

Arts for Unity and Peace – A Project Report by Kashmir Development Foundation (KDF)

ARTS FOR UNITY AND PEACE

This report presents anxieties, hopes, fears, memories, feeling of loss, longing and gestures of solidarity for unity and peace through the medium of art and culture.

Idreas Khandy



Published by:

Kashmir Development Foundation, 128-A, Spotland Road, Rochdale, England, OL12 6PJ. Charity No.1143891

Idreas Khandy

Introduction

Culture in the 18th century came to acquire many meanings; however, the most critical meaning attached to the word culture is "a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual" (Williams, 1971: 16). This is an all-encompassing definition of culture, which does not necessarily highlight the everyday manifestations of culture and how they become entangled with the issues of identity, politics, power, conflict, and peace. We must ask ourselves a few questions to understand such manifestations of culture. What objective is culture directed towards? What do cultural artefacts represent? Why are some cultural practices promoted at the cost of others? The answers to these questions can only be found once we recognise that the realm of culture, prevalent culture (or unpatronised culture), is a site of contestation between the culture of the dominant and the dominated. So, most concisely, using culture or cultural forms/artefacts to challenge, contest, and potentially undermine the dominant culture's hegemony can be termed as cultural resistance.

Having said that, cultural resistance in itself is a broad phenomenon and can and does mean different things to different people, as Duncombe (2002) points out. Cultural resistance has both positive and negative consequences, i.e. it can become the harbinger of positive change in society and usher in a new phase of social, economic, and political equality. On the other hand, it could be an inconsequential exercise that inadvertently ends up getting incorporated into the schema of the dominant culture about which Herbert Marcuse (2007:20) warned us that "...domination—in the guise of affluence and liberty—extends to all spheres of private and public existence, integrates all authentic opposition, absorbs all alternatives." Moreover, cultural resistance can be used to manufacture a space that pretends to exist in isolation of the large society, which decouples culture from politics and vice-versa and thereby exists merely as a mode of displacement. However, straddling the vast, albeit seemingly non-existent gulf between these two dichotomous views of cultural resistance is the much more nuanced view, which holds that while cultural resistance in itself may not be revolutionary, it nevertheless is not futile either, especially in moments of crisis. As James C. Scott (1985) has noted that when the paths to open collective resistance are blocked by existing hegemonic structures, cultural resistance, it can be argued, becomes one of the many "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985: 29).

Cultural resistance also offers an opportunity to look past "the official story" (Scott, 1990: 1) and functions as the "hidden transcript" (ibid: 4-5) that challenges the public transcript and illuminates the impact of domination on public discourse. These qualities of cultural resistance, it can be argued, make it an activity of intervention in the sphere of power relations to re-write the public discourse and, therefore, a political act. This brings us to how cultural resistance communicates politics and how we can discriminate between cultural acts of resistance and cultural acts that seek to exist in isolation from the political. To re-write the public discourse, cultural resistance must undermine, weaken, and replace the scaffolding of social structures that supports the dominant public discourse, which marginalises, excludes, and dominates the subaltern discourses.

Idreas Khandy

Cultural resistance achieves or strives to achieve this firstly by creating a free space, where the ideological and material dimensions of the resistance are given shape and spread through organisational networks. Subsequently, these spaces prepare activists to take cultural resistance beyond these private spaces into the public and political realm, thus paving the way for cultural resistance to become a political activity in itself (Duncombe, 2002).

To understand what end cultural resistance is geared towards, we need to pay close attention to the means of cultural resistance (Duncombe, 2002). The means include content, form, interpretation, and the activity itself. To understand the relation of cultural resistance with politics, we must look at how the content engages with the prevailing political sphere and what ideas and themes the content employs for the engagement. Secondly, form relates to the medium of transmission or the platform through which cultural acts are expressed and circulated. For instance, cultural acts that are broadcasted to a large audience from state-owned media or institutions mostly (pre)tend to be apolitical, the possibility that such acts will be part of the repertoire of cultural resistance is, therefore, minuscule.

