

## Logistic of Perception: Images from Conflict Zones

**A young media professional talks about her family legacy – a private archive of notes on people who died for ‘the cause’. The collection, built by a passionate local archivist, is a spatial record of the ‘political deaths’ that occurred around a small town in Kashmir in the 1990s. The collection, built with modest personal resources, is motivated by a strong belief in documentation and evidence making – based on a specific perspective of the time one is living in. It is also a note of dissent to the official histories.**

**This session was part of a four day workshop titled Logistic of Perception: Images from Conflict Zones, 2008 organised by Godaam – the archive wing of Majlis Culture Centre. The participants were a group of thirty five invited artists, activists, archivists, media professionals and cultural study scholars. The presentation was followed by an animated discussion. We upload the transcription of the session here to initiate further discussions on the contesting issues that keep emerging in the act of archiving.**

The presenter (P): I will be talking at three different levels. First my personal memories of the conflict from the 1990s and the discovery of my grandfather’s archive. Second from the point of (view) of my grandfather and how he views the archive, and lastly how the other person views it. I will start from one particular morning. I remember that morning very clearly. It was around 7 am and we were still in bed. At that time, I was just 8 or 9 years old, I am talking about 1991. So I clearly remember that morning, that we were still in the bed and watching our favorite Mickey Mouse cartoon on Doordarshan. Suddenly someone banged on the door; my father came out to look and he did not come back in the house for about 5 or 10 minutes. When he eventually came back, we figured that it was my uncle on the door. My father said to my mother, hurry up we have to go to our grandparent’s house. My family was based in Srinagar, and my grandfather’s house is in X. So my father came in and said - we have to go because grandma is very ill. And my mother started crying because she knew that grandma was unwell and thought that maybe she had died. So my mother just dragged me and my two younger siblings out of the bed and asked us to rush. And I remember, at that point I was just thinking - why grandma had to be ill today, because I was so happy watching the cartoon. Then we were all put in the car and we started our journey to my grandfather’s place. Usually, to reach my grandparent’s place from Srinagar by a car, it used to be about one or one and a half hour. But at that point in 1991, it took us three or three and a half

hours to reach. That was because by then the movement had started, it officially had started in 1989. So you had the army, all the checking post and you had to pass through so many posts.

Finally we reached. When we started to head towards my grandparent's home, we saw that the whole lane that goes to my grandparent's house, was full of people, men, children, and we were stuck. Looking at the crowd my mother started crying, she started pulling her hair and saying that 'my mother is no more... these people have come here for mourning'. And then I didn't see my mother, I didn't see where she went. And because the atmosphere was such...you could see hundreds of people there in our lane, in our courtyard. As children we were wondering what had happened, I couldn't remember where my two siblings were at that point of time. Somebody took me inside the house to the women's hall, and in one corner I saw my grandmother - she was weeping. And I thought - she is alive, so what has happened, why has everyone gathered here, crying, shouting, yelling. And then the slogans. At that time these slogans were quite popular, like 'what do we want / we want freedom (Hume kya chahiye / Hume chahiye azadi). And I kept thinking what happened? And then my uncle grabbed my hand and said, 'come quickly, just have a look'. And he took me to this tent where we would perform the last rites of someone who has died recently. When I went there I saw my uncle who was just 20 or 21 years old, I just saw his face and his feet and then my uncle took me out. It was then that we realised that it was actually my mother's younger brother, my uncle who has died. So that is that incident, that personal memory of that incident.. It is actually then that I got some inclination that the conditions are bad. I was 7 or 8 years old at that time, and then when I grew up, I realised that there is a conflict, a struggle, a movement.

And then the year after we have this custom where we mark the anniversary of the dead person, the martyr. We were in Srinagar at that time and we were told that it's the death anniversary of our uncle, so we have to go to meet the grandparents. And that was the first time I visited the Martyr's graveyard, and I saw all the people there, the graves, and the inscription on the graves, which states the name of the person, his date of birth etc. And I remember that day very clearly because it was a time of celebration and as kids we were so happy that we were meeting our cousins. And there was an excitement about going to the Mazar-e-Shohada where our uncle's grave is, that we would touch the grave. And the thing is, at that time because many killings were happening there, this martyr's graveyard was full. At the time my uncle died, there were about 30-50 graves there. We

have a custom in various parts of the valley that when we have the death anniversary of one martyr, we tell the others and also people from distant areas about the anniversary and everybody can join in the celebration. What I saw there was a celebration of a different kind, celebration that we as children were not aware of. I mean, we knew of wedding celebration and all that. But this was a celebration of somebody's death, somebody who has given his life for a cause, for a movement. Women, children and the fathers of the martyrs, all have come there to celebrate... this is our son who has died for a cause and everyone is, kind of, happy. So that was one kind of a personal memory of mine.

