



(Excerpted from the chapter, “This is (Not) a Betrayal” by Nishita Trisal, in *Can You Hear Kashmiri Women Speak? Narratives of Resistance and Resilience*, edited by Nitasha Kaul & Ather Zia)

‘Of healing and producing solidarity’

Nishita Trisal

In the days following 5 August, it became abundantly and painfully clear that the Indian parliament’s decision to read down Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution would be experienced by Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims in diametrically opposed ways, with most Muslims mourning the decision while most Pandits celebrated. That day, through tears and panicked calls, I kept a silent watch on my phone, waiting to hear from my close family members who, I had felt certain, must have heard the news and were equally shocked. When, however, that call eventually came, from my mother, it was clear we were not going to agree. We ended with pitched voices and more tears. The two Kashmiri worlds to which I belonged—my Kashmiri Pandit family and my Kashmiri Muslim friends—were yet again in direct conflict, almost inhabiting separate realities. The disjuncture felt intolerable.

The only thing it seemed one could do in the face of this surreal and seismic moment was to record and to document. While in the past, I had self-censored for fear of both state and familial backlash, in the aftermath of 5 August silence simply did not feel like an option. Encouraged by a friend, I began to write about the Pandit-Muslim impasse. As I tried to find a place from which to begin the narrative, it became clear that this would be a deeply personal essay, one in which I would draw from the difficult work of belatedly processing my father's death 22 years earlier in order to reckon with the Pandit community's trauma. In the piece I would suggest that, like personal pain and trauma, intergenerational Pandit trauma needed to be engaged with directly, with compassion and understanding. There was simply no other way forward.

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Although I had expected to encounter some inevitable criticism for my stance in the Op-ed, I did not expect the intensity of the reactions that emerged during the following weeks.... It has given me no joy to observe the ways these vitriolic reactions have only confirmed one of the Op-ed's principal arguments, that Kashmiri Pandit trauma is alive and well and must be grappled with. Crucially, however, my argument was not that such trauma can be neatly buried, nor that 'burial' is necessarily the end goal or indeed desirable. If we know anything about trauma or about inter-community conflict, it is that repressing memories of violence and injury is never so simple. Rather, mine was a plea to find a way to one another again, to understand what we have lost, and what might yet remain for us to save. The affective work required for this political and psychic healing—listening, empathising, and in the words of scholar-translator, Sonam Kachru, à la Dina Nath Nadim, *making human again*³ does not sit well with the muscular nationalism that marks our contemporary political moment. However, the capacity to engage in this difficult work is surely within us. Drawing on Nadim's poetic invocation, 'I've got to make humans of Hindus and Muslims again', and his subsequent doubt, 'Are even we human? Who says we are?', Kachru suggests that we think of *being human* as an 'indefinite

imperative, resisting the smug comforts of knowing or the despair of unknowing'. I see the work of healing and producing solidarity as lying in the interstices of this indefiniteness—of being willing to change our minds, of tolerating another's repugnant viewpoint, of revising, and yes, betraying, our previous selves in the service of our shared humanity.

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