

Chapter 2

Transforming Conflict, Changing Society: Psychosocial Programming in Indian Jammu and Kashmir

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Introduction

Societies emerging from violent political conflict confront myriad challenges as they endeavour to heal the wounds inflicted on individuals and on the community, and to establish amity between divided and hostile groups so that violence does not recur. In so doing, they come up against the economic and social inequities and power asymmetries that may have provoked the conflict in the first place. Lasting peace cannot be secured without addressing these structural imbalances. This can be identified as another form of violence, which Galtung (1969) calls structural violence, that is violence caused not by direct physical harm but by systems of unequal power that structure unequal life chances such that a person's potential is unrealised. Recognising its role in conflict, Galtung (1985) notes that structural violence could just as well be taken as the point of departure for development studies as for peace studies. Understood from the human capabilities paradigm, which asserts that development must mean an enhancement of human capacities, a widening of choices, and an expansion of freedoms and assurance of human rights (Kumar 2006), it is evident that development, peacebuilding and social transformation are intertwined in the process of recovery following violent conflict.

Based on the findings of a research study conducted in Kashmir, which has been the site of political violence since 1989, this chapter explores the potential for psychosocial programmes to make the relapse into conflict and violence less likely by facilitating social change that promotes development, social harmony and social justice. Kashmir is commonly used to refer to the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and Indian Jammu and Kashmir, the location of this study, will henceforth be referred to as JK in this chapter.

Psychosocial programming in JK is a little over a decade old. The earliest interventions aimed to bring relief to orphaned children and widowed women, and were

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focused on trauma and mental disorder. Today the field encompasses a wide variety of programmes spanning the mental health, community-developmental and social justice spectrum (Galappatti 2003). They are psychosocial in the sense that they recognise that there is a close, ongoing and circular connection between psychological aspects of people's experience and their wider social experience (Psychosocial Working Group 2003). International organisations with experience in systematic and professional psychosocial programming in other parts of the world have also entered the field. In the initial years, a chaotic proliferation of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the perception that these had money-making rather than humanitarian intent, as well as the fear of "outsider" influence on Kashmiri culture and values, contributed to a public wariness. The earthquake that ravaged northern areas of Kashmir in 2005 brought in humanitarian aid that helped change perceptions and now psychosocial programmes are well established.

Background

They make desolation, and call it peace (Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali cited in Ali 1997, p. 21).

The region of Kashmir is divided between Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir (Population 12,548,926, 2011 Census) and Pakistan administered Kashmir (PAK). India's independence from British rule in 1947 was accompanied by the partition of the country into secular India and Muslim Pakistan. The dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan is central to their foundational identities and wars have been fought in 1948, 1965 and 1999 over this. India maintains that JK is an integral part of the country since the Hindu raja of the princely state acceded to India in 1947 seeking help when invaded by tribal raiders from Pakistan. Pakistan claims it as a Muslim majority state. The promise of a plebiscite giving the people of the state a choice of joining India or Pakistan never took place and the ceasefire line that now demarcates PAK and JK has become the de-facto border. Being a Muslim majority state, Kashmir is central to the idea of India as a pluralistic, secular nation and equally important to the idea of Pakistan as an Islamic nation. The politics of nationhood readily collapse into competing Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms in both countries.

JK comprises three regions with distinct cultures and languages. According to statistics based on the 2001 Census India District profiles, these are the largely Hindu and Sikh (68.8 %) region of Jammu, the predominantly Buddhist (45.89 %) and (Shia) Muslim (47.4 %) region of Ladakh, and the predominantly (Sunni) Muslim (97.16 %) valley of Kashmir. The latter has been at the heart of the insurgency, which spread to Muslim-dominated areas of the Jammu region. This social heterogeneity in JK finds reflection in heterogeneous political aspirations. In general, the non-Muslim minorities want a Kashmir that is part of a secular India. Many Muslims want an independent secular Kashmir or a Muslim Kashmir united with Pakistan.

India asserts that the people have exercised their democratic rights in the successive elections held in JK since 1947. However, the experience of rigged elections, the systematic erosion of constitutional guarantees to separate status of JK as enshrined in Article 370 of the Indian constitution, and the central government's political manipulation led to an upsurge of popular feeling against India and culminated in the cry for azaadi (freedom). The policies of the Indian state have thus been crucial to the eruption and spread of militancy in JK. According to Bose (2005), the defining theme of democratic India's policy towards Kashmir since 1947 is "unfortunately the purposeful denial of democratic rights" (p. 53). Thus, militancy began in 1989 with hundreds of young men going across the border to Pakistan for arms training. Over time, the ferocious rivalry between pro-azaadi and pro-Pakistan militant groups and the brutal counter-insurgency measures unleashed by the Indian state led to psychosocial conditions that were fertile ground for threatened identity polarisation around Islam and the absorption of militancy into the global Islamic jihad (for further reading on the Kashmir conflict see Ganguly 1997; Schofield 2004; Puri 1993).