Moreover, we must also take into account that cultural resistance is multi-dimensional and manifests across passive-active, micro-macro, and overt-covert dichotomies (Williams, 2009), which in turn, dictates the scale of cultural resistance; varying from unconsciously political to revolution (Duncombe, 2002). The scale of cultural resistance varies contextually and depends on the structural obstacles a particular community or groups faces. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that there will be a general progression of the scales from 'unconsciously political' through 'self-consciously political' to 'revolution'. In fact, expecting any cultural resistance to follow a straightforward chronology is unrealistic and removed from actually existing material conditions. Lastly, (cultural) resistance itself engenders cultural creativity and is, therefore, a developmental and productive human act (Hviid, 2017).

Having outlined the theoretical standpoint vis-à-vis cultural resistance, what follows in this report highlights the many manifestations cultural resistance has taken in Kashmir, ¹ especially after the Indian Govt. unilaterally rescinded the nominal autonomy of Indian-administered Kashmir. The report builds on the Kashmir Development Foundation's activities organised as part of its *Arts for Unity & Peace Festival*. Under the aegis of the project, four events were held at Birmingham, UK, Gilgit, Pallandri (located in Pakistan-administered Kashmir), and Srinagar (Indian-administered Kashmir), respectively. The events were organised online, except for the Gilgit event, which was held in person with all the COVID-19 precautions and safety measures in place. The subsequent sections of this report outline a background that necessitated the

© Kashmir Development Foundation

¹ Kashmir in this report refers to the erstwhile princely state of Kashmir, a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious entity, which at present remains divided and disputed between India, Pakistan, and China.

Idreas Khandy

organisation of the *Arts for Unity & Peace Festival* and also offer a close reading of the content presented at these venues spread across time and space.

Coping with the crisis in Kashmir

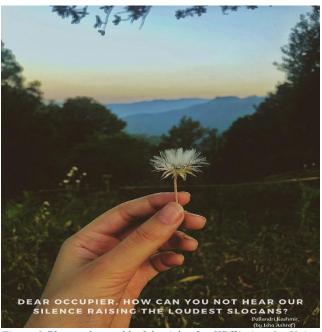


Figure 1 Photo submitted by Isha Ashraf to KDF's Arts for Unity & Peace Festival

The region of Kashmir has been a constant source of antagonism and hostility between the states of India and Pakistan ever since their creation in 1947. Both states assert their claims to Kashmir in its entirety and have fought four² wars over it, whilst leaving the people of Kashmir out of the discussions, for the most part, a feeling aptly captured by the in-frame caption in Figure 1. These antagonistic claims backed by militaristic ambitions have had a debilitating impact on Kashmir and its people. The region that existed as a unitary, albeit internally heterogeneous entity for a century now remains divided between India and Pakistan, with each state creating further sub-divisions within the territory under their control. With the Karachi Agreement of 1949, Pakistan,

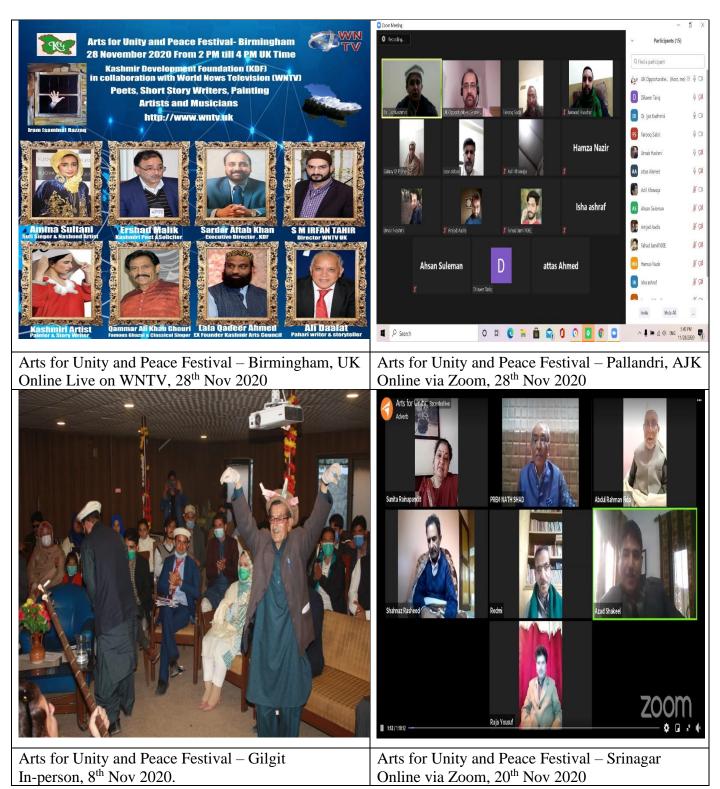
for all practical purposes, took full control of the Gilgit region of the state, which was formalised and further strengthened after 1970 by taking the route of "legislated dominance" (Snedden, 2012: 99) to create and cement sub-divisions within the territory under its control. The Indian state, on its part, shied away from creating and formalising internal divisions in the territory under its control until August 2019. On August 5 2019, the Indian state nullified the Indian-administered Kashmir's nominal autonomy through parliamentary fiat and bifurcated the territory into two union territories.³ Subsequently, a series of laws were passed that appear to be designed to curtail freedom of expression, erode press freedom, and undermine the social and economic setup of Kashmir (Mir, 2021). To suppress any opposition to these changes, Indian-administered Kashmir was turned into a garrison, a military lockdown was imposed for many months, and more than 5000 people were put under 'preventive detention' (Tiwary, 2019). As Indian-administered Kashmir has slowly begun to restart economic activities, another lockdown was necessitated due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and as of August 2020, the region's economy had taken a fatal hit of £4.43 billion (Khan, 2020).

