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Shrinking violets don't grow in the tundra.

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“We’re born in
crackdowns,
we die in curfews”

*Excerpts: The Many Faces of
Kashmiri Nationalism*

By Nandita Haksar

From Preface to new edition:

The Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, while announcing the nullification of Article 370, said this step would bring everlasting peace to Jammu and Kashmir and ‘completely eradicate’ Pakistan-sponsored terrorism from the Kashmir Valley. Before the announcement of the bifurcation of the state, there was a clampdown in Kashmir. Seven million people living in the Valley were imprisoned in their own land, within their own homes. Telephone and internet services were cut off. Kashmiri students living outside the Valley could not contact their families; schools were closed down; public assembly was banned; political leaders, including those who had risked their lives supporting India for decades, were detained; even children were arrested. The average loss of business per day in Kashmir during the clampdown has been to the tune of at least Rs 175 crore, according to the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI). Bakeries and animal herders have been hit particularly badly, as have fruit growers.

Greater than the discomfort of the curfews, the arbitrary arrests and detentions and the loss of trade, has been the impact of the feeling of helplessness, humiliation, injustice and repression among the Kashmiri people. The unprecedented triumphalism in the rest of the country has only added to the alienation and anger in Kashmir.

Kashmiris are not new to military repression. As the young Kashmiri rapper Ahmer Javed has sung: *Crackdownas manz zaamit, curfew manz maraan ... Bunker yeti gharan manz, bha qabrah khanaan* (We’re born in crackdowns, we die in curfews...They turned our homes into bunkers, and I’m digging graves). Even in the midst of this latest clampdown, the Kashmiris found a unique way of protesting. They sent boxes of their famous apples with slogans written across the fruits. When traders in Kathua District opened the wooden boxes, they found apples with slogans like ‘Azadi’, ‘Burhan Wani’, ‘Zakir Musa Zindabad’ and ‘Go India Go Back’ on them. People in Kargil too have protested and demanded that they should be part of the Muslim majority Kashmir Valley rather than Buddhist majority Ladakh.

Militant elements have found violent ways of making their displeasure known; their target: migrant workers, the most vulnerable section of our society. Militants have killed workers from Bengal and Rajasthan, truck drivers, and a trader from Punjab. Now it will not be ‘guest militants’ from outside who will use guns, but Kashmiri youth too might take to the gun to avenge their humiliation.

It is not only human rights activists and opposition leaders who are warning of the consequences of this alienation. Police, officers of the Indian security forces and defence experts too fear that the repercussions of revoking Article 370 and keeping an entire people under lockdown will lead to greater militancy. Ashok Bhan, the former Director General of Police in Jammu and Kashmir has warned: ‘The abrogation of the special status accorded to J&K and re-organization of the state will add to alienation, mistrust and the questioning of the government’s democratic credentials in the Valley.

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Of Purity and Autonomy: A Nation for Whom?

This third issue of *The Sparkplug* considers the challenges and contradictions that are entangled in Kashmir’s pursuit for self-determination. Included is a conversation with author and human rights lawyer Nandita Haksar, based around her research on how the nationalist movement in Jammu and Kashmir intersects with the socio-economic challenges that in turn face migrants to Northeast India.

Accompanying the conversation is a short excerpt from the preface to Haksar’s book, *The Many Faces of Kashmiri Nationalism*, which was updated to take into account the repeal of special status for Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. While the selection is brief and gives just a glimpse at the historic context that informs the present moment, Haksar’s book frames the history of Kashmir through the narratives of two prominent Kashmiri activists – a Muslim and a Pandit on common ground. Both sought a strong, socialist nation that would be inclusive and empowered its people. Both figures were adamant on the importance of protecting minorities in Kashmir, under the sway of an increasingly zealous and religious form of nationalism.

Class struggle and caste segregation are firmly at the centre of this confrontation, around which, like vultures, circle the divisions of religion, industry, and supposed “economic development”. From the military industrial complex, to the entertainment and tourism industries, the influences of multinational capital have unfolded over decades.

This issue also features an excerpt from a letter by Afzal to Nandita, which confronts the underlying danger of purist ideology and dogma, which births further violence – compared to political action that is based in compassion toward an inherently flawed humanity. Beyond the particular context of Kashmir, this letter poses a broader question of belonging and identity. What constitutes a claim to nationality, and what justifies the divisions of statehood?

The questions facing Kashmir are deeply relevant to any social movement as they challenge the purity that is expected of “martyrs” or “leaders” of a social movement. As was done to Afzal upon his disillusionment with the nationalist movement, that status is easily stripped. Martyrs are quickly disowned by a public that suddenly sees their heroes as complex individuals who may contravene the expected mores or challenge the “group-think” that is adopted by a movement. Those who assume the mantle of the left so often take on such patterns of exclusion.

Kashmir poses this question to all of us, warning of the internal divisions that disempower our parallel movements, and deceptively leave us inept and defenseless. It is up to us to keep asking the questions that center humanity over ideological purity, and that seek ways forward for more egalitarian futures.

LK.

Continued:

The many faces ...

While it will be hailed in large parts of Jammu province and in Leh district, both condemnation and appreciation will be along religious lines.’ Alok Joshi, Member, National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and former Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), has warned that the nullification of Article 370 could lead to greater involvement of Pakistan. He has said: ‘With the talks with the Taliban reaching a critical point and the Pakistani establishment leveraging these talks, would Pakistan be encouraged towards adventurism on the Kashmir front? Prudence demands that we prepare for a more active involvement of the Pakistani deep state in Kashmir and beyond.’