The toll of this political violence has been high. The approximate fatality figures range from 40,000 according to government sources to 80,000 according to civil rights groups. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, the JK government's count is 38,228 fatalities from 1990 to 2007. Its own figure compiled from news reports for the period 1988 to May 2012 is 43,247 (South Asia Terrorism Portal 2012). Human rights groups and local NGOs put the total figure at 84,000 (Pal 2006). Most commentators quote a figure around 70,000 (Chatterji 2010). It is estimated that there are 32,400 widowed women and 97,000–100,000 orphaned children due to the conflict (Dabla 2010), and 1550 "half-widows", that is women whose husbands have disappeared but not yet been declared deceased (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons 2011).

Numerous human rights violations have been documented including massacres, targeted killings, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence and intimidation by both government security forces and militants (People's Union for Civil Liberties 1993; Amnesty International 1999; Human Rights Watch 2006; Public Commission on Human Rights 2006; Chatterji et al. 2009; Bhatia et al. 2011). A survey conducted by Medecins Sans Frontieres (De Jong et al. 2006) on mental health in the Kashmir valley also noted that frequent cordon and search operations, frisking, round-up raids, physical and psychological maltreatment at the hand of military forces was widespread. They found that one in six respondents had been legally or illegally detained and of these 76% was tortured in custody. Although sexual violence was not easily talked about, 11% said they had been victims of sexual assault and one in seven claimed to have witnessed rape.

An exhaustive door-to-door survey conducted in Baramulla district of the Kashmir valley by the Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (2007) found that of the 5106 people killed during the period 1990–2007, 67% were in the age group of 18–35 years of age and 96% were male. The deaths of civilians accounted for 49% and of militants for 44% of those killed. There were 408 custodial killings of which half were civilian and 343 cases of enforced disappearance of which 72% were

civilian. Regarding the identity of perpetrators, 55 % were identified as belonging to government forces and 8 % as militants. The rest were unidentified, but it is conjectured that 24 % were targeted shootings carried out by “renegades” or ikhwanis working for government forces. “Renegade” is the term popular in JK for surrendered militants who become counter-insurgents supporting the government security forces. They are also called ikhwanis after the militant group, Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, to which many initially belonged. The authors conclude that civilians have been seen by the state as legitimate targets in the war against militancy (Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society 2007).

The toll on mental and social health has been enormous. A survey on the mental health consequences of this violence found that 33 % suffered from psychological distress and that fear was a pervasive problem for children and adults alike (De Jong et al. 2006). A common refrain heard across the Kashmir valley is that when people left their homes in the morning, they could not be certain whether they would return alive in the evening (Husain 2002). Psychiatrists coined the term “midnight knock syndrome” to describe commonly seen anxiety states arising from night raids by security forces. The number of people consulting at the government psychiatric hospital rose from 18,000 in 1999 to 48,000 in 2003, and reports from psychiatrists in the Kashmir valley quote an alarming rise in suicide rates and substance abuse (Khan 2009). Some psychiatrists estimate that 55 % of the population in Kashmir valley suffers from some form of psychiatric disorder (Altaf 2012).

There has been massive internal displacement of approximately 160,000 Kashmiri Hindus from the Kashmir valley (Evans 2002), as well as of Muslims from border districts. A culture of fear and impunity prevails fostered by laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which gives the armed forces wide-ranging powers to detain and shoot on suspicion and confers immunity from prosecution and the Public Safety Act (PSA), dubbed a lawless law (Amnesty International 2011) which permits police to detain without trial, sometimes for years.

Currently, militant violence has reduced considerably and a peace process is underway. A significant development is that free and fair electoral processes have been established and the last assembly elections in 2008 saw a high voter turnout even in bastions of militant separatist sentiment. Analysts concluded that people voted because they wanted issues of governance to be addressed and further, their votes brought in a coalition of centrist parties rather than parties that adopted extreme positions (Puri 2009). In 2011, full panchayat (local bodies) elections were held successfully after 33 years with the voter turnout reported to be nearly 80% (Editorial, EPW, 2012).

