



**A Joint Statement of Shared Concerns and Commitment:
By the participants at
Second Intra-Kashmir Youth Dialogue, Jammu, 15-16 September 2012**

Introduction: This is the first draft Statement to be improved upon continuously through the process of youth meetings, dialogues and consultations so that it could be widely shared by the youth of J&K, as a Statement of their common concerns and commitment. In the following pages we have a first draft worked out by the participants in the Jammu Intra-Kashmir Youth Dialogue 15-16 Sept 2012. An earlier one on Dialogue and Nonviolence, stipulating ethics and discipline of interaction for dialogue was derived from the deliberations in the first two-day Intra-Kashmir Youth dialogue held in Srinagar in March 2012. This one is an improvement upon that. Following the meeting in Jammu, this document, Shared Concerns and Commitment, was placed before the participants in Srinagar youth group's meeting on 3rd and 4th November 2012. They endorsed it. However, it may be noted that this is still in a draft state, for it needs to be comprehensive in terms of the aspirations and problems of several of J&K ethnic and regional groups, since J&K is not a one dimensional issue, a communal issue between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims as it is in the popular interpretation, understanding and perception. In that respect, this Statement is in a preliminary stage. However, what is important about this draft Statement is what it underlines – that it is not impossible to bring together estranged communities to build common ground and self-correct partial perceptions based on miss-and-ill-information, propaganda and partisan politics.)

Jammu Dialogue:

Seven including three women from Srinagar and sixteen from Jammu including four women participated in the two-day event.

The number of Srinagar participation came down from fifteen to seven- three activist-writers-journalist, one three social workers and one activist woman teacher-- at the last minute. They had agreed to the suggestion of staying with Pandit families in Jammu for three days and three nights. Srinagar group arrived by car in the evening of 14th and were received by Shri Shiban Koul a prominent Kashmiri Pandit and community leader, member of Swaraj Peeth Core Group on J&K; and by Shri Ramesh Raina an agricultural

scientist, who escorted the participants to the residences of their Jammu hosts. Including these two the other two hosts were Shri B L Saraf, a Retd Sessions judge, leading Kashmiri Pandit voice for reconciliation and a regular contributor to the J&K media; and Shri A K Dewani, a retired senior civil servant (IAS) and a community leader.

We started with *ibadat*, prayer, both in Arabic and Sanskrit. Many of them had known each other from earlier joint dialogue in Srinagar. Sri Rajiv Vora and Shibani Koul stressed on the need for creating space for nonviolence for the reduction of violence and fear and for trust and confidence building. It was a common sentiment that in the environment of violence and fear the normal process of reasoned thinking and that of action is suppressed. Though the terms ‘nonviolence’ and ‘peace’ have become hated words in the Valley as pointed out by the participants, the group thought that it will be our action that will define the terms.

In the place of allegations-counter allegations or debating over differences, a dialogue was conducted in an environment of openness, confidence and trust recognizing fully well the differences with regards to political aspirations. “We want to understand the pains and suffering of brothers and sisters from the Valley” said a participant from Jammu, whose sentiment was echoed by “we want to understand the pains of the Pandits” by a participant from Srinagar.

“You must come to the Valley to understand our pain and we must come to Jammu to understand your pain” This was the spirit in which both the groups conducted themselves. Initially both the groups were sitting separately, face-to-face, after lunch they intermingled.

On the first day participants spoke their minds; what they have been through, what has been their experiences, aspirations, complaints and grievances, the issues of HR violations and lack of mutual support on issues of common suffering; even some, like members of this group, who took initiative for speaking up for the other, the media did not pay any notice; the issue of differing perceptions and experiences with regard to the armed forces, the police and the Special Power Acts; violation of women’s dignity under the constant watch and presence of the Armed Forces; the mutual fears and suspicions among the regions and in particular between the people of Jammu on the one side and the people of Kashmir Valley on the other; one State but two standards of democratic space and lack of it; the need for normal democracy in the Valley and demilitarization ; common social issues like drug abuse, female foeticide, environmental degradation, intra-ethnic issues and need for social sensitization and reforms. Also was discussed the issue of freedom as different from independence.

Participants asked questions to each other to correct their perception and information. Misinformation they said is a big problem, which needs to be tackled at both the sides. A lot of ground was covered on major issues of contention and a better mutual understanding and respect for differences was created.

A Common Platform for Harmony and Reconciliation

- Participants stressed on the need for a common trustworthy platform where they can unite; wherefrom they can speak up for each other when circumstances so demand;
- work collectively and jointly for common cause like some of the glaring social and environmental issues;
- work for confidence building among the estranged regions and communities of the regions and within regions.
- It was suggested that this group should have an identity with a Statement of its own.
- They will work for the expansion of the group in the Kashmir Valley, Jammu region, and in Ladakh.

The Group will be known as J&K Swaraj Peeth.

