



# Of Gardens and Graves

*Kashmir, Poetry, Politics*

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Suvir Kaul

*Photographs: Javed Dar*

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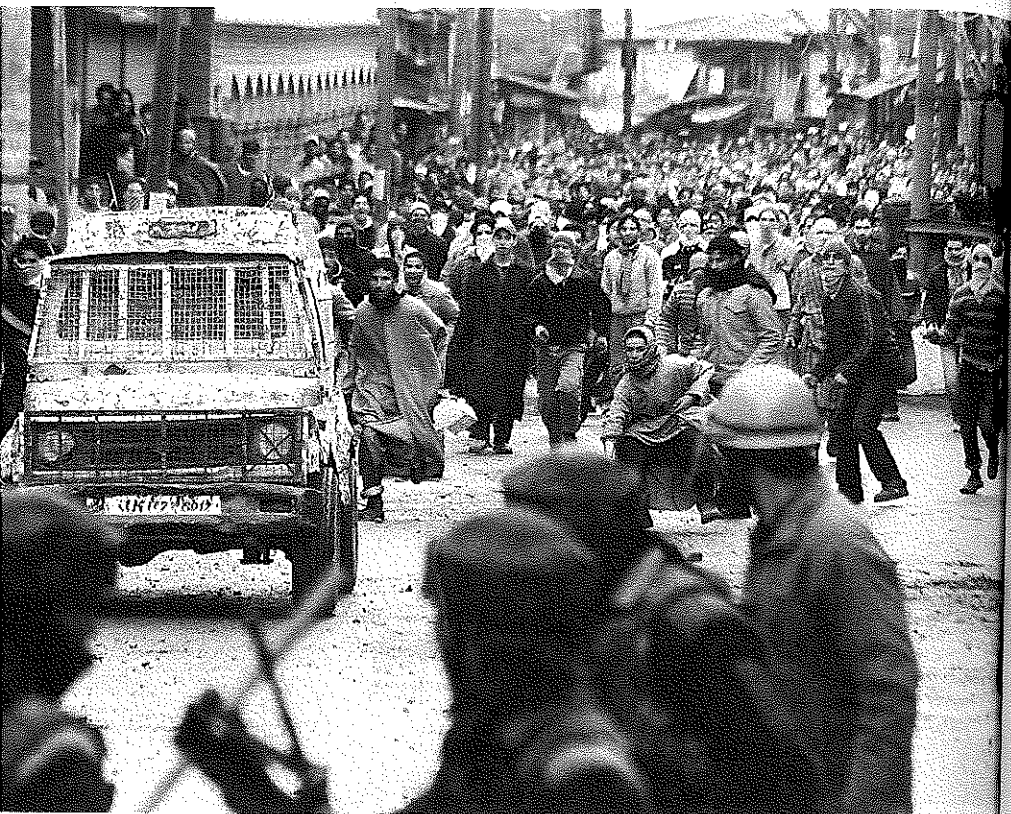
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Cover art: A woman mourns in front of her house, gutted by fire,

Frislan Pahalgam, November 2012. Photo by Javed Dar.

## Contents

ILLUSTRATIONS	ix	
PREFACE	xiii	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xxv	
INTRODUCTION	I	
POEMS		
Arjan Dev “Majboor”	14	
Ghulam Hassan “Taskeen”	20	
Brij Nath “Betaab”	24	
Ghulam Nabi Tak “Naazir”	28	
Shabir “Azar”	33	
ESSAY I	Visiting Kashmir, Re-learning Kashmir	39
POEMS		
“Shahzadah” Rafiq	64	
Bashir Dada	66	
Naji Munawar	70	
Rukhsana Jabeen	72	
Arshad Mushtaq	74	
Ayesha “Mastoor”	78	
Maqbool “Sajid”	82	
ESSAY 2	“My Paradise Is Burnin’ . . .”	87
POEMS		
Moti Lal “Saqi”	108	
Mohiuddin “Massarat”	112	
Mir Ghulam Nabi “Shaheen”	116	
Jawahir Lal “Saroor”	120	
Pyare “Hatash”	122	



Protestors clash with paramilitary soldiers and police | Srinagar, February 2009

#### Essay 4

### Indian Empire

#### (and the Case of Kashmir)

This chapter took life as an essay that marked a location and a date: *Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, August 15, 2010*. I began by noting the fact that I was analyzing the persistence of colonial modes of thought and forms of governance in postcolonial India while living in a city under constant curfew, where fifty-seven demonstrators had been killed, and many more injured, in police firing in the last three weeks.<sup>1</sup> The date was particularly poignant, as celebrations of Independence Day across the country only emphasized the continuing horror of these weeks in Kashmir. Living in Srinagar, I wrote, brings to a crisis many of the certainties that usually inform postcolonial analyses of an independent nation like India, if only because some of the key terms of anticolonialism articulated by Indian nationalists now inform the intellectual and political framework of activists for the Kashmiri cause. For them, India is the colonial power, the Indian army and paramilitary an occupation force, members of the elected state government are collaborators and stooges of the central government, and bureaucrats, particularly members of all-India civil services, are administrators whose job it is to deny any avenues for Kashmiri self-determination.

Further, Kashmiri nationalists (not unlike their earlier Indian counterparts) make clear that their movement is not simply concerned with economic betterment; in response to both the Prime Minister's and the chief minister's promises of more jobs in the government and in the private sector, they argue that their goal is political self-determination, and that they do not mobilize, and sacrifice their lives, for bread alone. Their movement is for *azadi*, a word once so dear to Indian anticolonialism, except that

it is now the Indian state that thwarts freedom. Kashmiri newspapers sympathetic to the desire for *azadi* are happy to reprint the work of Indian (and Pakistani) revolutionary poets: where once Sahir Ludhianvi and Faiz Ahmed Faiz spoke out against imperialists, their poems now provide sustenance for the Kashmiri movement as it struggles against Indian domination.