And then as I was growing up in that period, the most turbulent times in the conflict of Kashmir, it must be from '91 to '96 when the movement was at its peak. And as I grew up in that kind of an environment, with all those kinds of incidents, where you have crackdowns, you have all sorts of disturbances... As children we were often forbidden to move out of the house, if there was some army convoy or if the situation was tense, we were just asked to stay indoors. As children we had no idea - what actually was the conflict, the movement, the cause. And if we asked anyone they would just say that the situation is bad. That was the kind of reaction we always got. And thus we got accustomed to all these things and the street protests and the rallies...

I remember one more incident - it was again at my grandparents' house. This is after my uncle's death, 2 or 3 years later. My grandmother was very happy to have me around and one day she said that we will go to the shrine - which was quite far from the main town. The shrine is very revered, and many people come there. I asked why are we going there? And she said - you don't have to go to the school, because there will be one special procession today. One *juloos*, comprising exclusively of women that would go to the shrine. And I asked, why are we going there and she said - because we will pray there and we will get azadi. And I said - okay then we will go there. And in the course of this procession from the town to the shrine we would see young women, old women... grandmothers, even very old women joining in... an exclusive procession of women. My grandmother, young children, teenage girls and all that. Such processions were quite common in those times and the women in other villages were informed a couple of days in advance that a procession will be passing by. So the people, the villagers will start bringing snacks, tea, fruits etc. for the people who were part of the procession. I remember the journey. Then we reached and we prayed. I don't know what I prayed but there

were these older women in the front...and then the children. We all prayed. Everyone was crying... I mean weeping. Somebody was remembering her son, who died this way... And I asked my grandmother - will we get our freedom now? And she said, 'Insha-Allah, we will get it for sure.' I mean that was the kind of atmosphere that I have been growing up in.

And when I was 15 or 14... there was this bookshelf in my grandfather's room and it was kept locked because we knew it was his possessions - it had his books and literature. Nobody... especially the children, were allowed to take the books. My grandfather would say it is far too advanced for you... you don't need to study these books. And one day I just took the keys from my grandfather and said I want to have a look at this collection of your books and I want to study them. He said, okay, take it. When I opened the bookshelf I realised I was actually not interested in that kind of material. But in one of the shelves there was this album. I thought it would be some family album and so I was curious. The album actually had photos of the celebration day; we had taken many pictures there with the graves, also of all the women and children. I looked at the album with a lot of curiosity. I just kept turning the pages, and finally I found that there were many passport size pictures in it...I mean some were really very disturbing. And I asked my grandfather what are these photos? Who are these people?

He said they are the martyrs who have given their life for the cause. And I said who are they... I mean where are they from? That is how I discovered this archive of my grandfather. And then he took out all these albums, and he took out the diaries and all these pages in which he had written in Urdu. He told me that he has recorded from 1989 onwards, when this movement started, when this struggle started, he kept the record of all the people who died in this tehsil where he lives. And when I turned those handwritten pages of the diary, it was like he had kept a record of every person who died in his neighbourhood. In the tehsils we have these small villages of tiny settlements. He found out what all areas are there, the names of the villages, the remotest one, and the nearest one. And he has kept a record of every person who died in this period.

And then when I later asked him more about the collection and the pictures, he revealed that he used to go to every house, to every village and he used to collect the names of the young men who died during this period. And it was not only about the mujahideens; there were killings of other sorts too. Because according to him it is not the killing of one person,

it is about the whole generation of young men... young boys who died, who sacrificed their lives around a cause. And he went to all the accessible villages and collected the data, like name, parentage and the year when they died. And for the areas that were far away, he would send some other person to collect the information. Also he kept a record of all the people who lay buried in the graveyard. And he said that the graveyard started on a small piece of land that was voluntarily donated, the martyr's graveyard. But soon it expanded so much, that it is four times bigger now. It just expanded year after year with the graves of these young men. In his records, the martyrs are young boys from every part of the valley. We have graves of people from Kupwara, which is the frontier district of Kashmir. We have boys from Srinagar, the main downtown Srinagar. The graveyard constitutes of the entire valley. Second thing is, he has not only kept a record of the Kashmiris but also of people who were outsiders (migrants or non-native Kashmiris) here. And in his diary, he has written on top, 'our guests'.