The BJP-led central government has argued that the nullification of Article 370 ensures that the state of Jammu and Kashmir is fully integrated with the Indian Union. In order to achieve this integration, the Constitution of India and the law have been used in a way that undermines the integrity of legal processes. The government has cleverly—perhaps too cleverly—added a sub clause to Article 367—the interpretation clause of the Constitution—in order to give itself Constitutional and legal validity in revoking Jammu and Kashmir’s special status.

From Introduction:

It was the Dogras who united the entire Province of Jammu and Kashmir. One of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s most able generals, Gulab Singh (1792–1858), joined the Lahore court in 1809 and in 1821 Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave him the estate of Jammu. Gulab Singh sent his loyal general, Zorawar Singh, to conquer Baltistan and Western Tibet. In September 1842, a Treaty of Friendship was signed between the ruler of Jammu, the emperor of China and the lama guru of Lhasa by which the boundary between Ladakh and Tibet was established. This treaty assured Gulab Singh that the trade in wool, shawls and tea would not be interfered with.

The Sikhs, and later the Dogras, controlled the lucrative overland Indo-Central Asian trade through Ladakh. Between 1919 to 1931, goods worth about Rs 285 million were exported through Ladakh to Xinjiang in present-day China, while merchandise valued at about Rs 330 million was imported from Xinjiang into Ladakh during the same period. However, the Indo-Central Asian trade through Ladakh, which scaled an unprecedented height of over Rs 68 million during the financial year 1920–21, finally ceased to flow after 1949 following the Communist takeover of Xinjiang. Even though the trade link was broken when the British imposed restrictions on exports of essential commodities from India to Central Asia during the height of Anglo-Soviet tensions, the influence of Central Asia on the culture is visible everywhere in the Kashmir Valley.

The Yarkandi Serai on the left bank of the Jhelum River near the Safa Kadal Bridge in Srinagar is a standing reminder of the ancient connections between Kashmir and Central Asia. This was where travellers from Central Asia rested, and their yaks and ponies laden with delicate porcelain grazed in the grounds surrounding the Eidgah.

Now the possibilities of reviving these old links through trade are opening up with the global shift from Europe to Asia. The ancient Silk Routes are being revived and railway lines, bridges and roads are being constructed to link Asia with Europe again. Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) shares borders with several countries: Pakistan, the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan and Tajikistan to the west, and the Xinjiang province of the People’s Republic of China to the north. Ever since the Karakoram highway (KKH) was built to connect Pakistan with China via PoK, the geopolitical significance of PoK has increased manifold. PoK is a gateway to the Central Asian republics and to their expanding markets.

What would the impact of this opening up of trade routes to Central Asia through Gilgit-Iskardu-Kargil be on the Kashmir Valley? The people of Kashmir could once again be linked to international trade routes, but for the India-Pakistan and India-China tensions.

For the time being, the only reminder of the past connections with Central Asia can be seen in the culture of the Kashmiris—from the pheran that they wear to the kangri (earthen pot containing burning coals) that they carry, and the samovars filled with tea throughout the year.

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Nandita Haksar is a human rights lawyer, teacher, campaigner and writer. Her engagement with the people of Northeast India began while studying in Jawaharlal Nehru University in the 1970s.

She has represented the victims of army atrocities in the Supreme Court and the High Court and campaigned nationally and internationally against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. In her capacity as a human rights lawyer, Haksar has helped to organize migrant workers to fight for their rights and voice their grievances. In 1983, she became the first person to challenge the infamous Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the Supreme Court. She successfully led the campaign for the acquittal of one of the people framed in the Indian Parliament attack case.

She has written innumerable articles in national dailies and journals and is the author of several books, including *Nagaland File: A Question of Human Rights* (co-edited with Luingam Luithui) (1984); *Framing Geelani, Hanging Afzal: Patriotism in the Time of Terror* (2009); *Who Are the Nagas* (2011); *ABC of Naga Culture and Civilization: A Resource Book* (2011); *The Judgement That Never Came: Army Rule in Northeast India* (co-authored with Sebastian Hongray) (2011); *Across the Chicken Neck: Travels in Northeast India* (2013); *The Many Faces of Kashmiri Nationalism: From the Cold War to the Present Day* (2015); and *Kuknalim: Naga Armed Resistance* (with Sebastian Hongray, 2019). Haksar lives in Goa, Delhi and sometimes Ukhrul, with her husband, Sebastian Hongray.

Confrontation & irredentism in Ladakh:

Is anyone paying attention?

Over the course of this summer, military tensions intensified in the Kashmiri region of Ladakh, which is bordered by China on the east and Pakistan on the west. In June 2020, a military clash between Chinese and Indian troops resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian and over 30 Chinese troops in a clash at Galwan Valley. Despite diplomatic talks, the region is still caught in a standoff in October.

Ladakh is located in a militarily strategic point between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, viable also for any passage of oil and gas pipelines – particularly as China extends development of extractive and infrastructure projects through its Belt and Road Initiative.

Military tensions in the region have resulted in clashes since the 1970s. But Nandita Haksar writes to me an email as the standoff between India and China trickles into Western media in mid-June: “Modi is threatening to get back Gilgit and Baltistan from Pakistan, and there is an ever present threat of war.”