Conversely, the response of the Indian state—the central and state governments and the army and paramilitary forces whose highly intrusive presence warps civilian life in the Kashmir valley—has been to treat the sustained protests in 2015 as a law and order problem, and to crack-down militarily. Even when the prime minister and the home minister have spoken of Kashmir's "unique" status within the Indian union and of the need for an equally unique resolution, their promises lack purpose and conviction, and in any case are treated by Kashmiris as only the latest attempts to mollify widespread political protests and thus to enable a fraudulent, uneasy peace, as has happened repeatedly in recent years. "Mainstream" politicians, that is, elected officials who believe in Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India, lack credibility and are absent from public life; the only political figures who matter today are members of the separatist Hurriyat alliance, with Syed Ali Shah Geelani the most consequential of them. Further, ideologues of Kashmiri independence (or even those who favor achieving the autonomy guaranteed by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution) have developed dense historical accounts of the long Kashmiri struggle against their colonizers that goes back to the sixteenth century (first the Mughal conquest, then Afghan rule, then Sikh, then Dogra, and now Indian). In sum, many of the political and ideological features of classic twentieth-century anticolonial movements are in place in the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination.

This reversal of India's postcolonial credentials is one reason why otherwise progressive Indian intellectuals and politicians have found it so difficult to respond to the challenge posed by Kashmir. We have long assumed the ethical gravitas of being inheritors of a proud anticolonial nationalism, and even though we have developed critiques of the state and of the functioning of democracy in India, we assume that the state, warts and all, is fundamentally *postcolonial* in its self-conception and functioning. That is, we are convinced that the actions of politicians, bureaucrats, and police and military officials vis-à-vis particular communities, no matter how

polarized, are analytically comprehensible within an analysis of the problems of a young democracy. Thus, we document the travails of significant sectors of our democracy very well: our newspapers and magazines are full of exposés of corruption and official malfeasance, but also of substantive debates about the misappropriation of natural resources, tax revenues, or the developmental capacities of the state.

However, in other areas of governance, the self-righteous and aggressive nationalism bred by our anticolonial history has caused us to blunt our critiques of state functioning. Precisely because we demonstrated against and dethroned an empire, we like to believe that independence inaugurated a fundamentally different form of sovereign, constitutional rule that safeguards the state from assuming any of the attributes of the colonial state. No longer do imperial viceroys rule subjects; now elected officials rule in the name, and with the electoral consent, of citizens. In key areas, however, the Indian state has confirmed and enhanced the doctrines and methods it had inherited from British colonial law and policy. Prime among these is the dogma that once the departing British had defined the external boundaries of the nation (however opportunistically and inaccurately, and many were not defined at all), the populations contained within them were not to be allowed the right to political self-determination. These boundaries were to be defended at all costs, not only against external enemies, but also against secessionist movements or movements seeking different forms of autonomy.

That is, rather than the state functioning as the prime agency that would encourage citizens to evolve more progressive and equitable power-sharing arrangements across the nation, the state acts primarily to preserve the boundaries of the union in the form inherited from the British empire. This is true even when there are reasons to believe that this cartographic inheritance had been crafted without considering the needs and particular histories of local populations, and even if the policing required for the maintenance of borders involves the suspension of fundamental principles of democratic functioning. Thus one of the cardinal features of state-formation in the independent nation has become the development of a massive security apparatus ostensibly designed to guard international borders, but in effect to act internally against restive populations contained, by the force of historical circumstance, within those borders. Indeed, one might argue that this security apparatus, developed under the

cover of an aggressive, celebratory nationalism, is an important element of the postcolonial state's claims to legitimacy.

This chapter will ask what the history of modern empire and of state-formation within it can teach us about the formation and functioning of the state in formally decolonized, independent nations like India. It will also consider the converse of this question: Can an analysis of the centrality of a particular kind of state-formation to the making of empire help us understand some of the deeply undemocratic imperatives and neocolonial ambitions of the postcolonial nation-state today? I will argue that crucial modes of governance, particularly the relation between the militarized state and its subject populations that characterized colonial empires, extend into the present moment. European imperial nations established colonies via battle and conquest, as the British (East India Company) did after 1757 in India, and held and expanded their territorial holdings by building large armies using revenues and taxes raised from the subjects they ruled. This territorial and military legacy was inherited, in a "transfer of power," by the government of a newly independent India, which renewed both colonial legislation and colonial attitudes in order to deal with challenges to its authority, particularly from populations at its peripheries who wished to choose their own form of national (or even subnational) political formation. Further, as India achieves global economic heft, the policing functions of the state, far from being whittled down, are in fact being rapidly enhanced to deal not only with problems at the borders, but also with any form of resistance mounted by mobilized citizens within, whether these be communities protesting large scale industrialization that displaces and alienates them from their livelihood, or people who wish to call sharp attention to the age-old socioeconomic structures that are responsible for their historical dispossession.

#### INDIA'S "NEOCOLONIAL AMBITIONS"

I will begin not with matters at home, so to speak, but with an explanation of the appropriateness of a phrase I used earlier, India's "neocolonial ambitions." I take my cue from a recent article by C. Raja Mohan, the then "strategic affairs editor" of the *Indian Express*, and a former holder of the Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Rela-

tions at the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress. Mohan outlines a remarkable vision of military cooperation between the United States of America and India. He argues that "the Obama Administration needs to elevate the bilateral military engagement with India to a strategic level," because "a rising India," will be "a more credible and sustainable partner" than Western Europe or Japan in "coping with new international security challenges." If both the United States and India "can shake off the remaining historical baggage that has kept them at arm's length for most of the past sixty years, we may see something remotely like the return of the Raj" (2010). The "return of the Raj"? But before we examine the many assumptions about history and colonialism that make the revival of that political condition imaginable, let alone desirable, we might briefly summarize the contextual historical developments that encourage an Indian security strategist to reach for that quite astonishing phrase. Mohan's ideas about such "bilateralism" are no longer singular: the unprecedented growth of the Indian economy in the last decade, as well as the rise to global prominence of Indian multinational enterprises, has encouraged political theorists and policy planners to imagine a world in which India emerges as a regional power, with the military capacity (particularly a blue water or expeditionary navy) to enforce its foreign policy agendas and economic interests, as well as to play a more visible role in international peace keeping. This model of regional authority has been developed in tandem with, and in imagined opposition to, the even more prominent rise of China as an economic power.<sup>2</sup>

There is of course another crucial longer-term geopolitical development that explains Mohan's invitation to India to function as a regional satrap of US global power. After the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, regional alliances built by the United States and the Soviets, including those represented by the "non-aligned" nations, began to redefine themselves. Nations that shifted their affiliations included some of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, nations in Europe that had belonged to COMECON and the Warsaw Pact, and nations in Africa and Asia that had communist governments or were recipients of aid from the Soviet Union, and that often followed its lead at the United Nations. This decade also saw important milestones in the formal decolonization of the globe, particularly the 1994 general elections in South Africa that demolished the last bastion of racist white European empire in Africa. In this new world, empires of the most visible sort (those based on direct territorial

control, the subordination of majority populations, and the extraction of surplus to enrich colonizers or the colonizing nation) seemed a thing of the past. For a brief moment, it also seemed as if empire as an ideal of governance, or as a desirable model of economic organization, no longer had currency or legitimacy.

