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Article

Strong Military and Weak Statehood: The Case of Self-Governance Through *Rasookh* in Kashmir

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Abstract
The article focuses its gaze on the Indian-controlled valley of Kashmir to highlight how the militarily strong state resonates with weak statehood in Kashmir. Being faced with popular contentious politics, the state in Kashmir is argued to survive through militarised authoritarian control leading to the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity. Thus, rather than a provider of security, the situation in Kashmir is marked by the least expectations of security from the state. The article highlights *rasookh* as a means of self-governance popularly employed in Kashmir to socially navigate the prevalent precarious circumstances, especially drawing security by virtue of informal connections. The article becomes significant to firstly, highlight how the prevalent political structures condition and inform individual behaviour, and secondly, to examine the way different individuals develop institutionalised responses as an experience of those structures. The article through the case of Kashmir portrays how weak statehood in Kashmir predominantly informs the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity and how self-governance under *rasookh* becomes a means of compensating for the prevalent precarity. The article draws from the neo-institutionalist literature understanding the state as an ensemble of formal and informal institutions, mainly understanding institutions from the Lauthian perspective as ordered patterns of behaviour. From that perspective, *rasookh* is made sense of as an informal institution—an "uncodified but socially accepted pattern of behaviour". The article provides original contributions by highlighting the under-researched societal aspect of analysing self-governance through *rasookh* (an informal institution) and highlighting everyday, societal dynamics that underpin it.

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1. Introduction

The landlocked region of Kashmir, situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in South Asia, has been festering (for at least seven decades) as a protracted conflict. The former sovereign state is currently divided and controlled by three powerful nuclear-armed states: India, Pakistan, and China (see Figure 1). While China controls the mostly uninhabited part of the territory, India and Pakistan control major parts of the land and population while laying competing claims of sovereignty over the entire territory (cf. Snedden, 2021, p. 303). The article focuses its gaze on the Indian-controlled valley of Kashmir, popularly referred to as "Kashmir" or "Kasheer" by its inhabitants. The valley (henceforth referred to in the article as Kashmir) has been a site of active contentious politics (Tarrow, 2014; Tilly, 2006). Ever since coming under Indian control, it has witnessed regular episodes of massive popular insurrections and multiple phases of armed militancy challenging the legitimacy of Indian rule (Duschinski et al., 2018; Geelani, 2019; Malik, 2002; Zia, 2019).

Interestingly, the article argues that the situation is a significant site to highlight a special kind of weak statehood where the popular expectation of security from the state remains elusive. I argue elsewhere how the

Figure 1. Map of Kashmir. Source: The Contemporary (2016).

popular notion of state in Kashmir (rather than a protector and provider of security) is perceived as a perpetrator of *zulm*—reflective of the exercise and popular experience of repressive structures and procedures by the state (Mir, 2021, 2022). As a site of active contentious politics challenging the legitimacy of the state, it has kept hold of the region through militarised authoritarian regimes. In order to maintain a hold over the territory and survive through popular contentious politics, the regime militarily micro-regulated the physical and social spaces and bodies contained within them becoming reflective of militarised authoritarian control (Mir, 2021). Both militarised authoritarian regimes and militarised authoritarian control are used in a similar sense. While the militarised authoritarian regime flags the process of foisting repressive structures and procedures, militarised authoritarian control is used to reflect the manifestation of that in daily popular lives.

As such, the expectation of security from the state remains inadequate, if not completely absent. In order to survive through the militaristic micro-regulation of their life, space, and mobility, different inhabitants under the regime (henceforth referred to as Kashmiris in the article) develop institutionalised responses to socially navigate through them. Social navigation (used descriptively) is argued to refer to how different people act in precarious circumstances depicting how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape, and

move toward better positions (Vigh, 2009, p. 419). Of the many such responses, the article highlights the institutionalised response of *rasookh* understood as the maintenance of informal (familial, social, or professional) connections with the officials of state institutions to socially navigate the militarised authoritarian control. As a popularly evolved solution to a common problem of insecurity vis-à-vis the state, social navigation by virtue of *rasookh* becomes reflective of self-governance (cf. Neubert et al., 2022; Pfeilschifter et al., 2020). Corollary to this, as a means of drawing security against the precarity of the state's militarised authoritarian control, *rasookh* further exposes weak statehood in the context of Kashmir.