And then finally the third thing, the pictures were preserved for identification purpose. He took photographs of the bodies, because as I already mentioned the martyrs were from every corner of the valley. So, for identification purpose, if he was able to take a photograph of that body, he kept that as a record for later identification. Because there were so many people missing... so many young boys missing. After years the parents or the relatives may come searching from every part of the valley. They may come looking around; meet people and check the graves. Even some cousins, who are my age, remember these incidents very clearly - funerals, the graveyards, everything. When I sit with them and talk about that time... they talk about every detail and I sometime wonder how much they have seen, because they are of my age.

So for the identification purpose, my grandfather took the picture of the dead bodies and preserved them in these albums. So that anybody coming in search of someone will just have to look at this collection and identify the person. He also kept the belongings, like the shoes, the clothes the person was wearing at that time. They kept it aside; it was mainly kept in my grandparent's house or in the local mosque. So if someone comes looking and there is no photograph then they may identify by the clothes and other belongings.

Also he has recorded every death, people who were missing, or somebody who died in an encounter with the army or if someone died in an inter-faction violence - between the militant and the mujahideen. Or if someone was killed by the...I

would put that in inverted commas, "militants". So every kind of death, because according to my grandfather we have lost people. It is not about one side or the other side. It is simply that we have lost these people, and they will never come back. And also they have given their lives for a particular cause or a movement, in which my grandfather believed. He had also put a foreword, a note, for the readers; he had compiled a booklet of all his records, his lists. He had put a foreword note over there where he speaks about his stand on the movement and the struggle. And the last thing - he also said that people should record these things, record about those persons whose whereabouts we don't know, those who disappeared. These are the lists of the people we know, we know the name, parentage, but what about all those who just vanished in thin air... my grandfather talked about those people too.

He also photographed the route of the funeral procession. When a funeral happens, it starts from the mosque, where the last rites of that person are performed, to the graveyard. This route was recorded to help people who may come from outside in search of someone, these photos would help them to locate the graveyard even after years. I would also like to share another personal experience - in those days when we would hear that a body has come, or that we have a martyr, everyone would go to see. Even the children were taken along, to look at the bodies and the face of that martyr. This is one of the most striking memories that I have. That is all about the archive and now you can ask me questions.

I just want to add one last thing about my grandfather. He has kept this record and he has told me to keep this with utmost care, because it's very close to him and he wants to pass it as a legacy to the future generation... so that people would know that these people have died for a cause. And they should remember those persons, it is not that a person died and it all ended right there. It is about us who are living...we should remember those people.

He is above 75 now, so he has written a will to pass this to his grandchildren.

Thank you.

### **The moderator (M)**

Now there will be a short presentation from the person-in-charge at Majlis archive.

### **Collector (C1)**

I shall give a short background of how we have reached Kashmir and met P and her grandfather's archive. A little background of how we reached here.

The initial idea of Godaam, the archive in Majlis was, in a way, taking off from the Shared Footage group which had worked on Gujarat (a short lived collective of documentary filmmakers that made free access video documentation of the carnage in Gujarat in 2002). There was an idea that there should be a facility to share footage and to be able to quote from it among the filmmaking community. So that is where this started.

There was a young Kashmiri filmmaker who told us that it would be important to document Kashmir in the '90s... I mean we were basically contemplating on which area we should concentrate for the collection. In retrospect, it is perhaps a slightly ridiculous way of going about it. We tried to speak to various people to find out, because we are a small organization, we have limited resources too, we should try and make a collection which can have some value.

And this filmmaker from Kashmir had suggested that we document the 90s because a lot of material will simply go away. It was a place that we knew very little about. And we decided to try and do it. I think that if we had an image at that time of what the archive could be - I would say that we thought we were going to try and complicate our own social memory or public memory of what happened in Kashmir in the '90s. We, most of us when we started out were from filmmaking background, so we were interested; we were trying to understand the politics of the image. And we thought somehow if we could... there is a mainstream image of Kashmir which we all have some memory of from the early '90s. In the beginning we thought of working with video primarily - from Newstrack (video news magazine in the '90s) and so on, that has left a certain - because of its real seeming quality - it's left an impression in our memories perhaps. So, is it possible to complicate that memory? In a way it was easier therefore to go to Kashmir because - instead of looking someone in the face and asking them what has happened to you - I was there to collect representations. So I was looking for diverse centers of representations. There would be

student films, local news portals, there was an idea that there should be people's personal photographs. But whose photographs, what photographs we didn't know. We ended up collecting a lot of... I mean a lot of accidental things happened. I think usually in the process of making a collection someone may just give you a lot of material and you say okay. And we ended up having a lot of photographs and some videos, some films. Some sort of context we tried to establish to them and we came back. And quite often when we look at those images while sitting in Bombay... I mean I would wonder like whether they being able to suggest something beyond themselves. And what... I mean knowing as little as I did about Kashmir, like what could be the suggestions that I could annotate them with. And we would usually ask the photographer to write behind the photograph, that you please write here what you think this is about. And that was the level of annotation. And there were these ideas like, perhaps, if you could document a point in time, a year and you could collect diverse representations, say, from Jammu, from Srinagar, from here and there, you would have something. We didn't quite manage to do all that but we also managed to get material that we didn't anticipate.