However, the intermeshed world that modern European imperialists had created between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, based upon hierarchical economic, political, and cultural relations between colonizers and those colonized, did not alter quickly or considerably. Once-colonized nations now controlled their political futures (though their colonial masters were prone to influence developments, or even to intervene), but they certainly were not welcome to entirely rewrite trading arrangements bequeathed to them by their erstwhile rulers. Indeed in most cases the nationalist elites who had led the struggle for political independence saw no reason at all to abrogate ways of doing business that would continue to enrich them. This was the case even in India, for all the fact that its economy, for three decades after independence, was centrally planned and most of its key sectors closed off to foreign capital. Given protected and captive markets, indigenous capital grew in volume and this growth, coupled with the successful development of technically skilled engineers and managers, allowed Indians the confidence to find their place within an international technomanagerial and commercial ruling class. In the last two decades, Indians participating in the global networks of capital have also consolidated their power at home. The process of economic liberalization initiated in 1991—and the creation of a massive and deeply uneven consumer economy—required the formal repudiation of the institutional mechanisms of nationalist or socialist modes of economic organization.

In effect, in this process of globalization, the economic agendas and protocols dictated by once-colonizing capitalist nations became the state doctrines of once-colonized nations. Multilateral agencies like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the World Trade Organization played a crucial role; they legislated and enforced particular mechanisms of economic and commercial development, while denying the legitimacy of public sector or state-managed enterprises, and of state-subsidized programs of poverty alleviation or the redistribution of wealth. Globalization has of course taken some surprising turns: few could have predicted the rise of multina-

tional capitalists and corporations from countries like Russia, China, and India, nor the sporadically spectacular growth rate of the Indian and Chinese economies, particularly at a time when the most powerful economies in the West have struggled. Economists now believe that well before 2050 China will be the largest national economy, and that Russia, Brazil, and India will play roles in the global economy larger than that of the European Union. Particularly after several years of recession in the West, the world is changing rapidly, with new centers of economic power in view and realignments of economic relations across the globe.

However, all these developments are taking place in the context of a unipolar world, with a single superpower, the United States, continuing to intervene diplomatically and militarily in situations deemed a challenge to its authority.<sup>3</sup> We now have what seems to be a confusing scenario: the United States maintains its ability to fight two overseas wars at one time, as well as its ring of military bases across the globe, while at the same time struggling to revive its domestic economy. As several commentators have noted, these developments suggest that at this moment in its history the United States is slipping inevitably into the decline that defined its precursor empire, Great Britain, where the contradiction between its blighted post-World War II economy and its military capacity contributed to the success of the anticolonial movements that brought about the end of empire.

But the model of “informal” empire represented by the US is different. American power across the globe has been based not so much upon territorial acquisition overseas as upon economic and diplomatic power backed by the ability, and the will, to intervene militarily. For more than a century now, from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to Iraq and Afghanistan today, the United States has fought wars across the globe and has carved out spheres of influence that it polices from its bases and embassies overseas. By one estimate, in 2001 the United States had bases in more than sixty countries and overseas territories.<sup>4</sup> As the editors of the *Monthly Review* put it, “U.S. global political, economic, and financial power . . . require the periodic exercise of military power. The other advanced capitalist countries tied into this system have also become reliant on the United States as the main enforcer of the rules of the game. The positioning of U.S. military bases should therefore be judged not as a purely military phenomenon, but as a mapping out of the U.S.-dominated imperial sphere and of its spearheads within the periphery” (2002). Even

as twentieth-century decolonization movements across the globe spelled the end of modern European empires, and to that extent the decline of empire as an ideology of international political and economic organization, the US's informal empire continues to thrive, and has become the (much-debated, to be sure) exemplar of international power and authority.

Thus, to return to Mohan's article, it is scarcely surprising that the "imagination of empire," as it were, still holds security analysts in its thrall. And not only security analysts, for as is well known by now, a number of historians and economists have gained public notice by advocating an aggressive role for the United States and its surrogates across the globe: military intervention, policing, the management of economies and populations, are all seen to be part of the renewed mandate for empire. Niall Ferguson was the poster boy for such neoconservatism, particularly in his insistence that the United States, as a leader of a coalition or on its own, ought to occupy and manage countries that are not quite amenable—for any number of reasons—to Washington's view of the world (see for example Ferguson 2003).<sup>5</sup> This and similar attempts to get the United States to formalize its informal empire, were remarkably short-lived: neoconservative imperialists have not had direct influence upon the Obama administration, though Obama has continued with the expansion of the US military presence overseas.<sup>6</sup> United States foreign policy remains committed to the unilateral determination, and the protection, of United States interests, particularly its access to commodities and markets, and there is no sign of a scaling back of US bases across the globe.<sup>7</sup>

In this scenario, Mohan's priorities are clear: India should have a special bilateral relation with the United States, which will entail, in part, functioning under its aegis as a regional power. But why would Mohan reach toward raj revivalism (he calls it a "creative renewal" of the "Raj legacy") in order to most vividly illustrate his sense that India, and its army and navy, should be put at the service of the United States, and to be sure, of parallel Indian interests? Is this simply an idiosyncratic and attention-grabbing formulation or is there more at stake here? For Mohan, the British raj in India demonstrated what he identifies as the "'India Center' that organized peace and stability in much of the Eastern Hemisphere during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>8</sup> In order for him to claim British imperial history as a precedent for an Indian future, Mohan resorts to a rhetorical sleight of hand: for him, it is always a national entity called

India, and not an imperial state, British India, that acts to police colonial territories. Where others might see a fundamental political and foreign policy break between British India and an independent Republic of India, Mohan offers seamless continuity. In fact, he claims to redress the unfortunate legacy of an anti-imperialist postcolonial politics here: "it is not just the West that is ignorant of the security legacy of the British Raj; India's own post-colonial political class deliberately induced a collective national amnesia about the country's rich pre-independence military traditions. Its foreign policy establishment still pretends that India's engagement with the world began on August 15, 1947."