The article draws on my yearlong ethnographic fieldwork in (Srinagar) Kashmir, from June 2018 to May 2019, apart from my decade-long work in Kashmir as a journalist and activist. Aimed at grasping how Kashmiris experienced militarised authoritarian control, intimate ethnography came through as an appropriate methodological approach. It enabled me to capture the quotidian lived experiences of Kashmiris at close quarters while simultaneously understanding from them their experience of having to live under such conditions (cf. Okley, 1992, p. 24). Moreover, empirical data collection came through participant observations, informal conversations, and walkalongs. Employing those methods enabled me to have an in-depth insight into their (research community) everyday lived experiences, especially by endeavouring

to see the world around them through their eyes and to put into context their means of navigation of the repressive constraints. Each method reinforced the other and added to the robustness and triangulation of the empirical data.

This article depicts how the authoritarian regime militarily micro-regulates the physical and social spaces and bodies of Kashmiris. The pervading toxic geography of repressive structures and procedures imbues the everyday life of Kashmiris with a pervading sense of fear and insecurity (Kaur, 2020). In order to survive the circumstances, many Kashmiris employ *rasookh* to socially navigate the ever-present constraints.

The article takes a neo-institutionalist imagination of the state understanding it as an ensemble of institutions (formal and informal). It argues institutions as a set of formal or informal rules and regulations that structure societal interaction by laying out enabling and constraining factors of individual action (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). From that perspective, codified institutions like constitutions, judiciary, acts of law, police, and other state armed forces and their imposed repressive structures and procedures are understood as formal institutions. The not formally codified but socially accepted institutions—in this case *rasookh*—are categorised as informal institutions (cf. Lauth, 2000). Section 2 unpacks weak statehood vis-à-vis Kashmir.

2. Weak Statehood in Heavily Militarised Kashmir

In this article, I argue that the situation in Kashmir (contrary to prevalent scholarship) is reflective of weak statehood. Understanding the situation beyond the military lens exposes the presence of a strong army as not being commensurate with strong statehood. The foundation of the claim is built upon the popular perception of Kashmiris in general seeing the state as neither their protector nor a provider of their security. Additionally, its limited impact on the ground, especially with regard to its legitimacy to rule and also not having the monopoly over the exercise of violence, further reinforces the argument (cf. Pfeilschifter et al., 2020).

Following from above, weak statehood should not be (mis)understood as an incomplete or failing state at the brink of collapse. Such states are rather fundamentally stable and unthreatened in their existence—in this case, the state of Kashmir. Their weakness is to be understood in terms of their partial functionality rather than absolute dysfunction (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 9). Or in other words, those states are not in danger of breakdown but may be limited in their impact on the ground. So, instead of being completely absent from the ground, they are pretty much there but their impact and reach are limited or stunted. Such states may have their areas of strength while simultaneously remaining weak in some other areas. In that context, the case of Kashmir can be flagged as one of weak statehood. That can be argued mainly on the grounds of the state having lim-

its to its impact beyond military might, not having the monopoly over the exercise of violence, and, above all, not popularly being perceived as a provider of security.

The weak impact of the state on the ground in Kashmir is substantiated by the fact that it has been faced with popular contentious politics ever since taking control of Kashmir (Bhan et al., 2022; Duschinski et al., 2018; Malik, 1994, 2002). There continues to be popular questioning of the legitimacy of its rule and demands for the right to self-determination or *azadi*— their popular term for independence from Indian rule. Kashmir, ever since coming under Indian control, has witnessed phases of violent and non-violent contention against it. The most popular of these phases include the popular armed militancy of the 1990s when thousands of young Kashmiris resorted to armed militancy against Indian rule, apart from the three mass insurrections of 2008, 2010, and 2016 when hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris protested and demonstrated for months demanding their right to self-determination (Fazili, 2016; Geelani, 2019; Malik, 1994). Moreover, the writ of pro-independence groups had more resonance amongst Kashmiris than that of the state. Until the time of this research fieldwork (May 2019), the calls and calendars of *Hurriyat* (the term ascribed to the pro-independence groups in Kashmir) had more resonance among Kashmiris than those of the state. From their calls to boycott elections to the Kashmir legislature or Indian parliament, to the shutdown on prominent days of the Indian state, such as the days of its independence and republic, the popular obedience has been nearly religious (Geelani, 2014; Navlakha, 2004). In other words, anything ascribed to be giving legitimacy or popular endorsement to the state has been historically boycotted and observed as a black day in Kashmir. Moreover, any association with the Indian state, especially its coercive interface, saw popular stigmatisation and risked such individuals becoming pariahs in their society (cf. Junaid, 2020b; Zia, 2019). This brings into light the level of popular alienation from the state and the lack of its impact on the ground.