I subsequently begun to work on an independent film project with another filmmaker. And P also worked on that film project. In the process of that travel we encountered something else - people's personal collection of images. A lot of people for various reasons were collecting images. It was a break between the shooting schedule. P was helping us with the translations and she took us to her grandfather's house for tea and cakes. That is when this conversation came up and we saw the collection. We were bewildered and we didn't know what to make of it. We spoke to her grandfather and recorded the interview and I still remember very clearly that I was making associations with my father and his ideas of wanting to send my brother to the army and then looking at her grandmother and wondering like...  
And we came back.

And later again in Kathua which is outside Jammu, it is way outside the city. It was a former ceramic warehouse or a factory. And there is still the dust that you could feel in the air. For the past 10 or 12 years a group of refugee families have been housed there. So it's like a huge warehouse and on the either sides... it's just like partitions that have been made, earlier I think they were only blankets hung, now they've put walls. And when we were making our film - in a way doing something similar to what we were doing with the Majlis archive - 'we were collecting materials'. The feeling was - as we have done this now we should also go there, and since we have done that, we must go to the other site too.



And so we reached Kathua and we met this old man, similar to P's grandfather. The old man talked of how he had lived in Kashmir, outside Srinagar and how he was not keen to leave, and he tried to stay on. And then all those conflicting feelings of trust and mistrust, anger and how they had left came out. They had been living here for 10 or 12 years and it is a different trajectory with every family. I thought these people were sort of reconciled with the fact that they were not going to go back. I don't know whether it was about a desire or not...but they wanted something better than... you know...they were trying to move out. They really had tiny dwellings. And there were these pictures on the wall which were basically made with 4/5 ballpoint pens, he had...drawn flowers, a bunch of flowers. So we happened to ask, what it was and that is when the old man happened to take out his collection.

He had been drawing on these dot matrix sheets... you know cut them in half and made spiral bound notebooks... he had been copiously drawing, just endless pages of flowers. And somehow it sort of imaged his loss, for us, much more clearly than a conversation could. When you see someone's fine art work, embroidery work in Kashmir and you recognize, if you've been there, that it sort of draws from its environs. So even though the drawing was not of that caliber or of that sort of artistic perfection, there was a beauty and a real sadness of loss that we perceived, and I don't think it was just us, I think there was a shared mutual feeling. He had collected those drawings in notebooks and he wanted to leave them for his son. It was his legacy.

I often think that we are not really a classical archive. For me an archive is really about dimension and also a matter of imagining that you can just collect things from everywhere - that you have the capacity and the intention. The randomness in the way we looked for objects made a particular movement... one to the other... we shall show you some other collections later. But that is the issue. Each collection is a particular encounter. Something that my colleague (C2) would keep bringing up when we went to Kashmir later that even if we keep the collections how do we transplant the anxiety of the encounter and should we transplant it, should we take away the anxiety that we feel when we see this material from Kashmir, or when we just try and gather material from Kashmir and put it away safely for access. Or how do we write in that anxiety. In a way inviting P to personally present the archive of her grandfather here has... we wanted to somewhat communicate some of the anxiety that we felt in different ways... that's all.

**M:** Okay that's a very interesting range of issues that have opened up from the personal and of course what I found fascinating in P's story was the change in perspective. First it was that of a child looking at

memorialisation and looking at it from the perspective of a child who sees it originally as a holiday, as a playful kind of... you know there's a playful air and then of course as it changes and it shifts and there is a realisation of other kinds of...a kind of politicisation, so to speak, I find that very interesting. That how does one then, I think what the second speaker (the collector) is trying to reconcile with, is how to bring those feelings, those anxieties, those associations, with personal collections, when you then begin to place them in a more public kind of situation.

The collection, the archive, the catalogue... I would say that the lines between the collection and the archive are often very blurred and that's been my personal experience when I've been looking at state archives where there is absolutely minimal intervention, it's almost raw data existing. But I think the presentations bring us back to this very important issue of the relationship of the public and the personal collection, how does one actually reconcile these two things together. So while at one level, what happens to the context when you take a personal collection like her's and put it into say Godaam or Majlis is one aspect of the issue. The other of course is to say that the process liberates it, it liberates the meaning when you take away from the personal possession and you lay it open to other kind of interpretations, other kinds of scholars to come in or other kinds of filmmakers or artists to come in and begin to look at that work. So can it be seen as both a loss of context and at the same time liberation? So maybe we can start to talk about some of those issues.