Administrators of the British Empire used troops from India, paid for by Indian taxpayers without of course any mechanism to ascertain their approval (we are talking about empire here) to police, as well as to gain and hold, colonial territories in sites ranging from Egypt and Iraq to Malaya and South Africa, as well as to fight in Europe and elsewhere in both World War I and II.<sup>9</sup> Rather than pose a problem for Mohan, this fundamentally undemocratic exercise in imperial warmongering provides an argument for the future. He confidently asserts that, were Obama to upgrade the US's strategic alliance with India, he will find in "Manmohan Singh [then Prime Minister of India] a partner who is ready to work with the United States in constituting a postcolonial Raj that can bear the burdens of ordering the Eastern Hemisphere in the 21st century." In his argument, a "postcolonial Raj" not only entails the extension of Indian power overseas, but also the willing addition of Indian military resources to the US arsenal (even a "postcolonial Raj" needs its Raja, after all). The postcolonial future thus reiterates the colonial past, except that a sovereign India now acts in strategic accord with the foreign policy and commercial imperatives of the global military power, the United States.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE LEGACIES OF EMPIRE

The historical legacy of empire, as well as its perpetuation in the present moment in an imperial formation like that maintained by the US across the globe, continues to structure international relations in spite of the rise of other national or collective centers of economic power (such as the European Union). In any case, the mode of "development" that has allowed

power across oceans, but also to coerce its own populations into maintaining the borders drawn precipitously, inexactly, and often unfairly by the departing British colonial administration. For instance, in October 1947, when the Indian Army and Air Force flew into Srinagar to repel tribal irregulars originating from western Kashmir and Pakistan (and thus incorporated sections of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir into India), the Indian state extended its frontiers, but also put into place systems that denied large sections of the Kashmiri population the right to determine their own political identity, a problem that continues to fester.<sup>13</sup> In other “border” campaigns in the Northeast, the Indian state continues to deploy the army and paramilitaries against tribal populations who wish for sovereign and independent homelands in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. In the last three decades, state boundaries have been redrawn in that region to accommodate local demands, but any attempts to carve out independent or even autonomous homelands have been put down, often brutally, by the army and paramilitary forces (for an overview, see Hazarika 1994). In each case political processes and civil governance have been routinely marginalized to allow military “solutions.”<sup>14</sup> Most recently, rather than imagine viable political options, the Union Home Ministry has initiated combat operations against the Naxalite movement operating in central India. Within the government, the primary debate seems to be whether these operations should be conducted by central paramilitary and state police forces or if the army and the air force should also be inducted into this combat.

As this account suggests, India is no stranger to the use of the army and the paramilitary against its own populations. If Great Britain and the United States, the two dominant imperial powers of the last two centuries, offer any precedents, they are that empire-building is a process that requires the suppression (the forced amalgamation) of populations *within* as much as elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> The bloody history of the expansion of the United States across the North American continent, which entailed the destruction of Native American and Spanish-Mexican communities, as well as the systematic abuse of African slave labor, are too well known to require retelling here. England established its colonies in Ireland in the late sixteenth century (see Canny 1988, 2001), and held them for the next two-hundred-and-fifty years (parts of Northern Ireland are still part of the United Kingdom). The 1706 Act of Union united Scotland and England into an Anglocentric kingdom, but the highlands of Scotland still needed brutal “pacifica-

tion” via the anti-Jacobite campaigns of 1715 and 1745.<sup>16</sup> One of the consequences of the systematic dispossession of the Irish and of the destruction of the Scottish clan system was that disproportionate numbers of Irish and Scottish peasants emigrated to Britain’s trans-Atlantic colonies and provided the manpower for Britain’s armies abroad. In many ways then, Britain’s colonialism, like that of the United States, began at home.

The political mentality and methods of the modern imperial state are a product of these twin processes: the state hones its capacity for military violence at home even as it projects it across its borders. Further, these nation-states offer their marginalized subjects (particularly those who have resisted their territorial and political authority) a simple bargain: accept the suzerainty of the state and the centralized control of economic development (including those made available by access to opportunities in captive markets abroad) or be constantly at the receiving end of state surveillance and military action. (This is one of the purposes of raising larger and more numerous paramilitary forces, where the local and regional identities of recruits are subordinated into a highly disciplined form of nation-centricism. Equally important, recruits from one state or region are used to police populations in others; cultural, linguistic, and occasionally, religious differences between paramilitaries and locals enable more militaristic and uncaring forms of intervention.) The logic and history of the colonial state inform the structures of postcolonial governance to a point where they stunt any possibility of political thought and action that respects modes of collective being other than those defined by a coercive form of national belonging. But this cannot be understood simply as a problem of inheritance: postcolonial governance takes the forms that it does because the state’s developed capacity for violence is crucial to organize the exploitation of economic resources at home as well as abroad. Colonial forms of territorial control and trade reshaped the globe to make resources and products available in ways that disproportionately enriched imperialists and enhanced socioeconomic distortions among colonized peoples; postcolonial governance refines these methods, only now in the name of national development.<sup>17</sup>

The point here is that the advocacy of India’s potential global power, or at least regional military authority (the “India center” theorized by the colonial administrator Olaf Caroe), is in fact an advocacy of the power, and the right, of the putatively postcolonial state to insist upon quintessentially



colonial territorial, political, and economic arrangements. The mentality and methods of empire live on, and political processes that might subject them to local self-determination are delegitimized ideologically and denied militarily. There is a great irony here, for most twentieth-century anti-imperialist movements recognized that *decolonization* demanded not only political independence for colonized nations but also a fundamental rethinking of more local sociocultural and political practices that had been historically malformed by imperialism. In practice however, an independent nation-state like India acts upon lessons in governance taught by the empire of which it was once a part: the writ of the centralizing state is forcefully extended over all populations within its (often poorly defined) borders, even if those populations had never participated in creating, or have never acknowledged the legitimacy of, those borders. An India with global power aspirations, indeed an India that plans to translate its economic power and large population into the capacity to police its neighbors across the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, is a nation that is not predisposed to allow equitable arrangements within its borders. This is true even of peaceful mass movements to resist centralized, hierarchical decision making, whether these involve people displaced by big dams that bring no value to their communities, or indeed by mining or other industrial corporations that dispossess peasants and tribals of their traditional livelihoods without offering corresponding benefits.<sup>18</sup> Peaceful protest movements, as well as the constitutional process that recognizes their moral legitimacy and indeed political authority, are collateral damage to the onslaught of the twinned powers of the state and multinational capital.

#### THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF KASHMIR

The terms and claims of this analysis so far have been sweeping; and this chapter more a polemical overview of historical developments and state formation rather than a particular instance of the methods of governance of the colonial/independent state. In what remains of this chapter I will call attention to Kashmir, and in particular to the muscular forging of its recent history by India (and to a lesser extent by Pakistan). Kashmiris have at best been reluctant participants in crucial episodes of supposedly democratic politics and governance post-1947, and in important ways their

opinions have been disregarded in the same way as they were during the autocratic rule of the Dogra maharajas, who ruled as vassals of the British raj. Twentieth-century Kashmiri history features largely poor peasants, pastoralists, and forest dwellers ruled by feudal landlords (Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs) with little interest in alleviating the poverty or illiteracy of their subjects. Dogra rule favoured Hindu and Sikh administrators and confirmed the gap between them and the mass of Muslim (and Hindu) peasants (Rai 2004). Only after Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference came to power was rural landholding restructured in favor of the tiller. School and college education were made free, and in its "Naya Kashmir" manifesto, the state government articulated (if not always enacted) its progressive social vision.

In 1947, the maharaja's forced and precipitous accession (which, apart from anything else, denied the principle of the merger of majority populations in contiguous territories that supposedly governed the demarcation of borders in the Partition process) led to the de facto partitioning of the erstwhile princely state into Indian (Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh) and Pakistani (Kashmir, Gilgit, and Baltistan) sectors. It also created a political situation where relations between India and this new Indian state were mired in suspicion. For Indian (and Pakistani) administrators, Kashmir remained unfinished business; for India this meant that any Kashmiri politician who spoke in the name of self-determination, or indeed acted to confirm the autonomy granted by Article 370 of the constitution was deeply suspect. Thus the Indian state would countenance no political arrangements other than those premised upon the heavily militarized line of control functioning effectively as a border between India and Pakistan. That this border, as other lines on the map drawn in 1947 to demarcate India from East Pakistan, and indeed India from Burma and China, disrupted traditional communities and trade routes in Ladakh, Kashmir, and in Jammu was of no consideration: the postcolonial state was determined to enforce the boundaries it inherited from its colonial predecessor.

For a precarious new Indian government, battered by the enormous challenges of Partition violence and the need to resettle massive numbers of displaced people, among other more routine problems of governance, one of the bases of its legitimacy became its ability to police its borders as well as any populations who saw those borders not as sacrosanct, but as contingent, as the products of political chicanery and compromise. Over time—and Pakistan played its own partisan role here—the borders of

Jammu and Kashmir provided a powerful rationale for the development of a massive (and for a nation that contains the largest number of the world's poor, unconscionable) security apparatus. Since independence, the army, air force, Border Security Force, and Central Reserve Police Force have seen a vast (and largely unquestioned) expansion, and more specialized units like the Assam Rifles and the Rashtriya Rifles (raised in 1990) are dedicated to fighting secessionist insurgencies in Assam and its adjoining areas and in J & K respectively. The ill-equipped army's ignominious retreat in the face of Chinese troops in 1962, and wars against Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, meant that military and paramilitary budgets became disproportionately large well before India began to aspire to regional power status; this was the case even in the years when India claimed Gandhian pacifism and non-alignment as crucial pillars of its foreign policy.

#### ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY?

Between 1948 and 1989, Kashmiris rode a political roller coaster: elected governments, led largely by Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference, came to power, but neither they nor the Indian government made any attempts to find an equitable solution for the structural problem of a polity brought into being by a disputed accession and enforced borders. India's fig leaf lay in its stated position, argued before the United Nations, that it would conduct a plebiscite, but only once Pakistan had withdrawn from what India called "Pakistan Occupied Kashmir," so that all the populations of the Dogra maharaja's kingdom could participate. (The irony here is immediately obvious: a postcolonial state arguing that the only democratic political action it could contemplate was one based on respecting the territorial contours of a feudal regime crafted in wars and authorized by the British empire.) In 1953, on the first occasion that Sheikh Abdullah, the elected prime minister, sought to explore the possibility of a Kashmir less tied to India's political and economic control, he was arrested (he was to spend almost twenty years in jail). At each point the Indian bogey was that any moves toward autonomy were in fact covert moves toward an alliance or amalgamation with Pakistan, and that inchoate threat was enough for the Indian central government to intervene undemocratically. There were of course several political parties that were pro-Pakistan, and stood for

union with it, but none of them were allowed any significant presence in the state assembly or the Indian parliament. On the obverse, there was no shortage of Kashmiri politicians and people of influence who decided—opportunistically or out of conviction—that their future lay with India.

An electoral system did emerge, fitfully in many areas (there were elections to the state assembly in which administrative officials decided on the single candidate, who was then duly elected), more robustly in others, but elections were always supervised to make certain that no anti-India politicians were elected.<sup>19</sup> In 1977, for the first time, free elections were held, and a Sheikh Abdullah-led National Conference won a majority (forty-seven out of seventy-two seats, with the Janata Party and the Congress winning thirteen and eleven, respectively, largely from the Jammu region. The 1983 elections were considered to be largely fair too, and a Farooq Abdullah-led National Conference retained power, but the return of Indira Gandhi as prime minister meant the renewal of unabashed central intervention in J&K, and she dismissed this government a year later, installing one that she preferred. But worse lay ahead: even though Farooq Abdullah and then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had signed an electoral pact between the National Conference and the Congress, they were so fearful of the Muslim United Front (MUF), a new political alliance that included pro-Pakistan parties, that the elections of 1987 were massively rigged).