The scrapping of Article 370 has thus carried implications for the world beyond the nationalist movement in Kashmir. While the confrontation between India and China has been comparatively restrained, the world must nonetheless contend with the sober reminder of nuclear power axis beyond that of the United States and Russia, as Modi’s administration intensifies rhetoric around taking back “[physical jurisdiction](#)” over Pakistani-controlled areas—just as Pakistan considers making Gilgit-Baltistan into a new province.

Seeds of Alienation

The politics of exclusion in Kashmir's independence movement

By Lital Khaikin

A Nation for Whom?

Just over one year ago, India's far-right Hindu nationalist government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which granted the territory a significant degree of autonomy within India. The region has sought independence from India, and continues to be at the heart of a colonial contest between India, Pakistan and China since the partition following British colonial rule. Kashmir has long been besieged by occupying military and paramilitary forces that have enacted crackdowns and assassinations of dissidents, and imposed brutal curfews.

In addition to cutting electricity, the Indian government has routinely shut off internet access in J&K. Access was brazenly cut off for a year following the revocation of J&K's special status, severely impacting peoples' ability to organize protests and resistance, communicate with families, and connect with the media and communities outside of Kashmir. Since India's "blanket order" restricting Internet access, Kashmiris have fought for [access to be returned](#)¹ as a fundamental right under India's so-called democracy.

The theft of Kashmir's autonomy has still not received much coverage in western media. If it has trickled into the mainstream press, little is said about the complexities within the Kashmiri independence movement itself, much less about the apartheid conditions that have been imposed by Modi on the predominantly Muslim regions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian armed forces have continued to perpetrate forced disappearances. Journalist Hibah Bhat recently wrote about the continuity of present-day forced disappearances with those perpetrated in the 90s as part of Indian counter-insurgency operations. As Bhat [reported](#)² for *The Wire*, the Association of Parents of Disappeared People (APDP) has estimated that 8,000-10,000 civilians have been forcibly disappeared in Kashmir.

For Jammu and Kashmir, this has deprived the region of the ability to determine key aspects of political organization and social services from the state capital Srinagar — including property rights and government jobs — in a manner that could faithfully represent the Muslim majority.

Article 370, as the law on the region's special status had been known, was essential to empowering Jammu and Kashmir with a sense of unity and semi-autonomous governance. With its revocation, the autonomously governed state of J&K was broken up into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh — all of which are now directly governed by Modi's Hindi nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from New Delhi.

The division has generated anxiety in the predominantly Buddhist eastern region of Ladakh, which — also as a Union Territory — does not have social and environmental protections for traditional forms of governance, or for the region's unique ecology and biodiversity. In December 2019, a Ladakhi advocacy organization called the Vikalp Sangam Core Group released a [statement](#)³ regarding this lack of safeguards:

"Corporate giants have already begun exploring the area for business opportunities (including in tourism) and prospecting for minerals and other natural resources. If they are given open access, Ladakh will be damaged beyond repair, and India will lose a unique land and culture."

Now as a Union Territory, Jammu and Kashmir itself carries the brunt of the apartheid shaped by Modi's right-wing Hindu nationalist party. J&K previously had autonomy to determine permanent residency status within the state through another law known as Article 35-A, but its abrogation at the same time as 370 put this power into the hands of Modi's government in New Delhi.

Driven by far-right Hindu nationalist ideology, India has encouraged the migration of Hindus from neighbouring Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal. Relocations and land expropriations have stoked the fears of Muslim Kashmiris being displaced in their own homelands. Author, activist and human rights lawyer Nandita Haksar has written extensively about the plight of migrant workers in Northeast India, emphasizing the existential threat this poses for self-determination in the Northeast.

"The migrant worker is looked upon as an "outsider" and made an escape goat for all social and economic problems facing people, mostly unemployment," Haksar writes for the [Goan Observer](#)⁴, recalling assaults on migrant workers in Kashmir.

As socio-economic rifts are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Kashmir's nationalist movement confronts the internal divisions that complicate experiences of oppression. In the pursuit of political autonomy, Kashmiri nationalism presents the questions: at whose expense is this vision of a nation, and who is being excluded?

Writing for [Briarpatch](#)⁵, journalist Umer Beigh described the BJP's 2015 announcement of the resettlement of tens of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits (Brahmin scholars of Hinduism who fled during 90s insurgency): "The BJP is borrowing from Israel's tactic of creating self-contained, heavily guarded settlements in occupied territory. Many Kashmiri Pandits opposed the government's plan, worried they would become targets in Kashmir."

Considering his alliance with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Modi's Hindu state mirrors the Zionist vision of Israel as a nation-state that encourages and sponsors the immigration of foreign Jews while annexing, expropriating and razing Palestinian homes. Similarly to the revocation of Kashmir's 35A, Israel affords preferential citizenship to Jews over Arabs living within Israel.

As author and journalist Khushwant Singh once [described](#)⁶ India's Hindutva nationalism,

"Whatever one is seeing around are all signs of fascism — appointments to important offices are not done on merit, key posts are given to their men, even Governor-level appointments. There could be some two or three showpieces from other communities, otherwise its "their" men in all key positions — Hitler functioned in exactly the same manner. And while Hitler's main target was the Jews, for this brigade it's the Muslim population in the country."

What Beigh identifies as the reticence of Pandits being used as pawns in the Indian government's colonial expansionism reveals further lines of marginalization within Kashmir along ethnic and religious lines.