² Three wars in 1947, 1965, and 1971 respectively, and the fourth being the Kargil war of 1999, which is not regarded as a full-fledged conventional war by everyone.

³ Union Territories in Indian political framework refers to territories that are directly control by the central govt. and the powers of legislatures, if allowed, in such territories is circumscribed.

Idreas Khandy

It is in this context the Kashmir Development Foundation took the initiative to connect people from the different regions of Kashmir and enable them to express their anxieties, hopes, fears, memories, feeling of loss, longing and gestures of solidarity for unity and peace through the medium of art and culture. Perhaps, the only silver lining of the global pandemic for Kashmir and its people was the migration and 'normalisation' of meetings, events, seminars, and talks in their virtual form, which not only minimised the costs of organising the four events but also encouraged people to participate in them.



Idreas Khandy

A summary of the Arts for Unity & Peace Festival:

The Gilgit leg of the festival was held on November 8, 2020, at Deosai Guest House at Jatial in Gilgit, Pakistan administered Kashmir. Art for a place like Gilgit-Baltistan, "a zone of non-being" as Aziz Ali Dad (2018) borrowing from Frantz Fanon has termed it, is not just an activity of expression, but *the* activity that seeks to 'unveil' the concealed and challenge the second-hand representations of the region pragmatically. The fact that the region of Gilgit-Baltistan has been kept in a state of political stasis for over 70 years makes cultural artefacts a highly effective medium of getting any insights into the region. The artists, especially in this region, appear to be noticeably aware of the boundaries to their expression. How far they can be pushed, and these underlying tensions were palpable during the KDF organised event as well.

In his opening address, Professor Ahmad Saleem Salimi, who also moderated the event, highlighted the need to revive the traditional modes of cultural interaction and encouraged the younger generation to move away from mass-produced culture as it is bereft of any socially relevant content. Artists presented their creations through singing, painting, and poetry. The event was attended by many eminent poets, social workers, academics and youth affiliated with Gilgit's "Arbab-e-Zouk Circle". Mr Israr Abbasi and Mr Khalid Pervez Butt, Directors of KDF, were also present on location. Noted poet Dr Ejaz Kashmiri from Bhimber

also participated in the event. The event was kicked off artist, namely Shaheer Abbas; he presented a rendition Paras' song Hum Gilgit Baltistan Ke Hain (We are from Baltistan); the song is regarded as the unofficial anthem of the region and is quite popular among the song is an assertion of the heritage of the people of Baltistan and a rebuke to narratives that portray them as

"Kashmir is in trouble, although the valley is beautiful, but the turmoil has consumed three generations."