## RESPONSES

### **Respondent 1 (R1 - author and graphic novelist)**

Maybe one way of putting it is that the archive has to be a living organism, almost, sort of... which kind of interacts with each other and whether there are any skills one needs to acquire to just work on these connections. It cannot be fixed. Talking of classical archives - it also reminds me of Penguin Warehouse in Rugby, right outside London, where authors have actually braved to go inside trying to look for their books but never returned. They were finally found as skeletons holding their editions of books, they could not return back. But what are the pros and cons of that?

### **Respondent 2 (R2 - visual artist)**

I am just thinking aloud really, it's not a comment or a question, it's like this very uneasy area between the desire as C1 expresses it or when P spoke of - to contextualise, to locate this material within an emotional subjective space and the possibility of that becoming over determined. So how and when, and the fact that meanings of this will change with time, if it's determined in a particular way today, that determination, that form of navigation will take on completely different kinds of meanings later. So is there actually a way out of it, or should one

simply accept that you will be directive and to take responsible for being directive rather than this illusory openness, because every archive, or every catalogue I have encountered actually is deterministic, I mean coding, all of it. In a sense these are political perspectives, the way you construct a code, or what your navigation mode is going to be the way YOU see things... So just throwing that up for reflection.

**Respondent 3 (R3 - cultural study scholar)**

Just carrying it forward from the earlier comment. We all are aware of the problems of over-determination, I mean the different ways - the tyranny of the catalogue could be similar, in a way, to the possible tyranny of the over-enthusiastic, like - "we going out there to get material". And I think you problematised that adequately when you said that we wanted everything to be represented or we wanted to make sure that everybody was represented. Perhaps while acknowledging that kind of an impulse, that kind of an impulse is impossible to get rid of, it is better to acknowledge it upfront. I think just bringing it into the creative confrontations with the kind of issues P is bringing out of her personal experience and talking about those kind of experiences self-consciously to a group like us - is perhaps the only way out. Because then what we see are the other sorts of impulses. Your grandfather had his own desire for representation, Kupwara to Srinagar everybody must be represented, this is like a demographic of Kashmir. My particular fascination was with the locked book shelf, there was clearly a moment he was waiting somebody would ask him to unlock it. So there is a kind of, there has to be a catalyst and also the person with the flower notebooks, these things are just waiting: when will the eye fall - at that moment the personal collection moves into a possible archival condition. And that is why I found the whole idea of 'archive as aspiration' very useful to bring it all together.

**Respondent 4 (filmmaker & curator)**

I think that today politically, aesthetically and technologically we are at a point where it is very vibrant and it is also very scary. It is possible that we do one annotation which is P's grandfather's which would be very deterministic in its own way, then it can be P's annotation - which is different from the first one as she had not made those images but received them, then it can be C1's as she had chanced upon them as a filmmaker-researcher-collector, then it can be R4 as a scholar who is invested in the histories of Kashmir, then it can be somebody else's. I mean it is technologically possible, though I am not claiming that it will be as ideal as that, because it will throw up a whole lot of other problems. But somewhere if we can layer the analogousness of P's grandfather's collection with the digital technology that is available to us to create and frame together many simultaneities. It may not

escape from being deterministic but at least 5 different avenues of determination can be opened up. And well, I think that it is the only scale of democratising of images that we can, we may attempt to.

**Respondent 5 (R5 - filmmaker)**

It really confuses me a lot, like this archiving, like why do we need it? And because... suppose I was in Europe in the Middle Ages, when they started... like the idea of a labyrinth, the library was actually a labyrinth, they constructed it and cataloguing was actually a way to mould your thinking. And actually the person who owns it, the person who is the actual caretaker, is the one who knows where to take whom. And only he has the key and like Umberto Eco wrote that book of the murder mystery in the library... we all know about it. So how the person is constructing the public thought or a certain kind of idea being propagated through cataloguing. I don't know where does it lead to eventually? I think what P's grandfather, or the person who is making it, has a very different approach. It's not archiving, it is a pathological reaction to a situation you know. I think the only thing that made sense to me a lot was C1's anxiety. I think that all the emotions are fake, except the anxiety. And I feel sort of weird, as in, are we anxious enough? Or is the narrative given like... okay even my family came from Pakistan, and I remember these stories that my grandmother, when she was alive, told me about coming from Pakistan and it has almost become a mythical tale you know. It has a lot of mythical kind of quality, and the only thing which I got from her is anxiety. It is the sense of anxiety, and that is what transforms. It is a very abstract kind of an emotion which transfers from one generation to another. I am just confused, it's like where does it all lead to... and then creating a work of art around it or creating a film, I don't know...!!!