Sampat Prakash is a highly regarded Kashmiri Pandit and trade unionist, involved in organizing general strikes since the 1960s, and a long-time advocate for Kashmiri self-determination. Absent from virtually all coverage in western media is the class analysis around Kashmiri nationalism, which Prakash dutifully imbues in his critique of the contradictory tendencies in Kashmiri nationalism.

Prakash has [described the inefficacy](#)⁷ of the popular response to the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's status, chastising the "intelligentsia" against their inaction, equally alongside the infighting among Kashmiri politicians. He also commented on the perceived complacency and disorganization: "Kashmir will not forgive you. History will not forgive you. When such an 'atom bomb' was dropped on you on August 5, 2019, you stayed put! Why haven't you come out in rage?"

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Continued:

The Politics of Exclusion

Pulling the strings

Much like militant separatist Mohammed Afzal, Prakash has emphasized the importance of defending minorities within popular movements. Prakash has pointed to a moment of unity displayed in 1947, when, prior to segregation, some Kashmiri Muslims protected Pandits from persecution, demonstrating solidarity despite the historical role of Pandits in government administration and police. The significance of this reflected the values of secularism, emphasizing inclusivity while standing firm on self-determination and representation for Muslims.

Speaking from decades of experience in labour activism, Prakash described how the masses intellectualize the struggle but are unwilling to defend the oppressed within their own communities when they don't meet particular criteria—whether it is the murder of Kashmiri Pandits or harassment of migrant workers.

The option of an independent Kashmir that is separate from both India and Pakistan has not been seriously considered—with Ladakh continuing to experience tensions between India and China. As Beigh has described, “[e]ven when the occupation of Kashmir is discussed in Western media, it’s typically framed as a bilateral territorial conflict between India and Pakistan.”

The centrality of Muslim identities, and cultural multiplicity, to Kashmir Valley has been so clearly threatened by the discriminatory rulings of Modi’s apartheid state. Even here, Kashmir faces a colonial importation of Saudi Wahhabism into the region, where Sufism has rooted for almost a millennium. And while western media cannot seem to find empathy for the decolonial struggle of Kashmiri Muslims under Modi’s government, Indian state media has in turn capitalized on depictions of the Kashmiri insurgency as violent Islamism.

Even within militant cadres of Kashmiri resistance, Prakash has decried “lumpen-militants”, who first took on the cloak of militancy, later becoming counter-insurgents killing Kashmiris on behalf of the Indian army. Prakash also identifies the collective khamoshi (silence) of the majority of Kashmiri Muslims regarding the murder and exodus of minority Kashmiri Pandits in the 90s, referring to this as a “contravention of the ethics of Islam”. Likewise, Haksar has [described](#)⁸ how Afzal Guru turned to religion upon becoming disillusioned with nationalism. Always emphasizing the unity of humanity, the Islam in the name of which Kashmiri nationalism has not been “a true Islam”.

Yet, even at the root of violent extremism where it is present is a real experience of alienation and disaffection. People have not failed their state or their communities—rather, their state and their communities have failed them. But confronting this complex humanity, and representing the nuanced context that shapes their despair and actions, has been called apologism for terrorists.

The struggle for any independence movement is to ultimately sustain itself on its own terms. At any moment, it risks becoming dependent on the private interests that belie international aid and foreign capital, and being shaped by a new set of colonial forces if only for the illusion of persisting. Nations seeking foreign assistance must navigate an international aid infrastructure that is rooted in liberal capitalist politics. Too often, the call for “political autonomy” has blown the door open for co-optation by western neoliberal front groups for foreign governments and business lobbies that force “democratization” through sweeping privatization in their own interests.

To even be recognized internationally, a “nation” must conform to standards that are ultimately defined by western institutions. In his book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, political theorist and author Partha Chatterjee notably wrote about nationalism expressed as an “imitation” of Western nations as opposed to being a regeneration of national culture. On top of having to navigate international recognition for any declaration of independence, Chatterjee has [described](#)⁹ Kashmir as a “test bed” for internal colonialism where “[o]nly the Hindu upper-caste male who speaks Hindi will have the sovereign privilege of not having to prove his Indianness.”

India is intensifying measures to “develop” Jammu and Kashmir by injecting its own capital and inviting foreign investment—regardless of what Kashmiris actually want. Mining licenses and infrastructure projects do not go to Kashmiri contractors, all but pushing out Kashmiri ownership by awarding bids to companies outside of the state. Many mines are also located downstream from the Jhelum River, which crosses the Kashmiri region and recalls the concerns from Ladakh around local and environmental protections that are absent under the newly subordinate status to New Delhi. The northeastern region is deprived of control over its natural resources and the means of its own development, putting the power into the hands of neocolonial forces.

As Haksar identifies, much of this development has been driven by the perception of Kashmir as an economically “backward” area, without recognizing the value of Kashmir as a cultural “resource”—intangible resources that are often not inherently lucrative for capitalist development.

Yet, there is hope in a legacy of socialist organizing that has shaped Kashmir. The continued re-election of communist candidate Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami in Kashmir’s Kulgam constituency represents hope for the working class struggle in Kashmir, despite what has been described as a climate of “[choking political spaces](#)¹⁰”. Beyond Kashmir, this gives hope for the resilience of syndicalism and independence movements that are driven by labour and class solidarity, as opposed to the “lumpen-militants” and academic posturing that sees self-determination as a profitable exercise more than an urgent call for dignity and humanity.