Prof. Anwar Jameel

by a young of Salman Gilgit national people. The Gilgit

identity, history, culture and heritage. Highlighting the historical connections of Gilgit-Baltistan with other parts of Kashmir, artist Syed Iqtidaar Ali presented a painting and stated, "whether we are Gilgiti or Kashmiri, we are somehow somewhere connected. On the surface we may look different, but our root is the same." Ali also recited a poem, which touched on the theme of identity, and highlighted the different dimensions of Gilgiti identity to illustrate its depth and vibrance. The poem was another strong assertion of regional identity and a potent reproach of top-down patronising views that devalue the lived experiences of the region's people.

Reminiscing the tough times, the region had to endure because of sectarian violence, Ishtiaq Jatial, a local poet from Gilgit-Baltistan, illustrated the damage wrought by sectarian violence in powerful allegories and metaphors. Mr Jatial's poem squarely pinned the blame of the region's underdevelopment and lack of leadership on sectarian tensions and stated that the only way to change the world is to hold fast to the truth. The presentation of a painting by Anzal Fatima, a local painter followed Mr Jatial's recitation. Ms Fatima,

bereft of an

Idreas Khandy

whilst explaining the painting to the audience, stated that "the two women, depicted in the painting, who are holding their hands out to one another represent GB and JK respectively, and the connotation is that the people of GB will always be there for the people of JK." Professor Anwar Jameel recited his poetry next, and he began by drawing the audience's attention to the deteriorating situation in Indian-administered Kashmir. Prof. Jameel stated: "Kashmir is in trouble; although the valley is beautiful, the turmoil has consumed three generations." This statement in itself held much weight and was not made lightly; it was subtle enough to express solidarity with the people of Indian-administered Kashmir, but at the same time not too bold to invite attention from the gatekeepers of the statist narrative, which claims people of Gilgit-Baltistan want nothing to do with Kashmir. If the statement had left any room for ambiguity vis-à-vis the solidarity that was removed by the poem *Maazi* (The Past) that Prof. Jameel read to the audience. The poem used the imagery of the fabled beauty of Kashmir valley as a metonym and a reminder of the stability and peace the region had witnessed in the past and alluded that the deterioration of the said beauty was a consequence of the ongoing turmoil. Prof. Jameel concluded his recitation with the couplet, which emphasised that an artist must counter the hate by 'erasing' it off the metaphorical 'wall' of the public discourse.

Prof. Jameel's powerful intervention was followed by an equally gripping recitation by Mushtaq Ahmed Lai, a well-known poet from Gilgit. Using a remorseful tone, Mr Lai's poems expressed emotions of loss and helplessness, almost delving into fatalism, exhorting the audience to take stock of the situation and assess the decisions so those old connections can be renewed. Mr Lai appeared to be referring to the dearth of connections and exchange of people and ideas between the two regions of Pakistan-administered Kashmir when he read the following couplet:

Aur raastun ka tou kuch khayaal karo Raaste pe kissi ko chalne do

Mr Lai also presented a satirical poem, Haspataal *Ka Haal* (The State of the Hospital). The target of the poem's critique was the privatisation of healthcare. The poem uses the technique of tragicomedy to illustrate how the push to privatise healthcare violates the solemn oath medical professionals take upon entrance into the profession and leads to the commodification of people's health as profit-making takes precedence over improving people's lives. The poem was a scathing rebuke of the narrative that seeks to position privatisation as a panacea for structural inadequacies and social inequalities. Invoking the themes of respect, dignity, recognition, and representativeness, Dr Ejaz Kashmiri, in his poem Radeef (Rhyme), appeared to challenge the outdated patronising attitude of the people of Kashmir have been facing over the last several decades. Dr Kashmiri concluded his recitation by calling on the people of the different regions of Kashmir to "erase the distances between them and unite" as they are all "flowers of the same garden".