But this did not mean that the political issue of separatism and the alienation of the people from the centre had ended (Chaudhary 2009). These are evident in the frequent agitations on the streets taking the form of stone pelting mobs of youth. Typically, the triggers are perceived threats to Muslim interests and human rights violations by the security forces. The situation therefore continues to be volatile and the state has been rocked by massive protests in the streets and hartals (a form of political protest where shops are shut and work suspended) in 2008 (against proposal to give land to a Hindu shrine), 2009 (triggered by the alleged rape and murder of two women by

security forces) and in 2010 (triggered by the deaths of three civilian men killed by the Army and faked as militants killed in an encounter). This uprising saw the Kashmir valley locked in hartals for 4–5 months. More than 100 youth were killed in police shooting. The opposition leadership revoked violence as a means of resistance and vowed to carry on their agitation for a separate Kashmir through non-violent means. An alarmed Indian all-party parliamentary delegation visited the state in September 2010 and acknowledged the gravity and depth of alienation. The Indian government promised to expedite economic development and create employment opportunities for disaffected youth, and appointed a team of interlocutors who reported on their discussion with wide sections of Kashmiri society and proposed the contours of a political solution (Group of Interlocutors for J&K 2011).

The state continues to maintain a highly militarised presence despite the decline in militancy. Police sources declared the number of militants active in JK to be 500 (Times of India, January 3, 2011). It is estimated that there are approximately 500,000–700,000 security force personnel deployed in JK both along the international border and in counter-insurgency making it one of the most highly militarised regions in the world (Public Commission on Human Rights 2006; Navlakha 2011). Parrey (2010) has commented:

There is a bunker every few hundred metres and a camp for every few villages. There are so many security checks and so many orders to produce ID proofs that the whole of Kashmir is transformed into a jail for the natives . . . To the ordinary Kashmiri . . . the nature and memory of the relationship the people share with the security force is such that in a common space the former is reduced to an inferior class, further enraging the natives who see such degradation in their own land as one of the worst possible disgraces. (p. 49)

Under these circumstances, all sectors of society have suffered. There had been a collapse of health and education infrastructure, which is slowly being picked up by the private sector. The economy, largely dependent on horticulture, floriculture, sericulture, animal husbandry, handicrafts and tourism, was shattered (Mahapatra 2009). Frequent political disturbances impede stable recovery. On the human front, more than two decades of political violence have damaged the social support structures that once sustained the community materially and psychologically and have created an emotional climate of insecurity and distrust.

Methodology

Focus

The objective of the case study was to determine the impact of psychosocial projects on peacebuilding, development and social transformation in the context of political violence in JK. In order to meet this objective, three projects were selected for in-depth analysis. They were selected on the basis of diversity of sectors of intervention and representation of differences along lines of gender, ethnicity, age, trauma and assumed political inclination. They were “homegrown” and challenging in terms of

developing local leadership and capacity while being less insulated from the politics of their location and had been in existence long enough to have generated outcomes of interest to the case study. The term homegrown means developed largely as local Kashmir-based initiatives. The APDP and Help Foundation originated and developed as local initiatives whereas Athwaas was conceived and supported by WISCOMP (a Delhi-based organisation) but developed in directions determined by its core group of local Kashmiri women. Being local initiatives, the organisations and the people involved were vulnerable to the suspicious and polarising politics typical of conflict zones. International organisations, e.g. MSF are more insulated from this given their so-called outsider position. To work under such conditions and emerge as capable and confident and be recognised as community leaders is challenging. Apart from these three projects, interviews were conducted with people in leadership positions in a further five projects. Brief descriptions of the three projects follow.

Projects

Athwaas Project, Purkho Camp Samanbal (Jammu)

The Athwaas (meaning “handshake”) project is an initiative of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) and was launched in 2001 with the aim to rebuild trust between Hindu, Sikh and Muslim Kashmiri women, identify and nourish peace constituencies, and articulate the concerns of women to policymakers. It aimed to provide a context where instead of being caught up in a syndrome of victimology the women could become empowered and their own agents of change (Basu 2004). Through an intensive engagement with one another’s differing realities, the Athwaas members began a personal journey of peacebuilding leading up to devising their own projects, suited to their particular skills and interests. These became the Samanbals. The Samanbal is understood to be a safe physical space for women to be used for reflection, sharing, and activities related to a specific project.

The case study examined the Athwaas initiative through interviews with four Athwaas members, and also studied the work of the Samanbal located at the Purkho Migrant Camp in Jammu, which is 1 of 14 government—run camps for Hindu Kashmiri Pandits who fled the Kashmir valley when militant violence erupted in 1989.