Being a site of active political conflict, the state in Kashmir does not possess a monopoly on violence either. Despite being the highest militarised zone in the world, the armed militancy against the state has continued to date (albeit on a low scale; Majid, 2021). As per estimates, in the past three decades, Kashmir has seen between 75,000 and 100,000 deaths (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, 2015; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018). Everyday deaths and killings by state and non-state actors are not a rare occurrence in Kashmir. There are multiple reports by international human rights and advocacy groups that underscore the state's grim human rights record in Kashmir including custodial deaths, enforced disappearances, and mass killings. For instance, the records and reports by human rights organisations like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018), Jammu

Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (2015), the Kashmir Law and Justice Project (2022), and Amnesty International (1993) have reported annual data on killings and human rights violations in Kashmir by both state and non-state actors. Against the backdrop of the grim human rights record of the Indian state in Kashmir, the human rights watchdog Genocide Watch (n.d.) has put Kashmir on a genocide alert. The reports bring to light the large prevalence of violence by state in Kashmir. Apart from the use of violence including killings by non-state actors, the state has been seen as a gross violator of human rights in Kashmir. The state of Kashmir has been indicted of custodial killings, multiple massacres, as well as incidents of mass rapes (Batool et al., 2016; Bukhari, 2019; Rashid, 2020).

The aforementioned aspects significantly inform the popular mistrust and fear of the state in Kashmir and not see it as a provider of security. They rather strive for their survival and security through their means of self-governance, in this case *rasookh*. Put simply, based on the limits of its impact and reach on the ground in terms of popular contention to its rule, challenges to its legitimacy and not having the monopoly over the use of violence, Kashmir flags as a situation of weak statehood. Most importantly, the popular notion of the state as not a provider of security but a perpetrator of *zulm* (whose repression is socially navigated through means of self-governance) enunciates the weak statehood in the context of Kashmir.

Section 3 substantiates the argument by portraying the ways in which the state in Kashmir instils the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity in Kashmir. It highlights how, in order to survive amid popular contentious politics, armed militancy, and limited impact on the ground, the state relies on "militarised governance" (Duschinski & Hoffman, 2011) through militarised micro-regulation of their everyday social and physical spaces keeping Kashmiris in a sense of constant fear and insecurity.

3. Insecurity Through Militarised Authoritarian Control

As argued above, the regime exercises militarised authoritarian control to micro-regulate the physical and social spaces of Kashmiris that saturate them with a daily sense of fear and insecurity (cf. Kaur, 2020). Through such repressive structures and procedures, the regime maintains the status quo of its imposed political order and keeps under check any emergent (or potential) contentious politics (Tilly, 2006).

On the analytical level, militarised authoritarian control helps the survival of the state by serving two quintessential purposes. One, its exercise in the shape of repressive structures and procedures chokes the space for contention and raises its associated costs. This is achieved by punitively containing and dispelling threats posed by doers of contention. It also serves to discourage the potential doers of contention making it appear

less attractive and more costly (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014). Two, it becomes essential means of disciplining the doers (and potential doers) of contention by restricting or setting limits to their social and political actions becoming a means of their social and political control (Davenport, 2007). The overall effect comes in the shape of keeping under check collective actions and beliefs against the regime and keeping them in a constant sense of fear and insecurity. The exercise is argued to resonate with the "law of coercive responsiveness" (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014, p. 334) making it more essential for the survival of those regimes than electoral legitimacy (Carey, 2019; cf. Olar, 2019).

Moreover, militarised authoritarian control attains meanings far beyond the exercise of physical coercion on individuals. It embellishes repressive structures and procedures foisted in the social and physical spaces to authoritatively control civil and political liberties. Thus, it does not only encompass visible acts of direct violence on individuals but structural violence within the aforementioned spaces as well (cf. Galtung, 1969, 1990). It violates human rights, poses threats to individual and collective security, and significantly entangles the physical and social spaces in a multi-layered and overlapping mesh of repressive constraints augmenting the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity.