Idreas Khandy

After him, the general secretary of Arbab-e-Zouk constituency, poet Jamshed Khan, captivated the audience with his powerful poetry. Mr Khan while reciting his poem *Ae Dost* (O Friend!), which called for the people of the two regions of Pakistan administered Kashmir to build bridges of friendship and camaraderie proclaimed that "we need to increase connections between Kashmir (AJK) and GB; the rulers will never do it, but we will; nobody else will". In a veiled, but powerful critique of the Pakistani state, Mr Khan in his couplet:

Watan e aziz jinn se sambhala nahi gaya Haakim woh keh rahe hain ki Kashmir chahiye

mocked the political establishment of Pakistan for its paradoxical record of failing to provide security and good governance in Pakistan and remaining adamant in its desire to have Kashmir. Continuing the theme of rejecting sectarian politics and the use of religion to divide and rule, Abdul Khaliq Taj, a well-known poet and former magistrate and vice-president of Arbab-e-Zouk constituency read his satirical poem *Bus Jinaab e Shaykh* (Respected Shaykh). Calling out the *Ulema e Soo* (courtly or statist scholars) for their wilful misinterpretation of religion to suits their petty interests, Mr Taj declared that the people would no longer be the 'sacrificial lambs' for such scholars. Mr Taj's poem was one of the many examples of cultural resistance/intervention that sought to displace the stereotype of 'religious extremism' that is often used to discredit dissenters and critics of the ruling establishment. The event concluded with the presidential address of Prof. Muhammad Amin Zia, President of Arbab-e-Zouk Constituency. Thanking KDF for organising the event, he emphasised the need for connectivity between Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan and strongly condemned religious extremism in his presidential address.

The event in Kashmir valley of Indian administered Kashmir was held online on November 20 2020, even though slow internet speed tried its best to stymie the event. The event brought together poets representing different linguistic groups of Indian administered Kashmir and multilingual poetry sessions were held. The variety of the content yet again highlighted the multicultural character of Kashmir and their respective sense of belonging to Kashmir. The symposium was organised under the theme *Soun Poutkaal Akh Miltsaar* (Our United Past). The event was moderated by Mr Ashiq Ali, who is the CEO of Adverb Development Solutions, KDF's regional partner in this project. Renowned regional artists such as Shakeel Azad, Raja Yousuf, Suneeta Raina, Shahnaz Rashid, Prof Shaad Ramzan, Abdul Rehman Fida, Muhammad Subhan Showkeen, G.M.Nowsooz, Dr Nazir Azad, Prof. Ismail Aashana, Shahzada Rafiq, Ali Shaida, Fayaz Tilgami, and Dr Farooq Fayaz. Mr Azad initiated the symposium's proceedings with his poem *Ryesh Waer* (Abode of Saints). The poem was an ode to a long-forgotten history of Kashmir valley when it was known to be a seat of learning and religious harmony. The poem invoked a sense of a glorious past as an aspiration and an objective to build a peaceful Kashmir collectively and overcome the feeling of incompleteness engendered

Idreas Khandy

by the conflict since the 1990s. Raja Yousuf invoked similar nostalgic themes in his poem *Khabar Cha* (Who knows) reminiscing memories of Kashmir that was yet to be exposed to the onslaught of consumerism, haphazard constructions and rampant urbanisation at the cost of commons land and trees especially the *Chinaar*. The poem used the prospect of a vanishing Kashmir as a rhetorical device to highlight that Kashmir's cultural heritage should not be bartered with the so-called development. As most of the online symposium participants were from the older generation, a common refrain in most of the poems recited was a lamentation for the past and a nostalgic sentiment was frequently invoked, perhaps to make sense of a society that is in flux, transition, and turmoil.

Similarly, Abdul Rehman Fida's poem also invoked the signifier of Kashmir as an idyllic peaceful and pristine valley that was known for its Hindu, Muslim and Sikh unity. The poem in a remorseful tone lamented the loss of this idyllic past to suspicion and violent militarisation in the couplet:

Aaz chui barood tarfas tarfas Kam gul bargai meczi tal saei

Today we see explosives everywhere And countless young ones we have buried

Muhammad Subhan Showkeen in his poem *Wanizess* (Tell them), in a cryptic fashion, alluded to a besieged public sphere that feels claustrophobic and how the desire to be free has only led to the sprouting of countless graveyards, which poignantly captured the limbo Indian administered Kashmir has been put in, especially since August 2019. The poem's cryptic phraseology can arguably be interpreted as a pre-emptive move to deflect any scrutiny from the authorities who appear to be in no mood to tolerate any dissenting views (Civicus, 2021). Prof. Shad Ramzaan presented a very emotional poem titled *Miltsaar* (Brotherhood), a contribution to the rich heritage of literary work that has addressed the theme of communal harmony in Kashmir (see Bhat, 2018). Prof. Ramzaan, like other poets from across Kashmir, used his literary work to categorically reject sectarian narratives and proclaimed that the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir are as close to one another as fingernails are to fingertips.