**C1:** I am sure that many archives think all the time - should we disband and that is a relevant question. We are no exception. But when we look at some of these collections, they are in a way works of art. I mean it's a work, complete work, it's an expression. Like in P's grandfather's work - it is an expression and it has a form, it has found a form. These collections speak - on their own. These collections are actually responses and so they have forms - there is a book shelf, there is a lock, there is a form, there are records, there are photographs. And there is a story that is actually being told. He desires it to be told, just like the old man in Kathua who wants to tell something, somewhere, subconsciously, unconsciously, when he makes these collections. Whereas the sort of larger, diverse random collection that we have may not be able to speak similarly. Everything together may make each of them seem just random or may turn them into a heap of raw material, unsigned.

But it communicates of course many other things...

Sure, these are pathological necessities; I mean collecting is as much of a pathological necessity as making a film, as writing a book, there is an anxiety. That's like an existential zone. And I myself am sort of weary of the typical structure and these catalogues and these library files, which you sort of rifle through. So I do not know the solution, I just wanted to point out that the anxiety does not belong to just this... these are forms that are coming out of the anxiety.

**Respondent 6 (R6 - visual artist & art pedagogue)**

just want to take it on from there. To answer to the earlier question - how then do we share certain historical moments of significance which go beyond the personal, simply because those also need to be communicated. Also I think what was discussed in the earlier session is crucial - the whole notion of access and if we can democratise the access even in the way archives are structured so that they give us access to unlimited information. Of course within the limits of a single organisation there will be certain shortfalls. But then there is also simultaneity of institutions of different kinds of access. We just have to take advantage of all that within our own / contemporary limitations, how much we are capable of processing. So I think archives are of great importance, I mean the destruction of Nalanda for example is a huge tragedy because you know it is sort of a memory of peace and beauty in a state which was very beleaguered by violence and so...

**R2 (visual artist)**

I just feel like being provocative - why should P's grandfather's collection go into the public domain? I would like to place this query here.

**C1:** Is it possible to say in which form it should go?

**R2:** First why and then in what form, or maybe they are joint, they go together.

(Someone in the audience- I think it is ancestral...)

**C1:** But I do feel that he wants it to be shown, clearly. He very much wants it to be shown; I remember asking him, why did you do this? And he said that he wanted future generations to know that this time actually existed and this actually happened. Now for me that moment is not just about what he said actually... what I am saying is - that is the moment I actually turned to her grandmother to see her expression and I wondered about what... so the question I was asking is - how do I replace or represent the encounter, the moment.

**R2:** It is about intentionality. She said a number of times that for her grandfather this is a record that's important, in a sense, to his

community, to the people there and it is for the future generations of that community. And that intentionality is very, very clear. It goes in the act, the form, the statements. So when that particular set of images goes into the public domain - where very simply this notion that 'these are the people who died for a cause' - without giving into the cause, it is actually impossible. You cannot put it in the public domain without there being huge binary positions on the nature of the cause.

**C1:** I agree. We were trying to translate some of his notes when we were coming here. And I could imagine people saying - well, he is talking about the militants. I would not know how to engage with that. Then I thought maybe in this safe space we can think through in more depth.

We tried to shoot the collector talking about his collection. But that also may appear as if we are being defensive, sort of communicating our anxiety about showing this collection. What do we do? After a time we took a decision that - okay, let us stop collecting, let us try and see what we can do with what we have, what we can legitimately do.

**R4:** But this is far from democratising the process... the two poles that we are talking about are between public space and privileged space. So by not making it a part of the public space what you do is that - you don't necessarily keep it back in the personal space but you save it in a privileged space, only a chosen few can access it. I think we need to do a balance between the privileged space and the public space.

**P:** You are asking about why should my grandfather's record, his own perception of the movement or the cause, why should it be made public. I mean it's his personal record and what he believed in. When we were translating that foreword note it is his perception of the movement, the cause. I can either agree or I can disagree with it. That is how he portrays the movement and how he thinks that this is a cause and tries to explain what is this. I mean it's up to the perception. You see I was growing up at that time and at that age I have another perception of that movement. And the second thing is that my grandfather has passed this as a legacy, said he wants to show it to the people. He wants to show that, he wants them to remember that, at this time in history these things happened in Kashmir. When you talk about the history of Kashmir and the institutional version or that which is written in the books, he made it clear that he wants to show people, he wants them to remember this as a piece of history... so that people know that these are the persons who had gone missing. A whole generation was lost during that period.