Hindu Pandits had been a privileged minority in the Kashmir valley. Drawing on accounts of European visitors and the 1931 census data, Evans (2002) shows that Hindus dominated finance, administration and education in Kashmir and also had the largest agricultural holdings. European visitors in the early twentieth century portrayed Kashmiri Pandits as well-to-do merchants, Brahmin priests and civil functionaries. In contrast, the Muslim population was mostly engaged in agriculture or domestic service. Forced labour (from which Hindus were exempt), heavy taxation and debt added to the woes of the ordinary Kashmiri Muslim.

The actual number of Kashmiri Pandits who fled the valley after militancy erupted in 1989 continues to be debated with Hindu groups claiming an exodus of more than 250,000–350,000 people (see Panun Kashmir 2013). Extrapolations from the census indicate that there were about 170,000 Pandits in the Kashmir valley in 1990 of which 160,000 fled (Evans 2002). Of the displaced, approximately 25,000 lived in “migrant” camps in Jammu. The Indian government has refused to give them the status of internally displaced people on the grounds that they are being looked after by the Indian state and refers to them as “migrants”. The government provision for “migrant relief” consists of housing in one or two-room tenements, monthly food rations and cash assistance (see Relief Organisation (Migrant), Jammu 2013). By 1997, most had moved into their own homes in Jammu or elsewhere in India (Human Rights Watch Asia 1999, cited by Evans 2002). Those that remain are predominantly rural folk uprooted from their farms and orchards in the valley, lacking the resources of more fortunate brethren. They live in over-crowded and squalid conditions, which they term “shame” accommodation. Surveys indicate that they suffer a host of physical and mental health problems, economic hardship, and are dogged by fears of cultural extinction (Dabla 2004). The return to the Kashmir valley of some Pandits has become a possibility after the announcement in 2008 of a government package for their return and rehabilitation. The package provides for housing, employment and business opportunities, student scholarships and financial assistance.

The Purkho Camp Samanbal has undertaken a variety of trainings and activities for income-generation. The members have also participated in workshops for psychosocial healing, awareness workshops related to gender and domestic violence, and peacebuilding dialogues between Hindu and Muslim women.

Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)

This association originated in one woman’s search for her son who went missing after being picked up by security forces in 1994. This association of family members of disappeared persons campaigns collectively for accountability and justice, and seeks the whereabouts of their missing relative. It is estimated that there are approximately 8000 cases of disappearances of which 1417 have been documented (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP-CCS) 2011).

The APDP split into two groups in 2006, namely APDP and APDP-JK Coalition of Civil Society (APDP-CCS). The former is led by the founder-chairperson and the latter by a lawyer-civil rights activist who had helped set it up initially. The former identifies itself primarily as a victims’ group, while the latter carries the stamp of the strong civil rights agenda of its parent organisation. Thus, for instance, the latter is scrupulous about use of the term enforced disappearance rather than missing and considers enforced disappearance a human rights violation whether the victim was innocent or had militant links.

Both APDPs hold monthly inter-district meetings of members when relatives from all over the state sit-in as protest at a local park. They address the media, display

placards and photos of the disappeared person, plan campaigns and follow up on their legal cases. The APDPs assist with the filing of habeas corpus petitions and other legal action, and arrange capacity-building and legal literacy workshops for their members. The nature of the work of the APDPs set them in direct confrontation with the state and its security apparatus and members often face threat and intimidation as they take on the might of the Indian state.

The present study has included interviews with persons in leadership positions in both the APDP and APDP-CCS. The ordinary APDP members interviewed for this study belonged to the former group.

HELP Foundation (HF)

This organisation was set up in 1997 to provide help to underprivileged sections of Kashmiri society in the sectors of health, education and economic assistance. The health-related programme includes a polyclinic that, along with other medical help, provides free mental health services to children and families and creates awareness in society about mental health issues. It also trains teachers, students, caretakers of orphanages, counsellors, special educators and others in psychosocial care of children and families.

In the education sector, the organisation has set up three schools providing a rounded educational experience to those who would not otherwise be able to access good quality education, and also provides financial assistance for the schooling of children from financially distressed homes. These projects target the children and youth who have grown up in a polarised environment where conditions of fear, insecurity, loss and violence prevail. Many have lost family members, seen their elders threatened and humiliated, and some have had to take up jobs in the informal sector (e.g. in the carpet industry) to support their families. It also has a residential facility to facilitate the education of boys from poor families and remote locations who have lost their father.

HF has also set up centres for women's empowerment in which needy women are imparted training in vocational skills and livelihoods, helped to access micro-credit and to market their products.