3.1. Manifestation of Militarised Authoritarian Control

In view of the overwhelming military footprint in the social and physical spaces, a common phrase gathered from the fieldwork was "*Kasheer chha jail-khaanne*," literally describing Kashmir as an open-air prison. This highlighted the popular experience of Kashmir not as a place of security and prosperity but one of punishment, restriction, and insecurity. As the most densely militarised zone of the world, Kashmir is superimposed with military and paramilitary installations like state armed forces camps, bunkers, cantonments, and check posts. It is through these structures that militarised authoritarian control exercises the micro-regulation of the everyday physical and social spaces and even the bodies within them. Junaid (2020a, p. 308) goes further to argue that, in Kashmir, the militarised authoritarian control freezes and unfreezes time at will, keeping the inhabitants always in a quandary. This transforms Kashmir into a site of *everyday curfews* saturated with a pervading sense of fear and insecurity (cf. Kaur, 2020, p. 28). The militarised authoritarian control keeps them in a state of persistent precarity whether there are restrictions or not, with Kashmiris not knowing if they would be let past the road barricades and checkpoints or not, if they would be frisked or not, or if the mood of the armed personnel manning the checkpoints is good or not (cf. Hammami, 2015, p. 4). Put simply, precarity and insecurity came through as a normalised feeling of being in Kashmir.

The insecurity among Kashmiris was also reinforced by the thoughts of the creeping reach of the state into

their lives. During my fieldwork, the clichéd one-liner about the police and intelligence agencies was that "they even knew what is cooked in the kitchens." Kitchen as an intimate space in Kashmir indicated the level of depth of fear and insecurity among Kashmiris as well as the reach of state surveillance. The militarised authoritarian control was believed to have the ability to creep into the deep crevices of their personal spaces as well. For instance, there would be a constant sense of fear and insecurity and consequently self-censorship about speaking in public, venting out in social gatherings, or speaking over the phone. Words regarding militancy, resistance, army, killings, and bomb blasts would be self-muted and never mentioned. The fear and insecurity made the people even mistrust each other. It was taken for granted that even their private lives were being eavesdropped and snitched on.

Navlakha (2013, pp. 158–168) interprets it as the doctrine of sub-conventional warfare of the Indian state in Kashmir aimed at bringing the contentious Kashmiris into submission by forcefully transforming their will and attitudes. This highlights how the militarised authoritarian control worked not only on the physical spaces but on the minds and bodies of Kashmiris, keeping them, as argued by Kaur (2020), saturated with unprecedented fear and a continuous state of insecurity.

Drawing from the fieldwork, the militarised authoritarian control unfolded as complex and multifaceted, with overlapping layers that generated among Kashmiris experiences of constant vigil and insecurity. Within the multi-layered control, each successive layer penetrated deeper within their quotidian physical and social spaces. This served to reproduce the aura of an "Orwellian space" making them believe that their activities were under the constant vigil and control of the regime. The circumstances kept the physical and social spaces in Kashmir in a state argued by Kaur as "locked, sealed and geographically isolated through watertight surveillance and military control" (Kaur, 2020, p. 22).

Based on observations made during the fieldwork, the article portrays the intricate web to be craftly spread out to have a firm grip over the geography as well as the bodies and minds contained within it (cf. Allegra et al., 2017). The layers are interspersed but, for heuristic purposes, they are defined as (a) the top gaze, (b) concrete security build-up, (c) mobile security set-up, (d) the invisible network, and (e) militarised control of the digital space.

3.1.1. The Top Gaze

The notion of being watched from above forms the topmost layer. The various hillocks and peaks overlooking different localities in Kashmir nestled massive security camps creating the first layer of the Orwellian space. It generated among different inhabitants a persistent sense of being under the military panopticon. The ever-visible presence of those camps on the top added to the dominating thought of being constantly watched over adding to their precarity. The occupation of the hilltops overlooking the localities formed a militarised motif replicated at multiple other locations throughout Kashmir. Similar patterns appear in Parrey's (2013, pp. 179–185) essay "A Victorious Campaign," where the locality in the foothills is watched over and controlled by the security camp on the top. As such, being under the constant gaze from the top formed a significant facet of militarised authoritarian control keeping the inhabitants ever mindful of their presence. The domination of the heights served to create a persistent spectacle for the inhabitants reminding them of the power and reach of the state.

3.1.2. Concrete Security Build-Up

Concrete security build-up came through in the shape of massive security installations such as concrete security camps and police stations subordinated by multiple police posts in and around the different localities of Kashmir. As a means of control and regulation of daily space and life, the main entry and egress points of the localities had security camps in place. This well-knit circuit of concrete and permanent security structures got further reinforced by the occupation of various buildings within the residential areas making physical inroads into the social spaces as well.