Ms Suneeta Raina, in turn, gave voice to the experience of longing for the homeland in her poem. Ms Raina's poem expressed the desire to relive the life of Kashmir valley and simultaneously kept hinting at the invisible apprehensions at work that prevent the desires from becoming a reality. The poem highlighted the need to repair the social fabric of Kashmir, which has been rendered like a tattered old flag and left at the mercy of the winds that blow down from the citadels of high politics. Ms Raina's recital was perhaps a step towards that need for social rejuvenation.

Idreas Khandy

The Birmingham event of the festival was held online via Zoom on November 28 2020. Mr S M Irfan Tahir from the UK based WNTV was kind enough to host and moderate the event. The event featured poetry recitals, folk and political songs in many Kashmiri languages. The artists, poets, and singers who participated in the event included Parvez Muzaffar, Qammar Ali Khan, Dr Manaf, Amina Sultani, Ali Daalat, Lala Qadeer Ahmad, Ershad Malik, Iram Razzaq, and Shams Rehman. The event was kicked off by Parvez Muzaffar who recited a couple of poems, which his late father, Muzaffar Hanfi authored. Before commencing Parvez professed the recital to be an 'act of solidarity' with the people of Kashmir. In one of his recitals, entitled *Tarana e Kashmir* (Song of Kashmir), Parvez outlined a series of things and personalities that make Kashmir *Rashq e Toor* (Envy of Sinai). The recital was followed by Qammar Ali Khan's musical performance, who sang Faiz Ahmed Faiz famous poem *Hum Dekhenghe* (We will see!). Since the poem was written in a political context and has over the years become a rallying cry for dissenters in South Asia against state high-handedness, Mr Khan used it to make his performance a quintessential act of active cultural resistance directed at the structures of power at a macro-level without directly naming any specific entity.

Similarly, Dr Manaf's poetry recital contested the notion that seeks to equate Kashmir with the



Figure 2 Artist Irum Razzaq's rendition of a forced division of Kashmir

namesake Kashmir valley and proclaimed that Jammu, Ladakh, and Gilgit were Kashmir's *jism o jaan* (body and soul) and the bedrock of its existence. Dr Manaf's recital was followed by an emotionally charged performance by nasheed artist Amina Sultani. In her rendition of *Mere Watan* (My Homeland), Ms Sultani presented a blend of Koshur and Urdu to express emotions of belonging, hopes, and dreams of returning to a unified Kashmir. The song invoked memories of forced migration and division, and a hope of returning to witness Kashmir's fabled spring once again. The theme of division and longing to unite was also vividly and in an anatomical manner represented by Ms Irum Razzaq (see figure 2). The sub-text of the graphic

seeks to disrupt the dominant narrative that depicts Kashmir as a border dispute between India and Pakistan, and therefore, detrimental to their economic and social interests. The graphic appears to reject such assertions and instead centre the people of Kashmir as the primary stakeholders as it is their bloodied bodies that line the dividing frontiers militarised by India and Pakistan. On Duncombe's "scales of resistance" (2002: 8), Ms Razzaq's graphic is a "self-consciously political" (ibid) act of cultural resistance that makes multiple claims,

Idreas Khandy

some overt and some covert as was evident from the voiceover of Ms Razzaq that accompanied the presentation of her creative work.

Ershad Malik's poetry recital marshalled a wealth of lived experiences and emphasised the heterogeneity of Kashmir that is rooted in historical conditions, and how such heterogeneity is a strength, and a potent source of enlightenment, progress and peace in Kashmir. Mr Malik's poem too alluded to the multicultural character of Kashmir and drew the audience's attention to the danger parochial rhetoric poses to a common human project of justice and equality. The event concluded with the poetry recitations by Shams Rehman in Urdu and Pahari languages. In the poem entitled *Mari Reet* (Our Traditions), Shams portrayed the 'culture of resistance' against exploitation and feudalism as the real tradition of Kashmir instead of artefacts of material culture. Covertly, the poem conveyed to the audience that the people of Kashmir had resisted crises even when doing that was considered unthinkable, and the people of Kashmir must derive hope from this rich tradition to face the contemporary crises head-on.