Other Projects

In addition, information about the work of five other projects was considered in the study by interviewing persons who had leadership roles in these organisations. These include APDP-CCS (described above), Action Aid (that runs a mental health and psychosocial support program and is active in community mental health initiatives) and the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation (which facilitates dialogue between civil society members from different regions in JK, between Kashmiris in JK and Pakistan, between Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus). Two organisations that focus on youth were also included. These are the Yakjah Reconciliation and

Development Network (which works among youth from different regional and religious backgrounds in JK to foster peaceful coexistence) and MercyCorps (that is engaged in capacity building among youth for leadership and entrepreneurship).

Sample

The sampling method was purposive. After being informed of the specific needs of the case study, senior project staff assigned the respondents for individual interviews and participants for the focus groups. Individual interviews were held with 40 respondents: 10 male and 10 female youth beneficiaries of HF, 10 members of APDP (3 male and 7 female reflecting the preponderance of women in the APDP membership), and 10 women from the Purkho Camp Samanbal.

The youth were aged between 16 and 20 years and all came from low-income families. They were studying in high school except for two students in college. In the majority of cases, the father was dead and in the rest the father was disabled due to illness or injury. The loss or disability of the father was conflict-related in approximately half of the cases. The Samanbal women were largely in the 30–50 age group, nine were married and one was divorced, and all but one had high school education or more. Half of them were from lower middle class backgrounds and the rest had low but stable incomes. The APDP group ranged in age from 26 to 65 years and the majority was from low unstable income backgrounds. Only three had high school education and six were illiterate. In the sample, three women were “half-widows” their husbands having disappeared, two women had missing brothers and five respondents were parents of missing sons.

Four focus groups were conducted: (a) 10 teachers of a HF School, (b) 6 HF staff including health centre staff, counsellor, and coordinator of residential home for boys, women’s empowerment centre staff, (c) 8 members of APDP and (d) 7 members of the Samanbal. Focus group participants and individual respondents were different people.

There were 12 staff respondents distributed as follows: HF-2, APDP-2, Athwaas and Purkho Camp Samanbal-4, Action Aid-1, Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation-1, APDP-CCS-1, MercyCorps-1 and Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network-1. The staff-respondent from the last named had been the coordinator of the Athwaas project and was interviewed regarding both projects.

Measures

The measures consisted of (a) semi-structured interviews with participants/beneficiaries from the three projects selected for detailed study, referred to henceforth as individual respondents; (b) semi-structured interviews with persons in leadership positions in the three projects selected for detailed study as well as the five additional

projects mentioned above, referred to as henceforth as staff-respondents; and (c) focus group discussion at the three main projects.

The research protocol for individual respondents inquired into their life circumstances, their psychosocial well-being and their vision for an ideal Kashmir, and perception of the impact of the project on their lives and on society at large.

Psychosocial well-being was understood in terms of the PADHI (Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Interventions) model developed at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka (Social Policy & Analysis Research Centre 2008). It proposes that psychosocial well-being comprises of five interconnecting domains. An individual or community is thought to experience well-being when they are able to access physical, material and knowledge resources; experience competence and self-worth; exercise participation in family, community, social and political life; build social networks; and enhance physical and psychological wellness. Psychosocial well-being is mediated by power and identity and subject to the facilitating or undermining influence of surrounding sociopolitical and cultural systems and institutions.

The interview protocol for staff respondents inquired into what the goals of the project were and how these related to the sociopolitical context; the outcomes for project participants and beneficiaries; the larger impact of the project on society and at policy levels; the factors that enabled and obstructed the work of the project; and the role of operational factors such as funding, alliances with other organisations and capacity building.

The theme questions for the focus groups varied slightly for the different groups. The shared themes pertained to their vision for an ideal Kashmir and their thoughts on the impact of the project on well-being and social transformation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was largely carried out between December 2010 and April 2011. Data collection in the Kashmir valley was conducted with the help of a Kashmiri-speaking research assistant. The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed and also translated in the case of those that were in Kashmiri.

The data was subjected to thematic analysis within a broad frame that sought themes relevant to issues of development, peacebuilding and social transformation, as well as noted other emergent themes relevant to overcoming suffering arising from political violence. The data transcripts were reviewed and the responses categorised to represent the themes that emerged in each set of data, that is, data from individual respondents, staff respondents and the focus groups. These were further reduced by identifying themes that recurred within and across data sets, and next by combining related categories into overarching themes.

Satisfaction in different domains of well-being had been rated by respondents on a 4-point scale. In the analysis this was collapsed into “Satisfied” and “Not satisfied” categories. A crude index of satisfaction in each domain of well-being was thus obtained for each group of individual respondents.



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