A report released by Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (2015) titled *Occupational Hazard* quoted the statistics revealed by the then-chief minister to the concerned legislative assembly regarding the physical occupation of land and structures by the official military and paramilitary forces. According to the report, a total of 97,125 acres of land fell under the possession of the army and paramilitary forces. Of those, 21,337 acres of land remained under their illegal occupation which included 1,856 buildings (1,526 private establishments, 280 government buildings, 14 industrial units, five cinemas, and 28 hotels). In many cases, the army had not even paid rent for the forcefully occupied spaces (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, 2015).

The presence of these interpolations worked to limit the daily spatial practices to a limited social, cultural, economic, and geographical space (cf. Hamdan-Saliba, 2014) and exposed the Kashmiris to daily experiences of restriction and authoritarian control.

3.1.3. Mobile Security Set-Up

Mobile security set-up is animated in the shape of Indian armed forces dotting the roads and alleyways, their bulletproof armed vehicles, mobile checking and frisking beats, metal detectors, razor wires, and barricades spread across Kashmir. The latest addition to the toolkit was mobile bunkers and drones with fitted-in high-resolution security cameras (Yusuf, 2021). They became essential to execute the stop and frisk operations apart

from regulating the quotidian movement and space of Kashmiris. The multiple forms of barriers, in the words of Hammami (2015, p. 4), are:

> More than halting…to rather make the mobility arbitrary, chaotic and uncertain. The logic is to create a constant state of uncertainty; is it closed or open, how is the mood of the soldier manning the check post, etc.?

Thus, the overwhelming presence of the security personnel along with the mobile barriers produced a state of constant fear and military control of daily lived spaces in Kashmir. The exhaustive reach of the security setup creeping into public and private spaces became significant to ensconce the state by keeping Kashmiris in a persistent state of insecurity and ready to be targeted.

3.1.4. The Invisible Network

The fourth aspect is flagged in the shape of the invisible micro-regulation of the intimate social spaces of Kashmiris. It related more to the experience of the invisible or surreptitious reach of the intelligence-gathering network. This aspect resonated with the human and technical intelligence gathering set up in the form of informers apart from snooping technologies. In the words of Suvir Kaul (2013, p. 20), "an astonishing number of men (and some women, of course) are on government payrolls, and here I do not include many (some estimate up to 100,000) who receive a regular stipend from various intelligence agencies and secret services."

With a gigantic security setup, the militarised authoritarian regime worked through an equally massive network of human and technical intelligence. The significant presence of informers and technical resources, like phone and computer bugging and drones in the physical spaces, invaded even the deepest realms of the daily public and private lives of Kashmiris. This transported the state quite further into the intimate spaces of the inhabitants where it percolated within their homes, listened to their phone calls, knew about their lives, and controlled them by dominating and micro-regulating their private and public spaces.

3.1.5. Militarised the Digital Space

The militarised control of the digital space is flagged as another significant aspect of the superimposition of the military footprint on Kashmir's geography. The authoritarian regulation of the digital spaces in the shape of regular mobile and internet shutdowns remained an integral part of the militarised authoritarian control in Kashmir. Often the place was subjected to internet and communication services clampdown, disconnecting the inhabitants from the rest of the world (Mogul, 2023).

A study by Rydzak (2019) titled *Of Blackouts and Bandhs: The Strategy and Structure of Disconnected*

Protest in India categorised India as "the most shutdown-prone sovereign state in the world, with over 100 shutdowns recorded, more than all the other countries put together." Within India, as per the study, Kashmir accounted for 47% of the total recorded shutdown events between 2012 and 2017, the longest being in 2016 in Kashmir, when internet services were clamped down for 203 days at a stretch. The study referring to shutdowns as "blackouts" qualified them as a "logical extension of curfews" in Kashmir with the purpose of inhibiting public gatherings (Rydzak, 2019, p. 9).

Out of a total of 556 internet shutdowns between January 2012 and January 2022 imposed in India, 320 had occurred in Kashmir alone, the longest being 552 days (August 4, 2019–February 6, 2021), replacing the 2016 shutdown of 203 days. Put simply, the militarised authoritarian control over the digital space micro-regulated the ability of Kashmiris to speak or communicate or know the happenings around them. The exhaustive reach of the state militarily regulated the basic human functions of expression and awareness as well.