Sumit Ganguly (1996) provides a succinct comment on these elections and their consequences:

In this election, voters were intimidated, ballot boxes tampered with, and candidates threatened. Whereas previous generations of Kashmiris, whose political consciousness was low, had long tolerated all manner of electoral irregularities, the generation that had emerged in Kashmir during the long years of Sheikh Abdullah's incarceration did not have the same regard for the Abdullah family, nor was it willing to tolerate such widespread electoral fraud. Indeed, it is rather telling that several key insurgent leaders, Shabir Shah, Yasin Malik, and Javed Mir, were polling agents for the Muslim United Front in the 1987 elections. . . . The extensive electoral malfeasances that they witnessed in 1987 convinced this younger generation of Kashmiris that the national government in New Delhi had scant regard for their political rights and reckless disregard for democratic procedures. With no other institutional

recourse open for expressing their disenchantment with the flawed political process, they resorted to violence.

It is also worth noting that Syed Salahuddin (then known as Mohammed Yusuf Shah), the present Pakistan-based head of the Hizb-ul-Mujahiddin, was a MUF candidate in these elections. He was arrested from the vote counting hall and jailed for the next nine months for protesting the rigging; upon his release, he too crossed into Pakistan, and into the leadership of a militant group financed and trained by Pakistanis.

This brief account of election history in Jammu and Kashmir is of course not meant to be an adequate explanation for the events of 1989 and after, when pitched battles began between militants (both Kashmiris and non-Kashmiri recruits from the Afghan war against the Soviets) and the Indian army, paramilitary, and police forces. My attempt here is simply to underline the fact that elections, which are the guarantors of democracy and thus of the legitimacy of state power, were routinely suborned by the Indian central government (and their Kashmiri collaborators, to be sure) in pursuit of a malleable state administration. All this was done in the name of national security, of safeguarding the mainland's territorial interests by foreclosing the possibility of Kashmir becoming either an effectively autonomous, independent, or Pakistani state. In effect the state's location has caused its people to be held hostage to the Indian government's sense that, post-Partition, no more territory was to be ceded to Pakistan or indeed to be allowed to define itself differently from the nationalist conception underlying the Indian Union. There is also the question of demography: as the only Muslim-majority state in India (with a sizeable Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh population), an Indian Jammu and Kashmir is supposedly a shining instance of the secular values enshrined in the constitution.

Since India's independence, prolonged mass agitation, or changing demographics, have led to the demarcation of new states (Gujarat, Nagaland, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, now Telengana), but no argument for independence or functional autonomy was (or is) allowed to stand. Indeed, the forms of autonomy prescribed for J&K by Article 370 have slowly been whittled down, resulting in the even greater alienation of Kashmiris, and the revival of mass mobilizations demanding not just functional autonomy but *azadi*. Further, for more than two decades now, Kashmir has suffered the consequences of an oppressive

military and paramilitary footprint.<sup>20</sup> To take two instances of the way in which democratic processes and ordinary codes of policing are suspended here, we might consider that the J&K Police are quick to invoke the Public Safety Act, which allows them to incarcerate citizens for up to a year, and in jails outside the state. Similarly, the Indian Army has operated since 1990 under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which has allowed the military great latitude and virtual impunity in its dealings with the local population.<sup>21</sup>

Even after the army announced that the armed militancy of the 1990s has dwindled into sporadic skirmishes, recent attempts to withdraw or amend this deeply repressive, even unconstitutional act are met with immediate opposition. In a deliberately provocative statement, one senior general insisted that the AFSPA was the army's "holy book" and must not be lifted, even if some army officers and soldiers misused its provisions (NDTV; see also "Demand for Changes . . ."). In practice, this act places army actions outside of civilian legal review; not surprisingly, it has its origins in British colonial law, which regulated subjects, not citizens. In August 1942, in the face of the massive Quit India movement, Lord Linlithgow, then viceroy, enacted the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance to allow the police and army exceptional powers against civilians. This is the ordinance that became the basis for independent India's enactment of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, to provide legal cover for inhumane army operations in Assam and Manipur.<sup>22</sup> In sum, a colonial ordinance designed to legalize what were considered, even by colonial standards, extraordinary military methods designated to quell a nationalist anticolonial movement was revived and strengthened by independent India to legalize extraordinary military methods to repress political movements among sections of the population at its peripheries.<sup>23</sup>

#### KASHMIR IN THE NATIONALIST-IDEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

The "problem" of Kashmir for independent India should not however be understood simply as a failure of democratic governance or of the punitive deployment of colonial policing and military methods. I have mentioned some of the ideological, that is, nationalist reasons, why different

constituencies and political parties in India insist that Kashmir is an inalienable part of the nation. For the Bharatiya Janata Party, the primary proponents of hardline nationalism, no territory must be ceded to secessionists, center-state relations (no matter how iniquitous) must not be rethought, and no limits should be imposed on the power of the army or paramilitaries for fear of damaging their morale (any amendment of the AFSPA, for example, will be seen as a tacit admission of its misuse by the army). The Congress is less publicly committed to such an unyielding response but it too treats Kashmir as a problem in governance rather than as the occasion for any sustained rethinking about the political forms of autonomy in the state or indeed federalism in India. Communist parliamentarians have called for a reassessment of India's security regime in Kashmir, but they too have not encouraged any full-blown debate about center-state relations, especially if the centerpiece of this debate is to be a border state like Kashmir.

In each case, one of the unstated assumptions that guides Indian political thinking about Jammu, Ladakh, and Kashmir is that this region represents a palimpsestic history, where the confluence of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam has created a cultural texture that is particularly "Indian." This certainly is a laudable religio-cultural ideal, but not when it is asserted to repress the socioeconomic history of the state since at least the mid-nineteenth century, which features the struggle of the impoverished majority for their economic, human, and political rights. And if anything, the last two decades have meant that many, if not the largest mass of Kashmiris, have looked anywhere but to their south for cultural, religious, and political orientation. If idealized notions of a syncretic past supposedly anchor the Indian political imagination, visions of the future make clear to Indian planners that Kashmir is crucial for their access to the Central Asian nations as well as to their geostrategic links with Afghanistan and Iran (and indeed to their "containment" of Pakistan to the north and west and China to the east and north). It is in fact the case that the borders (or rather, the lines of control) between India, Pakistan, and China in that region are unsettled and provide repeated occasions for posturing, sabre rattling, and skirmishing. These borders are among the most heavily militarized in the world, which means that civilians in the state bear the full weight of this military presence, even when it is ostensibly directed across international borders.