“Festering wounds we Kashmiris bear, fleeing tyranny from all sides

We have witnessed nothing but pillaging of our abodes

Our own joined strangers in marauding our own ...

... When we greet spring and autumn with the same tune

This is our humility or cowardice, otherwise, our faith is firm.”

- Madhosh Balhami,
[Kashmiri poet](#)¹¹.

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A conversation with:

Nandita Haksar

LK: Let's start with the galvanizing moment when Jammu and Kashmir was stripped by India of its special status, protections, and statehood in August 2019. Through your book, *The Many Faces of Kashmiri Nationalism*, you consider the historic resilience of Kashmiri nationalism under the pressures of more militarily and economically powerful states. You also write about the confrontation with the Indian government's oppression of Kashmiri resistance, told through the story of prominent Kashmiri nationalist Afzal Guru, who was executed in 2013.

This revocation of statehood and protections for Kashmiris is still fresh: what is the biggest challenge for Kashmiris, in terms of regaining self-determination at this moment?

NH: This is a very large question. And I cannot possibly speak on behalf of the Kashmiri people but this I do know that the Kashmiri people will not give up their struggle for self-determination and preservation of the Kashmiri identity. There are those who will continue the struggle by trying to engage with the Indian State and there are those who will challenge the Indian state with armed resistance.

Those who are still willing to engage with the Indian state are challenging the revocation of the special status by political and legal means; and by mobilizing public opinion. It is not merely the revocation of the special status but also the new set of rules called Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules 2020 which have replaced Article 35 A of the Indian Constitution which granted special rights to "permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir." Now anyone who has lived in the state for 15 years can get a domicile certificate.

The Kashmir based political parties such as the National Conference have said that the new rules are aimed at changing the demography of Kashmir by disempowering the residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

LK: You mention that militants, many of them youth, in Kashmir will take out bitterness on migrant workers from Bengal, Rajasthan and Punjab, for example. You address the challenges faced more broadly by migrants in Northeast India in a separate book, *The Exodus is Not Over*. But, in *The Many Faces...* you write, "Now it will not be 'guest militants' from outside who will use guns, but Kashmiri youth too might take to the gun to avenge their humiliation."

Based on your experience and conversations through both of these books, could you comment on this motivation for young Kashmiris who have experienced so much oppression to take out their anger on fellow, underprivileged people—who are also economically and socially ostracized by the Indian government?

NH: In the new Introduction to my book *The Many Faces of Kashmiri Nationalism* I did mention, almost in passing, on the attacks on migrant workers in Kashmir Valley. It was in the context of describing the anger against the revocation of the special status and the subsequent clampdown when large gatherings were not possible and migrants became easy targets.

But now I do see those attacks on migrants in a larger context of how migrants are the most vulnerable section of our society and how easily they can be targeted; and killed, especially in a situation of armed conflict.

We have been witness to a mass exodus of inter-state migrants and the callous indifference to their plight. In a way the root of this indifference is the politics of what was called sons of the soil politics when reservation for locals in jobs, medical and educational institution became a way of mobilizing voters. Attacks on migrants became an integral part of the calls for autonomy or self-determination.

I have supported movements for self-determination both in Kashmir and in the Northeast Region of India. I believed that each community must have political space for articulating their special demands; for the development of their culture and society. But does the collective right of a community eclipse the rights of those who are looked upon as outsiders? The outsider has inevitably meant the inter-state migrant worker who has been excluded and victimized, even physically attacked just for being an outsider.

And who is an outsider? When does he become accepted as a "local"?

I have written critically on the role of Kashmiri Pandits, but can we justify a politics that have turned them into migrants, outsiders to their own society?

In the context of liberal democracy we could say the protection of minorities is a basic challenge for all democratic societies; not only for the liberal state but also for movements for self-determination based on ethnicity, race and religion.

LK: You also indicate that the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood may contribute to further radicalization. Can you expand a bit on this?

NH: It was not merely a revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (the special status had already been watered down) but the way it was done. The entire Valley with seven million people were made prisoners in their own homes during a clampdown which lasted months. There was no internet connection, families could not communicate to each other, youth were arbitrarily arrested and detained and even those political leaders who had risked their lives supporting Indian State were put under house arrest.

And this clampdown was accompanied by unprecedented triumphalism in the rest of the country celebrating the "integration" of Jammu and Kashmir. It is the humiliation of not being able to speak out against injustice that radicalized the youth. The radicalization if a response to the injustice and humiliation; it was a way of asserting self-respect and dignity.

LK: Indian mainstream media, like the *Hindustan Times*, often depicts Jammu and Kashmir in the context of the Indian Army conducting sweeping operations to deal with Jaish terrorists. Now, certainly terrorism is a reality and is present, but for North American publics who rarely see coverage of Kashmir by Kashmiris, this easily misrepresents the situation in Kashmir: only as a volatile terrorist state that needs to be quelled by the Indian government. (This very clearly reflects Israeli media and the Israeli lobby's depiction of Gaza and the West Bank.)

Such labels of "terrorism" are rarely questioned. How is this image of "terrorism", as a tactic, used by the Indian government to invoke fear and manipulate public opinion on the reality in Jammu and Kashmir?

NH: Yes the threat of terrorist attacks is very real. But the question which is sought to be suppressed is: what is the cause of this terrorism. I remember a time when there were no metal detectors at airports and no body searches at the entrance of government buildings.

Before the insurgency of the 1990s the media, including Bollywood (as Hindi mainstream cinema is called) Kashmir was used as a location of romance and escapism, the perfect setting for the Bollywood hero to romance his love.