Following from above, the multi-layered militarised security setup transformed Kashmir into a site caught in a web of complex forms of militarised repressive constraints that militarily micro-regulated its geography and bodies contained within it (see Figure 2). The exercise of militarised architecture became reflective of what Kuus (2016, p. 365) argues to be the "geopolitics of occupation" serving to dominate and habituate the inhabitants to those imposed constraints.

The said circumstances imbued the everyday life of Kashmiris with overwhelming fear and insecurity. It was under those pervading social conditions that Kashmiris evolved institutionalised responses of self-governance to socially navigate the prevalent repressive constraints. Their employment served those employing them in two major ways: firstly, by helping them socially navigate the repressive constraints meant to restrict and micro-regulate their space and daily life, and secondly, by helping them sustain their quotidian life processes. The following sections discuss the employment of *rasookh* to socially navigate the repressive constraints.

4. Employment of *Rasookh*

Drawing from the fieldwork, one of the most significant means of compensation for the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity came through *rasookh*. Individuals with informal (personal) connections—either familial, social or professional—with the officials of the institutions of state were understood as ones with *rasookh*. The article argues that the employment of *rasookh* as an informal institution implies socially accepted, known, and normalised patterns of behaviour that persist over time due to their capability of structuring social action. Being different from formal institutions, they owe their existence and recognition to their functional utility without which they cease to exist
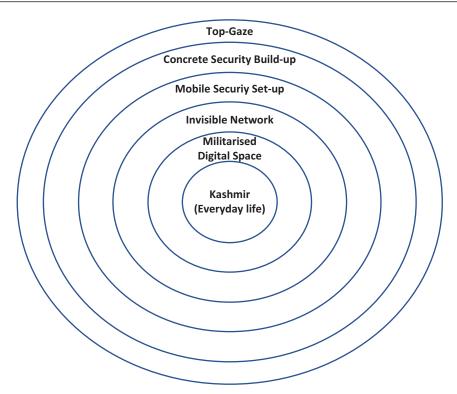
Figure 2. The multi-layered militarised authoritarian control of Kashmir.

(cf. Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Lauth, 2000). As such, *rasookh*, being a socially accepted and normalised practice, serves the vital function of response to repressive formal institutions. As violations of informal institutions may involve sanctions (through social mechanisms) like exclusion or minimal access to goods and services (Lauth, 2000), inability to employ *rasookh* animated sanctions like loss of the ability to get by repressive constraints or inability to come out of their grip. The detailed categorisation of *rasookh* into its direct and indirect types (reliant on whether the officials liaised directly or through conduits respectively) and the subtle nuances between them are beyond the scope of this article.

Irrespective of the type of *rasookh*, those exercising it compensated for the pervading fear and insecurity from the militarised authoritarian control by drawing security through their informal networks as opposed to the institutions of the state. The social navigation through the repressive structures and procedures came by means of influencing the addressees or officials of the concerned institutions (cf. Lauth, 2000, p. 25). The help on part of the officials mainly comes out of empathy as well as social or relational expectations or obligations (cf. Mir, 2022, p. 204). Put simply, the exercise of *rasookh* not only helped socially navigate the "geopolitics of occupation" (Kuus, 2016, p. 365), but also compensated for the pervading insecurity by drawing security through personal (informal) connections with the concerned officials.

The Rekhta Urdu Dictionary, as well as the University of Chicago Urdu-to-English dictionary, give the English equivalents of *rasookh* as firmness, stability, steady friendship, and influence (Rekhta, 2020, as cited in Mir,

2021). In the context of Kashmir, the idea of *rasookh* tethered the above meanings to it connoting considerably stable connections (particularly that of personal informal associations) with the officials. It reflected a conscious effort on part of those employing it to cultivate, curate, and make use of their personal (informal) associations in order to deal with the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity. Based on fieldwork, the employment of *rasookh* meant being able to (informally) utilise the said associations with the concerned officials and bypass formal channels to socially navigate the repressive constraints. Its employment availed help through the connections such as getting-by curfews and restrictions, relief from arrests and detentions, being able to get a passport, or being able to save family and friends from the repressive constraints of the militarised authoritarian control. Following from the instances, the employment of *rasookh* came through as predominantly reactive but underscored proactive aspects as well, being principally employed to generate alternative corridors of action like evading arrests, raids, or restrictions which could not be achieved (as such) had *rasookh* not been employed highlighted its reactive aspects. Simultaneously, managing to be left out from blacklists, availing security clearances like no objection certificates or formal documents like passports, underlined its proactive aspects as well.