We should also remember that there are also very powerful material reasons for India to possess Kashmir (or indeed for Pakistan to hold its sections of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir). I will not elaborate on these here, as many of these details are under-researched or hidden in official secrecy, but will call attention to some salient issues. There are hydrocarbon deposits—oil and gas—though there has not been much exploration or drilling in the last two decades because of violence in the state (see Narayan and Jayaswal 2010; Suri 2009). Ladakh is likely to contain rare minerals of a variety of sorts, though it is not yet clear whether these are extensive enough to reward mining ("Uranium Deposits . . ."). However, as India expands its investments in nuclear power and weaponry, the importance of exploitable uranium and thorium deposits cannot be underestimated. Perhaps most important at this moment is the question of water resources. Ever since Partition, India and Pakistan have quarreled over the usage of the waters of the five rivers that flow into Punjab. The 1960 Indus Water Treaty, signed under the aegis of the World Bank, achieved a tenuous accord—which seems to have worked so far—as regards water sharing (for a overview from the Indian point of view, see Sridhar 2005). In recent years, Indian hydroelectric projects (and the development of catchment areas and water-control mechanisms) have polarized matters again, and Pakistani leaders, aware that the origins of rivers in the Indian region of Kashmir gives India great strategic leverage, have protested vociferously (see Mirani 2009). As Mirani points out, India is clear about the "geostrategic and foreign policy implications" of its hydroelectrical projects in Kashmir. Mirani also points to a further wrinkle: India has refused to allow the Jammu and Kashmir state government to build and operate dams like the Kishenganga and Baglihar projects, which have been commissioned and built by the National Hydro Power Corporation, thus ensuring central control over the production and distribution of electricity, to the detriment of both the state exchequer and its consumers of electricity.<sup>24</sup>

In all these ways, Kashmir represents a fundamental political challenge to the democratic functioning of the postcolonial nation-state (but certainly not a unique challenge, as the histories of Naga and Manipuri self-assertion illustrate). So far, the state's response to this challenge has been twofold: to make central funds available in an effort to demonstrate to Kashmiris the benefits of affiliation with India, and to maintain a massive repressive apparatus whose violent actions warn of the futility of independent

thought and action.<sup>25</sup> The former has not worked, certainly not entirely or convincingly, and the latter has been disastrous. I will not here suggest possible solutions: an entire army of politicians, administrators, and experts continue to work on what seems to be an intractable polarization between state and people, Indian nationalism and Kashmiri self-determination. But I will remind us, as concerned citizens, that we have a proud history of progressive ideas, those that fed the politics of decolonization, to draw upon, ideas that insisted that the evolution of our independent, egalitarian democracy was an ongoing process, open-ended in its possibilities, and constantly aware of the need to develop and respect modes of self-determination, including those at odds with conventional political wisdom. Such openness—an openness to a genuinely *postcolonial* future—will be of great consequence not only to India but also to the world community in which it plays an increasingly consequential role. If we are to continue to desire and bring into being democratic and egalitarian forms of human development across the globe, we should realize that that effort too begins at home.

#### NOTES

1. This number kept mounting; newspapers finally reported 110 people killed in this period of unrest. They stopped counting the numbers shot and maimed.

2. China's ambitions are clear from its state-sponsored investments in commodity-rich nations in Africa, its development of the deep-water port of Gwadar in southwest Pakistan, and its enhanced trading relations with Latin American nations. China has also invested enormous resources into its nuclear submarines, new aircraft carriers, and bases that are able to shelter and service them, with the result that believers in realpolitik insist that it is only a matter of time before China challenges the domination of the United States in sea lanes and territories ranging from Africa to Australia. See for instance Thomas Harding's report on the Sanya base on Hainan Island (2008).

India's help in developing the Iranian port of Chabahar, which allows easy access to the Indian Ocean, is seen as an attempt to outflank the Chinese and Pakistani development of Gwadar, and to allow the unhindered movement of goods and natural resources from Iran, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian republics.

3. Ironically, one of the symptoms of the weakened US economy is the high percentage of its public debt held by central banks in China and Japan (and several other countries) that have made massive investments in US treasury securities. Such investments reflect confidence in the ability of the United States to repay its debts over time, but they are also made for other pragmatic reasons (China for instance needs US consumers for the burgeoning export-driven sectors of its economy).

4. Estimate by the editors of the *Monthly Review*; for analysis and a map showing these locations, see "US Military Bases and Empire," (2002).

5. Ferguson expounds on empire at length in his *Empire* and in *Colossus*. See Chibber 2005 for a precise rebuttal of Ferguson's historical claims and historiographical methods. Ferguson's celebrity, based equally upon his egregious claims for the great benefits the British Empire enabled for their colonized populations and for his insistence that the US should be equally unembarrassed about claiming the "civilizational" burdens of empire, has proved productive for political thinkers across the globe, if only because they have been forced to rebut his historical arguments and his vision of the imperial future. For an Indian instance, see Chari 2008.

6. Adam Taylor has published a recent survey of the increasing US military footprint in Africa (Taylor 2014).

7. In an article in the Calcutta *Telegraph*, Ashok Mitra calls attention to the US refusal to close its base in Okinawa, in spite of the election pledge of the new Japanese Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama of the Democratic Party, who resigned in protest. In a comment on the US denial of Japan's sovereignty, Mitra writes:

Getting rid of the American base in Okinawa has turned out to be a different story. . . . neither [Japan's] economic prowess nor its formal political sovereignty has been of any avail. . . . The US response to the notice served on them by the new Japanese administration to quit Okinawa . . . [was]: no, the United States will not oblige; Okinawa may be Japanese territory, Japan may be a fully independent and an economically powerful nation, the Americans could not care less; never mind the electoral verdict of the Japanese people, Okinawa will remain an American naval base, maybe for eternity, just like the one at Guantanamo in communist Cuba. (2010)

8. Raja Mohan derives his sense of "the 'India Center' concept in the British imperial defense" from Brobst. Brobst's book elaborates ideas about geopolitical security centered around the geographical landmass of India, as well as the sea lanes it might control, that were developed most fully by Sir Olaf Caroe, who was foreign secretary to Britain's government of India during World War II and then Britain's last governor of the North West Frontier Province. Caroe's thinking, forged by the priorities of Britain's empire, looked beyond its end to a time when, as "a counterpoise to Soviet and increasingly Chinese power consolidated in the Asian heartland, India would remain pivotal in the maintenance of a global balance between land and sea power" (xiv). Brobst argues that there is today afoot a "New Great Game for control of [Central Asia's] oil and gas," in which the "United States has assumed many of the attributes of Britain's former role in Asia, but the subcontinent remains the central strategic space" (2005: 147).

