kashmiri Pandit,” 184). The hard work and efforts of the displaced Pandit women of Kashmir will not go unheard.

## Conclusion

The issues confronting Kashmiri Pandit women demonstrate the difficulties war presents in civilian lives. This thesis discusses the varied meanings of “home” to Kashmiri Pandit women in different moments of time throughout the now 60 years of this ongoing violence. Through examining the meanings of “home” to Pandit women, the themes of longing and belonging interconnect with larger concepts of nationalism and masculinity to demonstrate how war conflicts can shape the lives of entire groups of people. The thesis also explores how the diaspora of Kashmiri Pandits has led to the creation of new identities throughout the world, in which individuals search for a collective commonality among fellow displaced Kashmiris in order to connect to the “home”land they once were a part of inside the arbitrary borders of Kashmir.

As a way to demonstrate the complexities of nationalism, masculinity and how displacement can create new identities influencing the meanings of “home,” I specifically analyzed the lives of three Kashmiri Pandit women who were affected by the conflict. The voices of these Kashmiri women reflect the deeply rooted complexities of women’s lives as a result of the Kashmiri conflict. Krishna Mehta gives a historical account of her experiences within the larger backdrop of an enormous political and geographical change due to Partition. While land was disputed, millions of women were violated, and thousands more killed. Mehta’s story is one of struggle and survival in the search to (re)locate a sense of “home” as she is removed from her physical

and geographical “homes” in Kashmir. Through Mehta’s words, I explore the differences in the meanings of “home” and how history and violence contribute to changing the meaning of “home” for Kashmiri Pandits.

The other two voices that were heard—that of Farida Abdulla and Shakti Bhan Raina—are further tied to how the concepts of nationalism and masculinity contribute to the shaping of “home” for Kashmiri Pandit women. Farida Abdulla’s words express the profound changes that came during the 1990s surge in violence in Kashmir. As the violence soared to its highest during this time as Hindus were forced to leave Kashmir in fear of retaliation from militant groups, Abdulla’s story is able to demonstrate how physical “homes” were invaded by raiders. It also shows how the violence invaded, even colonized, the minds and perceptions of Kashmiri Pandits. The violence led to a sense of insecurity among Pandits, and Abdulla’s story of how her “home” was threatened demonstrates the problems many nationalist movements present for certain groups of people. In nationalist efforts, there is usually a push for a control on behalf of a particular group, and this often drives people (such as Kashmiri Pandits in this case) out of their “home”lands.

Shakti Khan Raina’s story is essential in demonstrating losses of dignity and belonging as a result of the various masculinities within the armed struggle. Her eyewitness accounts of displaced Kashmiri’s loss of dignity shows how militarized masculinities can cause trauma and strip people’s pride away from them, especially for women. Raina’s personal feeling of loss away from the physical “home” she left in Kashmir is a strong example of people’s

connection to a “home” base. While she is able to live in a new place with her family, she still experiences issues of longing and belonging as part of her identity. As Raina visits different refugees, it shows how diaspora works in creating collective identities outside of the “home”land in an effort for individuals to regain a sense of the connection to the histories, places, and peoples they once knew – to “home”.

These stories help us examine the lives of Kashmiri Pandit women. My thesis takes larger issues of “home,” nationalism and masculinity and works to intersect them with shifting identities. It is my hope that this thesis sheds light on the past and current situation in Kashmir and its profound effects on women’s lives. The political climate—debates and negotiations—is not enough to understand when examining the initial partition and subsequent years in Kashmir. Serious human rights violations have been committed and continue to ensue. Kashmiri civilians have faced and still face trauma on a daily basis. By understanding the ways nationalisms and masculinities influence the way women’s “homes” are understood, perhaps we can influence the way political and identity differences are approached and resolved (or not). This moves us one step closer to establishing humane “homes” that embody safety and peace for ALL citizens.

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## Appendix



(page 4). Map of occupied Kashmir. Jammu & Kashmir is controlled by India (center of map). The major cities in Jammu & Kashmir include Srinagar, Jammu and Kargil. The northwest area is Azad Kashmir, controlled by Pakistan where the city of Muzaffarabad exists. In the northeast, China hold occupation. The Line of Control divides Pakistani control and Indian control close to the city of Kargil.  
[http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/pdf/hhr\\_2005\\_html/jammuandkashmir.htm](http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/pdf/hhr_2005_html/jammuandkashmir.htm)