

IRIS Award Report 2023
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For my doctoral research, I am interested in engaging with the ways medicine is perceived and practiced in a conflict zone. Outside the institutional spaces, such as hospitals, asylums or clinics, medicine unravels itself through intertwined relations with sociocultural and religious beliefs and behaviors. They manifest in navigating modes of treatment by the aspirants of wellbeing in a war zone. Instead of entering the rhetoric of treatment and wellbeing from the standpoint of medical institutions, pharmaceutical corporations or the doctors, I wish to shift my lens towards the ones in charge of this navigation, the patients, family members and largely the community and document how through these dynamic navigations, everyday experiences of life in a war zone are constituted. I intend to study these relations in the context of Kashmir. Located in the north of mainland India and occupied by the Indian State, Kashmir continues to be the world's most militarized zone.

I went to Kashmir in 2018 for an internship, a requirement for my master's degree course. However, since then I was never financially supported or even allowed to travel to Kashmir, even for writing my master's dissertation, as a student enrolled in an Indian university, located in the capital city of New Delhi. I could not go back afterward due to various constraints and complications. It was first an attack on the army van which was responded to by bombing a village in Pakistan. Then, in August 2019, the government imposed an absolute lockdown in the aftermath of revoking Article 370 (attributed a special status to the region), blocking all communication including the Internet. The lockdown continued to stay in effect till 2021 due to the covid 19 pandemic. Finally, in the summer of 2023, the financial support from the IRIS enabled me to travel to Kashmir and conduct pre-dissertation ethnographic fieldwork. I intended to visit Delhi as well to speak to some of the scholars of Kashmir Study Circle, but the flood situation in the city (June-July) prevented my travel. Hence, I decided to extend my stay in Kashmir.

I stayed in Kashmir for over a month and worked with the guidance of the workers of the Association of Parents of the Disappeared People (APDP). They connected me to people of diverse professions, and it snowballed from there. I also traveled extensively to have conversations with people from both urban and rural areas, suffering from various health issues embodied by the

impact of militarization and noticed how they oscillate between modes of treatment. I met doctors working in hospitals, clinics and with MSF (Medicine sans Frontier) who have been historically playing a role in managing such modes of treatment alongside the common mass.

I also met with journalists and writers working on health-related issues in the context of militarization in Kashmir. I shared my interest in looking at folk literature, songs and myths to trace the constituencies of health-related norms and notions with them which led me to scholars of Kashmiri literature, books of ancient folklore and so on. I plan to now pursue such documents and archives to trace the sociopolitical history of medical concerns and wellbeing in the valley through its literature and songs.

During this fieldwork, I spent time with my Kashmiri family and celebrated Eid with them. They along with my colleagues at APDP connected me to faith healers as I was looking for people who practice and depend on alternative modes of treatment. I conducted in-depth interviews with two practicing and one nonpracticing healer. Each of these interviews turned out to be full of complex and layered conversations. Kashmiris have diverse perceptions and opinions on healers and their treatment, but they continue to greatly influence the community.

As someone traveling back to a conflict zone after five years, all these experiences were extremely intriguing to me for several reasons and will compel me to explore them in my research. I am truly thankful to the IRIS awards for supporting me in this journey. I now plan to apply for more grants and funding opportunities to pursue another summer of pre-dissertation fieldwork, while preparing a conference paper that will later contribute to my dissertation.