### **The other collector in Majlis archive (C2 - social scientist)**

If it's a question of why an archive or what is an archive, then my only experience has been within Godaam itself but even within that I would definitely make P's grandfather's collection an exception. So it is not actually a general issue about archiving. C1 had numerous conversations with P where she would say that - maybe you can Photostat it. And even when we went to Kashmir the idea was that we would Photostat it and we would bring it to Bombay. But I was reluctant because we have absolutely no way to narrate, annotate... And when we were working on this workshop I was insistent that if the collection had to be displayed in any form then it had to be either by P or by her grandfather. But now we got to know that her grandfather is extremely pleased that his collection will be, at least within this safe space, displayed. So I am not entirely sure of my own position.

The other point is - in Godaam we also collect material from Bombay. But we feel very differently about the material we have on the Bombay collection and the material that we have on the Kashmir collection. For Bombay we have several strategies to make video documentation of the present. But we are uncomfortable with the idea of shooting in Kashmir. Whether it is the self-consciousness about documenting the 'other' (but even in Bombay there are others and we are not uncomfortable to shoot with them)... instead we have been trying to locate material in / of Kashmir that already exists. But... maybe the issue is about the location. As C1 mentioned that a Kashmiri filmmaker asked us to create an archive of Kashmir here, in Bombay. That could be the issue. I would be like all the archives, whatever kinds and sizes, that exist in Kashmir to be considered. And we could develop a kind of a catalogue, providing references but materially they would exist in Kashmir. It may create controversies, as in, we are not making the material accessible but only giving information about them. Not sharing our privileges. But, that way, there will be more ways to reach the archives and not only one way.

**Respondent 7 (R7 - author and publisher):** I have a very basic question though the debate has moved into some other level. We have also been grappling with the question of whether or not to set up an archive or when and how to do that. It is a way of negotiating history because you have before you a wealth of information that can lead you to certain other aspects of history. Is there anything that is not worthy of an archive? Is there anything that cannot qualify to get into an archive? Let me give you an example that might best illustrate what I am asking. When you are trying to seek out women's lives, there is a whole range of ephemera that leads you to the day-to-day realities of their lives. This could be things like library tickets, or shopping lists or rubbish that we would normally throw away, paraphernalia. And then you might valorise these by putting them in an archive. Is that a valid

exercise or not, I mean we did, we published a book some time ago, which was created out of this kind of stuff left in a trunk by a grandmother. And her granddaughter used it to reconstruct her life. Is its value over, should it be in an archive, should it go back into a trunk? Is there a rule? I am asking this question to R8 as he is working on theorising the anxieties of archiving.

**Respondent 8 (R8 - film historian & archivist):** I ordinarily would say that nothing is unimportant, it is all important. However, and this is a point, I think this is where it is coming again and again, the need to signify, we need to actually have some signifiatory mechanism by which you will at least arrive at the mechanism of cataloguing it without necessarily, and this is a point, making the catalogue the sole determining reason for why it is there, or the sole determining reason by which it can be accessed. That's the really tricky part of it. I mean who knows what you will read into it. Which is what is bringing me into the other question at hand.

Getting back to the earlier question of anxiety that R5 has raised - see the problem is not her grandfather's problem. It is our problem. Let us make a distinction here. What he wanted and what he would have wanted is one aspect of the issue. I feel quite strongly about this because I do think that when you, as you did, face up to material of this kind your anxiety is, I think, quite interesting. This anxiety is what we would face in many, many ways. I think it's first of all a moral anxiety, am I now entrusted with some responsibility which I now have to handle, some peculiar act of history which I now have to perform? Which is a question, I mean I think R2's point is also sort of well taken on that. Now I think that the problem arises from a peculiar discrepancy that arises between your responsibilities as historian on the one hand and the impetus of the material on the other, which is asking you to do, as it were, something else than merely play the role of an historian. Which is a disciplinary problem and not a moral or emotional problem. It addresses what exactly is a responsibility and herein lies the question. The point is that when you make a film on it like you've done or if I were to write a book on it, for example, my film, your film and my book do not exhaust the material. It's kind of bizarre because another aspect of the problem has been rather contentious - one that the documentary filmmakers who shoot their own material should keep the material after they've made their edit. Lots of documentary filmmakers think they have the right to destroy material that they consider NG (not good in the floor talk of filmmaking). I think that is criminal, you know especially in documentary. It is as though you are destroying an original material because your version of what you think you have, is done with. But that is not the definitive one. And I would also say that what your grandfather says about the value of the material is not definitive either. He thinks it's important for this reason,



