



## ‘There is no debate in India on resolving Kashmir’

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Kashmir belongs neither to India nor Pakistan, but only to the people of the region, Pakistani-American sociologist Ayesha Jalal told a symposium sponsored by the Center for South Asia and the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies at Stanford University, March 5.

What started as an academic conversation turned into a heated dialogue when some members from the audience said the panelists advocated a separatist line.

“My home was ransacked and burnt, I have no land in my country,” said Rajiv Sumbly, director, Kashmiri Hindu Foundation, San Francisco Bay Area. “We are just asking for a small portion of land for Kashmiris.”

Pushpa Dhar, another Kashmiri Pandit from Sunnyvale, said, “It’s been 22 years since I saw my homeland. We are part of India. We celebrate Kashmiri festivals here and my grown up daughter wants to see Kashmir. But I cannot take her there and risk her life,” said Dhar.

Also present were people of Pakistani descent like Omar Khan, who said he hopes that the Kashmir problem is solved, but said “I’m a pessimist.”

Mridu Rai, professor, Trinity College, presented her paper on ‘Folding Kashmir into India’s Imagination’. Rai who is also the author of *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir*, said, Panun Kashmir (*Our own Kashmir*) is separatist by nature.

“I say this because there are various

maps that shows Panun Kashmir.”

On this, one attendee said, “Panun Kashmir has suffered. We had to leave overnight, our culture and everything is at stake.”

Ayesha Jalal of Tufts University presenting her paper on ‘Regional Patriotism, Religious Universalism: Kashmir-Punjab nexus 1931-2011’, said, “The Kashmir issue is not about religion, it is about its people.”

She said the politics of India and Pakistan have complicated the issue. Jalal, who has been working on the subject for the past two decades, said, “Kashmiris have a right to decide what they want to do.” She said she did not deny that when it comes to the ‘state’ (*Kashmir*) there still is a view that it belongs to India.

She added a lot has been going on in the Pakistani media on the issue.

“In Pakistan, there is an embedded media, but there is a lot of variety. Today, people are talking and questioning what the army has done and a lot more questions are being asked in Pakistan than in India about Kashmir. In Pakistan, a debate is raging on how it could be resolved. In India we do not see that,” said Jalal.

Suvir Kaul who presented his paper on ‘Kashmir and the Challenge of Postcolonial Politics’ said, “I am not a votary for a separatist line. I argue for the importance of democracy back in India. We have to figure out ways to deal with the restive populations that live up to our constitutional ideas.”