The cultural event at Pallandri was a poetic symposium; it held on the same day as the Birmingham event. The online symposium was moderated by Advocate Dilawar Tariq and brought together some of the most well-known and upcoming Urdu poets of Pakistan administered Kashmir. These included Dr Ejaz Kashmiri, Umair Hashmi, Amjad Aadis, Jawad Hashir, Ehsan Suleiman, Basit Ali Raja, and Atas Ahmed Atas. The poetry recited at the symposium touched upon a variety of social, political, and cultural issues. The range and the depth the works showed was remarkable as each poet voiced their assessment of the society, its failings, and the measures needed to address the social malaise and usher peace, prosperity, and equality in Kashmir.

The symposium was kicked off by Dr Ejaz Kashmiri, who recited two poems, both of which were a scathing critique of sectarian politics and its consequences. Dr Kashmiri indicted sectarian politics for creating an atmosphere of distrust and exploiting religion for petty politics. Even though recited with a calm demeanour, the poems categorically rejected the instrumentalisation of religion for political ends. Similarly, Kotli's Umair Hashmi invoked the themes of betrayal and the resultant indefinite betrayal of the 'moment' (the moment of peace) that the people of Kashmir have been awaiting. Following the tone set by Umair Hashmi, Amjad Aadis's layered poem *Dareecha* (Window) on one level gave expression to the dilemma people of Pakistan administered Kashmir face, and on another level, voiced the anxieties that stem from being part of Kashmir and at the same time being isolated from it, and was a call for overcoming the structural

Idreas Khandy

hurdles that prevent the people of Kashmir from freely connecting with one another across the Line of Control (LoC).⁴

The experiences of the people, who reside in the vicinity of the LoC and live in constant fear of cross-LoC exchange of fire by the Indian and Pakistani armies, were poignantly illuminated and centred by Ehsan Sulaiman in his poem Sarhadi Bastiyun Ke Muqeem (Residents of Borderlands), which is an archetypal example of memory or recalling as (cultural) resistance. Sulaiman laid out the grim reality of life in the 'borderlands' of Kashmir in a haunting fashion. The poem being a *poem of witness* revealed how the everyday uncertainties of survival and death for the inhabitants are made subservient to bullets, and mortar shells fired by anonymous 'soldiers' were captured in a macabre manner by Sulaiman. The poem, to quote Carolyn Forché, "is not a recounting, (...) not memetic narrative, (...), not political confessionalism, and "it is not simply an act of memory. It bears witness, (...) in the manner of an ethical or political act" (Forché, 2014: 20). The underlying motive of the poem, therefore, was not to relegate the struggles of the most vulnerable people of Kashmir into the realm of poetic abstraction but to humanise their existence, which is otherwise erased by the ego of 'national security', by personifying the statistics of sufferings that are usually used to depict the lives of borderland Kashmiri people. By doing so, the poem challenges and destabilises the notion of 'national security' that the Indian and Pakistani states usually use to justify their cross-LoC exchange of fire. The poem reminded the audience that for the two states, it might be just an 'exchange' of arms and ordinance through explosions and smoke; however, it is always the lives, bodies, and properties of unrepresented and ignored Kashmiri people on which such 'exchanges' are recorded.

⁴ The de-facto border between Indian administered Kashmir and Pakistan administered Kashmir, the border is manned by Indian and Pakistani armies.

Idreas Khandy

Conclusion

The four events organised by the Kashmir Development Foundation under the aegis of *Arts for Unity & Peace Festival* were as mentioned earlier in the report organised at the most tumultuous time in Kashmir's recent history. The events were an act of cultural resistance as they collectively across time and space sought to shatter the silence that had engulfed the people of Kashmir post-August 2019. It is debatable that it may not be cultural resistance in the most definitive and organised sense, but it succeeded in breaking the enforced silence across the different regions of Kashmir in the most eloquent manner. In doing so, the participants in the events upheld the plural character of Kashmir and managed to challenge top-down narratives concerning Kashmir that seek to portray the people as a 'divided lot'. The poetry and other artistic creations were unanimous in rejecting sectarianism and the misuse of religion and demonstrated a consensus and a will amongst the people of Kashmir to work towards a peaceful and just future.