In an all-time hit *Jab Jab Phool Khile (Whenever the Flowers Bloomed, 1965)* a rich Hindu woman has a romance with a simple Kashmiri boatman and later brings him to Bombay; the boatman does not like the life in the big city and he decides to return back to Kashmir. He catches a train but the woman chases him to the station and he pulls her up into the carriage.

The director was asked to what religion did Raju the Kashmiri boatman belong and he said he had no idea. But there are no Hindu boatmen (shikarawala) but in India of the 1960s and 1970s who cared? Today it would become a subject of attacks by the Hindutva organizations who would dub it as "love jihad". In the 1990s the same Bollywood made a series of films demonizing the Kashmiri Muslim and portraying him as a terrorist.

So the image of Kashmiri Muslim as a terrorist has been carefully and deliberately constructed to invoke fear and manipulate public opinion so it becomes difficult to voice any opposition to the Government's policy of repression in Jammu and Kashmir. Anyone protesting against human rights violations in Kashmir has been vulnerable to be dubbed as an anti-nationalist.

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Continued:

A conversation with Nandita Haksar

NH: Yes, the policies of the present Government mirror the American and Israeli policies. There is an increasing co-operation between the three countries. And the war on terror is being used to justify corruption, authoritarianism and legitimize religious right ideology.

In the Howdy Modi event in September 2019, just after the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Prime Minister told an audience of more than 50,000 diaspora in the presence of US President Trump at Houston's NRG stadium that the revocation of the Kashmiri status would put an end to the Pakistan inspired terrorism and bring peace.

This is how the war against terror can be used to manipulate public opinion not only at home but internationally.

LK: Are terms of "terrorism" legally manipulated to permit military and/or police invasion, occupation, or operations?

NH: The terms terrorism can of course be legally manipulated despite the fact the term cannot really be defined legally. The human rights community has been critical of the laws passed to deal with terrorism because these laws have substantially lowered human rights standards and have been proved to be ineffective in dealing with militancy in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir or Northeast.

The first law passed to specifically deal with terrorism was the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, commonly known as TADA. It was in force between 1985 and 1995 in the context of the insurgency in the Punjab. But it was allowed to lapse due to increasing unpopularity after widespread allegations of abuse.

Then in 2002 the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA) was passed in response to the attack on the Parliament. But despite its provisions the prosecution could not prove that Afzal Guru belonged to any terrorist group. This Act too was repealed in 2004.

Then there is the infamous the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 (UAPA) which has been amended on multiple occasions; the most recent amendment that came was the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 Under the Act activists have been arrested for posting criticism of the government on the Facebook, to voicing their dissent in entirely peaceful way. Terrorists do not operate within a democratic framework; activists do.

The problem of terrorism, however defined, is ultimately a political problem and cannot be resolved by the law.

LK: You mention how the Indian government wants to bring "development" to the Kashmir Valley. The term of "development" often obscures the social damage that often follows neoliberal and "free market" reforms, and the sweeping privatization of social services like healthcare, education, land and property rights. How do you respond to the role of capital in the context of Kashmir: in what ways has Kashmir experienced such forms of economic pressures in the process of pushing for self-determination, and against India's irredentism?

NH: The successive Governments in Delhi have claimed the root cause of the Insurgency and alienation in Kashmir is unemployment and lack of development. However, the economic indicators clearly show in many studies that Jammu and Kashmir was way ahead of many other parts of India. In part the reason for this was the radical land reform programme carried out in the early years after India gained independence from colonial rule.

The Kashmiri political leadership have always maintained that the cause of the insurgency is political alienation not economic deprivation.

I believe that the big corporations are looking to make an entry into the Valley; especially the travel and tourist industry but the Kashmiri movement has not focused on this aspect of the threat to their identity.

LK: There is a parallel to Eastern European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that were ultimately bought by private, Western interests. Poland, Ukraine and Belarus—just as an example—have all felt pressure to privatize social services, reform their militaries, join the NATO alliance, and install governments that are unilaterally friendly to private Western investment and largely U.S. foreign policy.

While the geopolitical circumstances are obviously different, would you say that Kashmir may be threatened, especially now, by similar pressures to impose economic and political reforms?

NH: Yes, there is some parallel. In the sense that the movement for self-determination the objective is to achieve autonomy or sovereignty but there is little thought of what kind of State an independent Kashmir would be.

In the past under the influence of the communists a manifesto for a New Kashmir was set forth and it inspired the land reforms which I mentioned earlier. But the Kashmiris have no such programme or agenda for reform or even a critique of the role of finance capital and the destruction of Kashmiri identity by global capital entering into the Valley. In their anger against the Indian state they may even align themselves with foreign capital. This has happened in the Northeast region of India.

LK: One of the themes in *The Many Faces of Kashmiri Nationalism* relates deeply to the manipulation of Kashmir during the Afghan wars. Kashmir was caught up in the turmoil of the occupations of Afghanistan, first by the Soviet Union and then by the United States.

The Saudis of course collaborated with Pakistani intelligence in the 70s and 80s to establish terrorist cells in Afghanistan, and work with rebel leaders in Tajikistan. With ongoing Pakistani negotiations with the Taliban, and fears of Pakistan becoming more active in Kashmir, how has this shaped the presence of Jaish in Kashmir, and the influence on a more radical Islam?