Following the above, *rasookh* most commonly appeared in the shape of making use of the aforementioned contacts to avoid getting caught under the repressive structures and procedures. For instance, during the fieldwork, I uncovered that many people would utilise

their *rasookh* with police officers to get their kin saved from arrests for their contentious activities or get them released from detention without being formally charged. In many cases, it also meant not being stopped at checkpoints or returned home during curfews and being able to move out and about for work and attending to urgent necessities. During raids, night raids or mass frisking, it meant not being targeted or being dealt with leniently. In those cases, *rasookh* usually came into play in the shape of individuals (with *rasookh*) informing their contacts (concerned officials) either personally or telephonically and the officials, in turn, passing (informal) information further down in their favour, often to personnel in charge of the issue.

Another important function that *rasookh* served was being aware in advance of any curfews, raids, night raids, cordon and search operations, or any repressive procedures that would be forthcoming in their locality. This would help them (individuals with *rasookh*) to preemptively prepare or avoid getting caught up under their repressive constraints. Many individuals, during the fieldwork, also used their *rasookh* to speed up their police verification process including getting intelligence clearance certificates. Being a place under strict militarised authoritarian control, basic services like getting passports, telephonic connections, and job appointments needed clearance from the police and intelligence agencies (cf. Zia, 2019). *Rasookh* in these cases was handy as well.

Interestingly, under militarised authoritarian contexts—in this case Kashmir—the tolerance for those resorting to contentious politics or those perceived to be gullible to it is minimal (cf.; Davenport, 2007; Tarrow, 2014; Tilly, 2006). Likewise, the perception of the inhabitants' political attitudes by the state institutions turned out to be quite significant in determining their ability to employ *rasookh* for social navigation. Those Kashmiris that were deemed to be *tehreeki* (adherents of Tehreek as a political ideology, connoting freedom from Indian rule) by the said institutions had significantly fewer chances of having informal associations with the agents of formal institutions (cf. Junaid, 2020a; Zia, 2019). Thus, the inhabitants perceived as *tehreeki* came through to have the least likelihood to employ *rasookh*.

Moreover, the employment of *rasookh* came through as nuanced from similar informal institutions employed in the wider Indian context. Unlike those cases, the employment of *rasookh* came through to be predominantly employed to navigate the repressive structures and procedures of the militarised authoritarian control rather than appropriating resources of the state or maintaining patrimonial dominance (cf. Brass, 1997; Harriss-White, 2003; Jeffrey, 2010; Marcesse, 2018). *Rasookh* was also not boasted as a show of strength or maintenance of patrimonial dominance, unlike similar institutions in the Indian context (cf. Jeffrey, 2000). It was rather strategically maintained in a lowkey fashion to socially navigate the said repressive constraints without appearing as sympathisers of the contested state (cf. Mir, 2022).

Put simply, *rasookh* is flagged as a significant means of socially navigating the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity in Kashmir. With the expectations of security from the state to be significantly inadequate, rather it being the major reason for insecurity, means like *rasookh* in Kashmir attained significance as an operating strategy to compensate for that (cf. Tsai, 2006). Section 5 underscores how *rasookh* resonates with self-governance on part of Kashmiris.

5. *Rasookh* as Self-Governance

As an informal institution, the article argues that *rasookh* resonates with self-governance on part of Kashmiris to survive amid the prevalent repressive structures and procedures. Whereas being socially accepted gives *rasookh* an institutional reality, being simultaneously able to compensate for the inadequate, if not absence of, security on part of the state highlights its exercise as self-governance. Understanding *rasookh* from the lens of self-governance reinforces the overarching premise of the article. It shines a light on how prevalent political structures condition and inform social responses and, as such, how they develop institutionalised responses as an experience of the political structures. For instance, how weak statehood in Kashmir and the consequent militarised authoritarian control generated a pervading sense of insecurity and fear among Kashmiris and led them to socially navigate the said precarity by employing *rasookh*. Capturing these dynamics through self-governance becomes essential also because the relevant debates and concepts, such as the everyday resistance or microanalysis of conflict, fall short of focusing their gaze on the overarching premise. For instance, the said debates mainly focus their attention on prospective acts of contestation and place predominant weight on the individual agency (cf. Autesserre, 2006; Fujii, 2008; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Kalyvas, 2003; Scott, 1985). However, the prospective events or acts of resistance challenging the formal institutions form a small part of the daily lived realities of the individuals under militarised authoritarian regimes like Kashmir. They are equally (if not more) engaged in living under and "getting by" (Allen, 2008) these circumstances and giving their lives a semblance of normality. Borrowing from Mac Ginty (2012, p. 180), many individuals living in such situations remain too occupied in the political economy of survival. Moreover, placing insufficient emphasis on the role of political structures in conditioning the behaviour of individuals and rather focusing entirely on the individual agency does not capture the dynamic of *rasookh* vis-à-vis the militarised authoritarian control in Kashmir. It is in this context that the rationale for choosing self-governance becomes the appropriate lens for understanding the employment *rasookh* in Kashmir.