Hopefully, these events were the first among many such events that will continue to build bridges between people using arts and culture. The emerging network of the artists and an online repository of their work created as a legacy of this project which is available at https://arts.kdf.ngo/ would build and foster relationships between artists within all the regions of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, diaspora and beyond to advance peace and unity.

The outcome of this small project has established a need for a more comprehensive long term 3-5 year project to help the artists and citizens diplomacy practitioners in reimaging opportunities for peacebuilding and conflict transformation through artistic expressions of storytelling, poems, music and paintings showcasing the pain, irony and hopes of the people for a peaceful and prosperous future and an open society within all the regions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Note:

This project has been supported by Conciliation Resources (https://www.c-r.org/programme/south-asia) through the small grants programme and delivered with the support of local artists and their organisations in AJK, Gilgit Baltistan, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. For further information, please contact Sardar Aftab Khan, Executive Director, Kashmir Development Foundation, E-mail: kdfajk@gmail.com

Idreas Khandy

References

Arts for Unity and Peace Festival – Gilgit 8th Nov 2020 video available at https://www.facebook.com/events/726241128102110/permalink/727074238018799/

Arts for Unity and Peace Festival – Pallandri (online) available at https://youtu.be/2cUAT-TOEhM

Arts for Unity and Peace Festival – Birmingham (online) available at https://www.wntv.uk/arts-for-unity-and-peace-festival-

uk/?fbclid=IwAR3cIiskE6WuUpvjGCjfDJJ3geHmvtz61dYPvmQjteFir3hKdUHpE5G6BAs

Arts for Unity and Peace Festival – Srinagar (online) available at https://www.facebook.com/AdverbDevelopmentSolutions/videos/210587810431213

CIVICUS. 2021. 'CIVICUS - India Profile'. Monitoring Agency. CIVICUS. January 12 2021. https://monitor.civicus.org/country/india/.

Dad, Aziz Ali. 2018. 'The Zone of Nonbeing'. *The News*, January 13 2018, sec. Opinion. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/267708-the-zone-of-nonbeing.

Duncombe, Stephen, ed. 2002. Cultural Resistance Reader. London; New York: Verso.

Forché, Carolyn. 2014. 'Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art'. In *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English*, *1500-2001*, edited by Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu, First Edition, 17–26. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Hviid, Pernille. 2017. 'Cultural Productions Through Resistance: An Introduction to Section I'. In *Resistance in Everyday Life - Constructing Cultural Experiences*, edited by Nandita Chaudary, Hviid Pernille, Giuseppina Marsico, and Jakob Waag Villadsen, 13–18. New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Khan, M Aamir. 2020. 'Kashmir Incurred Rs 45,000 Cr Loss Due to Successive Lockdowns: Report'. Newspaper. Tribuneindia News Service. August 24 2020. https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/j-k/kashmir-incurred-rs-45-000-cr-loss-due-to-successive-lockdowns-report-130685.

Marcuse, Herbert, and Douglas Kellner. 2007. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Repr. Routledge Classics Philosophy. London: Routledge.

Mir, Shakir. 2021. 'From One Year of the Gag to the Next, "Normalcy" in Kashmir Comes at a Price'. News Portal. The Wire. January 1 2021. https://thewire.in/rights/kashmir-valley-rights-media-modi-government.

Scott, James C. 1985. Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.

——. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Snedden, Christopher. 2012. *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tiwary, Deeptiman. 2019. 'Over 5,000 People Arrested since August 4 in Kashmir: Home Ministry'. Newspaper. The Indian Express. November 20 2019. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/over-5000-people-arrested-since-august-4-in-kashmir-home-ministry-6129072/.

Williams, Raymond. 1975. *Culture and Society: 1780 - 1950*. Repr. [d. Ausg.] 1963. A Pelican Book Sociology and Anthropology. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.