NH: The conflict in Kashmir always had international dimensions and international politics has a deep impact on the turn of events. Western support for political Islam is reflected in their (UK, USA and other Western European countries) support for Pakistan over India. Francis Tucker the last general officer commanding of the British Indian Eastern Command writes in his memoirs (1950) that Britain deemed it necessary "to place Islam between Russian Communism and Hindustan."

International human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch are often instruments of their home state's foreign policy as can be seen by their interest in Kashmir. Taking up the issue of human rights violations in Kashmir has allowed Western intervention in the politics of the Region. So the people in Kashmir are caught between suppression by the Indian state and manipulations by Western vested interests; and more recently by China's interests.

So, it's not just a question of Pakistan being more active in the region but the role of the Western states; their intelligence agencies have a role which has remained invisible in public discourse.

LK: Throughout this period, Pashtuns in Afghanistan found their religious architecture and sites, symbols, and traditions destroyed and replaced by Saudi-style Islamic architecture. (Many of Afghanistan's most ancient Buddhist sites were also destroyed).

Similarly, you mention in your book the architectural sway in Kashmir from the pagoda-style mosques toward Saudi-style mosques. What do you feel about this replacement of Kashmiri expression of Islam with an imported version? And in what other ways has this influence reverberated through Kashmiri culture?

NH: I did mention the fact that Saudi money is flowing into Kashmir and influence of radical Islamic ideas on the impact on Kashmir. I do not think it has entirely replaced Kashmiri expression of Islam. The popularity of the Turkish TV show Ertugrul is a reflection of how Saudi style Islam does not have an appeal to the Kashmiri, and perhaps to most of the Islamic world.

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Continued:

A conversation with Nandita Haksar

NH: May I quote from a Kashmiri paper on Ertugrul:

"It is a Turkish series called Dirilis Ertugrul (Resurrection Ertugrul). So far five Seasons have been completed and currently sixth season is being aired. Which pertains Osman Gazi (Kirilis Osman), The son of Ertugrul and founder of Ottoman Empire. The show is being watched around the world almost in 150 countries by both Muslims and non-Muslims. ...The series is Muslim centered, full of action, thrill and entertainment with meticulous ethics, beautiful mannerism unlike Bollywood and Hollywood. Having different characters like scholars, warriors, healers and leaders, I do tempt to acknowledge that full justice has been done by every character which makes you feel proud of your Muslim history.

What's more, the show can be watched by one with its family as it's rightly said "Halal for the eyeballs.""

LK: In your book, you address what Western mainstream media still largely refuses to speak about: the role of Communists in supporting Kashmiri resistance movements—as you refer to the first war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. The Soviets themselves knew very well the insurgent manipulations of the Pakistani intelligence in the region. But in terms of the contemporary moment, would you say there are viable socialist alternatives in Kashmir to the multinational capitalism that India promises to bring to the Kashmir Valley?

NH: The fact that a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) continues to win elections in Kashmir shows that there is a possibility of an alternative politics based on socialist ideology in Kashmir. I believe Islam is a religion which has always emphasized the idea of justice – and in part the popularity of Ertugrul is that he fights for justice. I believe socialism offers real justice, social, cultural and political. But socialists, especially communists have problems in dealing with religion and nationalism. How can they address both these sentiments is a challenge for socialists and communists. In a way my book's underlying theme is just that.

LK: I also wonder if we can talk about the element of 'nation-building' in the context of Kashmiri independence—though it must clearly struggle through this revocation of statehood, posing complicated questions of replicating models of statehood.

It is a challenging conversation, but how does Kashmir avoid replicating the neo-colonialism and the nationalist politics of India itself?

NH: I had hoped my book would help start a conversation on an alternative conversation; and perhaps it did. But it is a difficult conversation.

NH: The liberals have talked about Kashmir largely in terms of human rights discourse, the torture, the disappearances and the repression. The Islamists have spoken of a society based on Islamic principles and perhaps Shariat laws. The educated youth and academics look to the West for inspiration. Radical Islam seems to offer a critique of US imperialism; but it does not have a critique of capitalism.

The Kashmiri nationalist politics is based on a concept of Kashmiriat which as an ideal has been used as a tool of state policy – as I have shown in my book.

LK: You've written about how you deliberately chose to focus on Afzal Guru's story, despite both popular controversy in India around his nationalism, and efforts by the Indian government to censor and literally erase his life: as you quote "his life should become extinct". Especially from your perspective as a writer, could you explain a bit more about your motivation to bring attention to Afzal Guru's life regardless of the condemnation?

NH: My book is about two persons, Sampat Prakash and Kashmiri Pandit and a communist trade union leader who was active in politics from the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War and Afzal Guru who became involved in politics with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Sampat Prakash testified as an expert witness in the Parliament attack case and has tirelessly worked for the cause of Kashmiri nationalism and he campaigned for Guru's acquittal. He remained committed to his socialist ideals but has been critical of the communist parties. Afzal Guru was a Kashmiri nationalist but disillusioned by nationalism – Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri and took refuge in political Islam.

Both these Kashmiris felt deeply and passionately about Kashmir and their stories put together reflect the pain, anguish and dilemmas faced by all Kashmiris. As a person Afzal Guru was in real life everything a real Kashmiri is: warm, loving, with humour, thirsty for knowledge and spiritual not a bigot in any sense of the term. He even won the heart of the jailors.

LK: And, could you also comment more broadly on the importance of keeping alive the legacy of contentious political views in the face of enormous censorship and revisionism?