I may read something else into it. And that is the question and as it is already mentioned at the beginning of the session, it is an area of specialisation that we have to bring to the table. It is not the job of the original collector. It is an area of expertise, it is an area of some sensitivity and it is an area where you are ensuring... you know that is where the tyranny thing comes in. Well, in the process of making your judgment you are of course in a position of great power. In the process of making the judgment you may well decide - this cannot go into the public domain. That is your decision, I mean what then will you do is a question. Are you perpetuating it, are you looking after it, well you can't...I mean nothing can be returned to its origin. And I don't know what else you do in such a situation but you do have historical responsibilities other than necessarily making public as well to be thought through. All I wanted to say is that end of the day it's your anxiety to use it, not the original person's - what he or she would have wanted.

**Respondent 9** (women's rights lawyer): I think the discussion so far has sort of 4 different parts. One is a private collector - whatever anxiety is there in collecting and whatever purpose there is in collecting privately. Then there is the actual collection - photographs or whatever material. Then there is what R4 has put up as privileged space - that I have this material and I want to share it with a privileged / qualified few. And there is a public domain where everybody has an access to and there is the state interpretation of the same thing. And the state version is, of course, very public. I think here we are traversing between all the four constantly.

Let's go back to the grandfather's collection of material on that particular area. And supposing the state, in its functional best, also came up with similar material on how many people died. So the record of people dying - can be a private act and emotional, it can be demographical, it can be the state records. For me there is at every stage a tension, an anxiety of what you record, what you leave out and who accesses it and who does not access it. And this is constantly there, not just in this presentation, in this workshop. We as researchers, as filmmakers, as documentarists constantly entering into the private domain. There is also a voyeuristic approach in the public domain that we want to see what 'actually' happened.

For instance, let's just take Mathura (the 1980 case of the young tribal girl raped inside the police station. The case became the impetus for a nationwide movement and change in rape law.) Now who was Mathura, did she want to make her life public? Did we want to make her life public? It is the personal violation that we are talking about. All these feminist icons... it wasn't they who made it public, it were 'we' who made it public. And constantly we are doing this. What is

important, what is not important, what is mundane, what is voyeuristic, what is sensational has been our tension in every moment of what we do and not necessarily when we are doing archiving.

So the grandfather's photographs - what do they convey...I think ultimately what we are talking about is what is it conveying to whom and at what point of time? And that is left to the viewer and that is left to the researcher who is using it subsequently. So, the issue is whether it should be available... it will be available if somebody does the research very methodically, very systematically and with conviction. So, what can be the medium of access, I think that is what we are concerned about here. Otherwise tensions have always been there.

**Respondent 10** (R10 - visual artist): It is an observation, especially in the context of a conflict where any memory or any archiving has a particular value but there are also many of them. When P was talking about the graveyards I was reminded of Sri Lanka, I've been there for 3-4 months, where both sides have built graveyards and these are official graveyards. And only people who died in a particular way or due to a particular reason get space in that graveyard. And so many people, other people who died in the conflict out of different reasons, don't get a space in that graveyard. So, there is an official archive for each side and there are actually multiple sides. And yet some people may not be there in all the three. And they may not even be in the missing people's list which all the three sides maintain. So, the issue of determination and our intrusion will always be a dilemma in the kind of work that we do. But still there is a need to give that space to these people.

The memory and the perception of history related to that are also being used as a part of the conflict. Yet whatever position we may take on the conflict, the space that these people are asserting is very legitimate, like the notebook that you talked about or the material that these people have gathered...

**R5:** See, it is a movement from 'context sensitive' to 'context free' and both ends are extreme ...

**Respondent 11** (R11 - filmmaker): ... like in the internet which will become the source of so much of our knowledge of the world - it is so de-contextualised, like I would see an image I probably would not even know where it comes from. So, I don't know for how long we can preserve these ethics. And since I have arrived at the cusp of analogue and digital, I don't know for how long we will manage to satisfy that archival impulse with all the responsibilities that are due to it or probably the means to do that.

**R5 (filmmaker):** That's why I am saying... like when the footage was sent to me (prior to the workshop certain images from the archive was sent to some participating filmmakers / artists to respond) I couldn't sleep for 4 days. It had a very disturbing kind of impact. I also come from Jammu and I have run out of my state so long ago, I don't even want to go back. But the strange thing is like... this whole thing of changing the context, from very context sensitive situation to very context free situation. And what does it do? Maybe having this workshop in Kashmir, or in Srinagar, or maybe in Jammu...