Thus, from the perspective of providing security in response to the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity, *rasookh* flags a means of self-governance

(cf. Pfeilschifter et al., 2020). The article understands self-governance to come through when individuals in the group develop common and sustained solutions to common problems where the solutions evolve by consensus rather than external influence or coercion (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 4). Thus, self-governance connotes a process not based on the authoritative regulation of the hierarchical state, but a result of interaction and negotiation processes between officials of the state institutions and civil society or non-state actors. Self-governance is further argued as a necessary response under situations of weak statehood. The necessity is ascribed to the fact that under such situations it flags as an important means of ensuring survival and dignified life (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 4). From that perspective, the exercise of *rasookh* resonates with a commonly evolved and accepted solution to the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity due to repressive structures and procedures of the state. Its exercise by Kashmiris as a necessity for their survival and dignified life flag it as a significant means of self-governance.

Amid the circumstances underscoring insecurity and fear vis-à-vis the state, the tacit understanding and acceptance of *rasookh* as a means of survival and drawing security amid the pervading social condition of fear and insecurity resonate with it as means of self-governance at the local level. Self-governance through *rasookh* highlights its significance in providing for the basic and foundational popular need of security and as such a dignified survival (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 4). Put differently, the employment of *rasookh* highlights the weak statehood in Kashmir. Reliance on *rasookh* rather than the state institutions for drawing security exposes the weakness of the state with regard to the provision of popular security. While Kashmiris resorting to their personal connections to compensate for the insecurity highlights their lack of faith in the state as a protector, it simultaneously flags the weak impact of the state on the ground, especially in the said aspects. Thus, the presence, prevalence, and acceptance of *rasookh* become strong evidence to triangulate the overarching thesis of the article underscoring the weak statehood in the context of Kashmir.

6. Conclusion

Situations of political conflict become active sites that highlight weak statehood. The article portrayed Kashmir as a site of conflict that reveals weak statehood, especially with regard to the provision of security. Faced with popular contentious politics (Tarrow, 2014; Tilly, 2006), the state is argued to survive in Kashmir through the exercise of militarised authoritarian control leading to a pervading social condition of fear and insecurity among Kashmiris. Thus, rather than being seen as a provider of security, the state in Kashmir is seen as a perpetrator of *zulm*, reflective of exercise and the popular experience of repressive structures and procedures by the state (Mir, 2021, 2022). Amid the prevalent circumstances,

marked by the least expectations of security from the state, Kashmiris develop institutionalised responses to socially navigate the said constraints. The article highlights the response of *rasookh* understood as the practice of building, maintaining, and utilising good offices or personal liaisons with officials of the institutions of the state. The employment of *rasookh* helps them draw security through their informal connections. Being able to compensate for the inadequacies of the state, *rasookh* is made sense of as self-governance.

The case study of Kashmir becomes significant to mark how prevalent political structures condition and inform social responses and as such, how individuals develop institutionalised responses as an experience of the political structures—in the case above, how weak statehood in Kashmir and the consequent militarised authoritarian control generated a pervading sense of insecurity and fear among Kashmiris and led them to socially navigate said precarity through *rasookh*.

Inductively, *rasookh* also becomes reflective of how societies under similar conditions (where survival remains an everyday struggle) may resort to institutionalised means of self-governance as a means of survival. The means of self-governance become important for the sustenance of everyday life. So, managing to "get by" (Allen, 2008) and survive amid repressive constraints becomes a quintessential everyday struggle for the inhabitants of such precarious regimes. Thus, under those situations, means of self-governance may become significant to provide for the fundamental public need of survival amid repressive constraints apart from helping retain a semblance of ordinariness to their lives.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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