NH: I felt that the stories of Sampat Prakash and Afzal Guru needed to be told because they represented histories which no one wanted to preserve. Sampat Prakash had left the communist party and Afzal Guru was a surrendered militant. But both were not traitors to their cause. Documenting their lives and keeping alive their legacy of contentious political views was a way of starting a conversation on alternative politics in Kashmir. This interview is a testimony that perhaps the effort was not wasted.

What's in a name?

In an [interview](#) between journalist Parvaiz Bukhari and lawyer Kartik Murukutla featured in the Polis Project, Bukhari notes that the Kashmir dispute has been awaiting resolution at the UN since 1947. Bukhari describes the legal challenges of calling Indian armed control over Kashmir "occupation" versus "armed conflict". Occupation would necessitate the application of international law, and India is reluctant to allow independent organizations or the UN to "engage in this conversation" – or make a rigorous legal case and human rights investigation.

A comprehensive [report](#) put together by the International Peoples' Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-Administered Kashmir, and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, has described how there have been no trials of the Indian armed forces for human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir that, under international law, may constitute crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

It is not surprising that state forces have not been held accountable for the crimes perpetrated against Kashmiris. After all, the perpetrators hold the power to deliver justice. But this makes it all the more vital for an internationalist rally behind Kashmir, and scrutiny of India's armed occupation and revocation of status.

Murukutla also remarks on the challenges of engaging the civil society at an international level: "the civil society – and I understand the difficulties with which any civil society operates especially in a space such as Kashmir—has a misunderstanding of what the UN can do and how successful it can be. The UN, in my understanding, is a reflection of the states, how serious nation states are—because they form the UN—and civil society processes. And the stronger these processes are, and the stronger the states are on these principles, the stronger the UN is bound to be."

As one example, Murukutla describes how India has not ratified the international convention against torture, known as OPCAT. This allows for many forced disappearances and practices of torture by state forces to not only go unpunished but also unrecognized by India:

"I should add that in India we also don't have any method by which you could hold a person at senior levels responsible yet distanced from the physical perpetration of the crime. Under international law, there's the idea of command responsibility where a commander is responsible for the crimes committed by a person acting under him. That doesn't exist [in India]."

Letter from Afzal Guru to Nandita Haksar (2008):

I am a citizen of this planet.

I am a citizen of this planet. I do not believe in chosen land, chosen race, concepts which are diabolical, devastating and disastrous in their consequences and results. There is only one way to come out of these policies of nationalism, that is, we must believe and practice the universal permanent values.

Professor Amartya Sen says: 'Honesty is first a value, then it becomes best polity in economics'.

US and its silent followers have detonated and fragmented the whole value-based policies... Every responsible citizen of this planet must stand against this neocolonialism of humanity, of cultures, of universal values. It is a terrible threat to human civilisation. The so-called 'international community' is a euphemism for the United States furthering its interests through consumerism and materialism, associated directly or indirectly with armed occupations under the flag of globalisation.

Francis Fukuyama's liberal democracy is not the 'end of history', rather the political philosophy towards the end of all human moral values. It is this neocolonialism we are prisoners of, but unaware of the prison walls in which we are caught. Our tastes, desires, and imagination are all imprisoned, this is where the greatest danger lies.

My ideas may seem more utopian and larger than life, but one should never escape from individual responsibility. Every person has a special vital role to play in this world.

Everyone is accountable for their personal, individual deeds. No one can share the burden of other souls. It is our sincere deeds which will go with us. Everyone comes alone and goes alone.

We can develop ourselves only when we develop our concerned societies and humanity as a whole. Humanity will develop only on the basement and foundation of universal permanent values. Let the noble thoughts come from every side.

In the end, I request you: don't colorise or dress my words in any colour or dress, except a purely responsible human concern for humanity.

I am in universe in such a way that I made myself the universe, I live in a space but I am spaceless.

With regards and respect,
 Mohammad Afzal Guru,
 High Security Ward, C Jail number 1, Tihar.

"...it is very difficult to live as a surrendered militant in Kashmir..."

Excerpt from "A Wife's Appeal for Justice". Originally published in *Kashmir Times*, [republished](#) for the record by *Outlook India*, October 21, 2004.

"Throughout the period that we lived in Kashmir the Indian security forces continuously harassed Afzal and told him to spy on people they suspected of being militants. One Major Ram Mohan Roy of 22 Rashtriya Rifles tortured Afzal and gave him electric shocks in his private parts. He was humiliated and abused.

The Indian security forces used to regularly take Afzal to their camps and torture him. They wanted to extract information from him. One night the Indian security forces came to our home and abused all of us and took away Afzal to their camp; another time he was taken to the STF (State Task Force) camp Palhalan Pattan.

Some days later they took him to the Humhama STF camp. In that camp the officers, DSP Vinay Gupta and DSP Darinder Singh demanded Rs one lakh. We are not a rich family and we had to sell everything, including the little gold I got on my marriage to save Afzal from the torture.

Afzal was kept in freezing water and petrol was put into his anus. One officer Shanti Singh hanged my husband upside down for hours naked and in the cold. They gave electric shocks in his penis and he had to have treatment for days.

You will think that Afzal must be involved in some militant activities that is why the security forces were torturing him to extract information. But you must understand the situation in Kashmir, every man, woman and child has some information on the movement even if they are not involved. By making people into informers they turn brother against brother, wife against husband and children against parents."

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