On the second day, participants divided into two groups with equal participants from both the regions. Based on their deliberations on a common statement the following statement was worked out:



A Joint Statement of Shared Concerns and Commitment:

By creating an environment of openness, trust, confidence and cordiality, we the youth of Kashmir valley and Jammu could enter into a constructive dialogue with each other in place of mutual allegations, counter-allegation in a debating fashion; and, as a result we could correct some major perceptions about the other, which have been standing like impregnable wall between the estranged people of Jammu and the people of Kashmir Valley. We could correct misperceptions, wrongful beliefs and image of the

other, most of which are due to misinformation campaigns, distancing between communities and silence by the people of one region on the issues of pain, violations and hurt of the other.

Our views have undergone some transformation through the process of dialogue, which has brought us closer. We stress on the need for understanding each other better than we do and the need to develop means and methods for it. Violence and fear being the central issue, we stress on the need for creating desire, commitment and environment for nonviolence.

As the youth from Srinagar said to the Jammuites that you have to come to the Valley in order to understand our plight and pains, so do we have to come to Jammu to understand the plight and pain of the Kashmiri Pandit who had to leave their homes, neighbours and motherland under the clouds of violence, so did the youth from Jammu recognize plight of a people of the Valley, particularly the youth, who have no day-to-day democracy; who cannot voice their grievances even in a democratic way; where the protestors are severely punished; and where mothers and sisters can not



walk as freely and fearlessly as they must, under the gaze of omnipresent and omnipotent armed forces. Youth from Srinagar also appreciated the concerns of Jammu youth that since every other family of Jammu region has one of their sons in the army, a blanket demonising of armed forces, though for unpunished misdeeds of some, hurts them and, more than that, it creates counter position in reaction. Similarly, the youth from Jammu do realise that for the same reason they have a greater responsibility

towards the sufferers of human right violations by the armed forces.

The youth of Kashmir Valley, who, prior to this, under the communalized propaganda thought that all Kashmiri Pandits, after the exodus in 1990, have made their havens in the USA, Europe and Canada, could see the falsity of the perception which stood like a block between them and the Kashmiri Pandits. We, the youth of Kashmir Valley saw how they have so badly suffered, that not all are communalized; there are among them many a non-partisan people and how they have preserved the famed culture of Kashmir under adversity and uprooting from their soil. The youth of the Valley wish to create an environment for their home coming, well come, well being, protection and security.

Some of the other perceptions and concerns are:

1. **Self-Corrections:** Conflict situation generates wrong, one-sided, prejudicial and some times vicious perceptions about the “other”. The people of J&K have multiple ‘others’ from within themselves. It is ethnic at one point, religious at

other, and regional at still other; and, its multiple permutations and combinations based on who belongs to whom and to which district or a part thereof. Given the political and intellectual climate, feedback and propaganda, people do not by themselves seem ready or willing to correct prejudicial perceptions about the 'other'.

2. When some of the young men from this group, just for the sake of an experiment, visited Doda and Rajouri, they found their perceptions and prejudices challenged. Similarly, they had believed that lots of funds go to the Kashmir Valley, as a result of which Jammu is deprived. We learnt that in Jammu we have more job opportunities than Kashmiri youth have in the Valley.
3. A Gujjar youth leader, who has staged several protests and courted arrest, said that what he could do in Jammu as an activist he would have not been able to do in Kashmir. It is easy to protest in Jammu, not in Kashmir.
4. **The group believes that misrepresentation of facts and misinformation has created present state of misunderstanding, distrust and distancing between the people of Jammu and the people of Kashmir. There are political and communal pressure groups on both the sides. By using the means and methods of fear and violence, they do not allow unbiased thinking and discourse.**

Common Concern:

- **Our central concern is violence; violation of Human Rights; violation of human dignity and human security. Violence, environment of fear; and lack of normal democratic rights of people besides the Special Powers Acts that turns the 'protector' into oppressor, has caused the repression of the normal thinking process, the most fundamental of all freedoms.**
- **We together have to strive non-violently for the restoration of fearlessness and normal democratic space for the people of the Kashmir Valley that people of Jammu and Ladakh, the people of the same State of J&K, enjoy.**
- **It was the subversion of democratic process in 1987 which put Kashmiri youth on the path of violence, therefore it is the respect and restoration of normal democracy that the remedy must be found.**
- **We respect the difference in political aspirations and views held by each other.**
- **While the Jammu youth recognize and respect the dominance of the *Azadi* sentiment among the youth of the Kashmir Valley, the youth of the Kashmir Valley, present here, similarly recognize and respect the dominant**

- apprehensions among the people of Jammu about *azadi* as an excuse and a path for the Islamization of Kashmir.
- We recognize common issues that affect the youth of all the three regions. These are social and environmental issues. These issues, such as drug abuse among the youth; female foeticides both among the Muslims and the Hindus; environmental issues such as destruction of Dal lake, forests and ecological fragility of Kashmir weigh heavily on our minds. Destruction of the youth by drug; and, destruction of Kashmir's ecology and environment, is destruction of Kashmir itself.

We today come together as an intra-Kashmir group. We will work together for preservation of Kashmir's youth, culture and ecology.

We will meet at least every six months. The regional groups may meet more often and expand their membership and social profile.

Our commitment is to nonviolence. We have started a nonviolent process. We need to learn and adopt nonviolent methods for bridging the gap, estrangement and containing violence.

-Jammu, 16th Sept 2012