9. While historians of empire have recorded the adroit use of Indian soldiers by the East India Company and then by the British imperial administration to gain territories and extend their control within India, it is only recently that scholarly analysis has detailed the extensive deployment of Indian soldiers outside of the boundaries of British India and examined the consequences of such deployment for politics in India and in

Britain. As this scholarship makes clear, these forces were not simply a perk of empire, but crucial to its extension and maintenance, particularly during World War I and II. David Omissi points out that by the end of the First World War, over nine hundred thousand Indian troops were serving overseas and that they “fought and died in France and Flanders, in Mesopotamia and Palestine, at Gallipoli and Salonika, and in Egypt, the Sudan, and East Africa” (2007: 74). Daniel Marston points out that between “1939 and 1945, the [Indian] army expanded from two hundred thousand to more than 2.5 million men and officers,” who destroyed the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma, fought against the Italians and Germans in North and East Africa and Italy, and took and held important oil fields in Iraq and Iran (2007: 102).

10. The election of Narendra Modi as prime minister of India has added impetus to US attempts to sell arms to India. Chuck Hagel, the US defense secretary, visited New Delhi in early August 2014 to cement military ties, and news reports were clear that this visit was part of efforts made by the US “to secure greater military cooperation with India as it seeks to counter growing Chinese firepower in Asia.” See for instance the AFP report, “Hagel in India to Boost Defence Ties, Trade; Meets PM,” published in the *Hindustan Times* on August 8, 2014 (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/defence-deals-on-agenda-us-defence-secretary-hagel-meets-sushma/article1-1249580.aspx>).

11. A highly readable, humane account of the brutal imperial adventures of even a tiny European principality—in this case the Belgium of King Leopold—is available in Hochschild (1999).

12. A signal instance is the 1953 CIA-backed coup d'état that deposed Mohammad Mosaddegh, the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, when he moved to nationalize the British-controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (the precursor of British Petroleum, now branded BP).

13. For analysts of postcolonial history, two other military campaigns that moved to incorporate territories within the “landmass” of India, so to speak, are less controversial: the “police action” that annexed another princely state, Hyderabad, to India in September 1948, and the liberation of Goa from Portuguese colonialism in December 1961. Goans had in any case struggled for years against the dictatorial regime of António Salazar, and in Hyderabad, the Nizam’s equally autocratic regime had alienated the majority of those he ruled, with sections of the peasantry, particularly in Telengana, already in revolt against landowners owing fealty to him. Once incorporated into India, there have been no secessionist movements in either territory, as opposed to the sustained attempts made by large sections of Kashmiris to determine their political future outside the status granted them by the Indian Constitution.

14. Punjab saw equivalent moments, as for instance in 1984 when, during Operation Blue Star (the attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar to wrest it from Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers), all civilian administration, including police authority, was suspended. Even when the army was not deployed, the movement for an independent Khalistan was destroyed primarily by police and paramilitary power rather than via a political process.

15. China provides a contemporary comparison: the military has been used to suppress Tibetan and Uighur movements for self-determination. This mode of forced

“assimilation” complements China’s global ambitions: as the history of modern imperial nations suggests, any nation that aspires to superpower status cannot countenance democratic self-assertion among minority populations within its borders.

16. Ireland wrested its independence from the British Empire in 1923 after a long and occasionally bloody struggle, with six counties in Northern Ireland still under British rule. More recently, there has been a tenuous devolution of power in Northern Ireland too, which has allowed for peace after many years of conflict between Irish Catholics and the pro-British Protestants. Since 1998 the Scots have had their own parliament in Edinburgh. In September 2014, 45 percent of voters voted for Scottish independence, though the majority voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. More surprisingly (given that they were conquered and colonized by Edward I in the late thirteenth century) the Welsh too have moved to recover their separate political identity; since 1999, a Welsh assembly with substantial budgetary and legislative powers now meets in Cardiff. In these ways, Great Britain has moved towards a more ‘postcolonial’ conception of the power relations between center and provinces than seems possible in India.

17. *Bloomberg Businessweek* reported on a pledge made by the Indian Home Secretary to enable \$80 billion in investments in heavy industry by defeating, within three years, the Maoist rebels who defend the largely tribal and forested territories where minerals are to be mined and industries located (see Pradhan and Kumar 2010).

18. For an account of the new “commodity frontier,” see Padel and Das 2010.

19. B. K. Nehru, once governor of J & K, has this to say in his autobiography: “From 1953 to 1975, Chief Ministers of that State had been nominees of Delhi. Their appointment to that post was legitimized by the holding of farcical and totally rigged elections in which the Congress Party led by Delhi’s nominee was elected by huge majorities” (Nehru 1997: 614–15).

Sanjay Kak (2010), a noted documentary filmmaker and Kashmir-watcher, writes:

In the first election of 1952, under the dominating presence of Sheikh Abdullah, his National Conference was a political party that had willingly stepped in as a lynchpin of India’s strategy to “retain” Kashmir, and the party won every single seat in that first election. “Won” is too facile a description of what happened, because only two out of the seventy-five seats were actually contested. The rest had a walk-over. (The opposition, such as it was, was simply not allowed to file their nominations.) This happened with the active concurrence of the Government in New Delhi, because in these early days of India’s freedom, with the world looking over his shoulder, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru desperately needed to demonstrate the legitimacy of India’s control over Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah, at that time a personal friend of Nehru, took over as the Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir. . . .

When the next election came by in 1957, Nehru may have had some second thoughts about what he had started off. He is said to have written to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed suggesting that he generously lose a few seats, so that the image of the world’s largest democracy was not tarnished. But such cosmetic

niceties cut little ice with the National Conference. It was unstoppable, and won sixty-eight seats. Half of these were uncontested.

In 1962 the National Conference repeated this strategy, and won seventy seats. Again half were uncontested.

A twisted template had been set, and democracy had become an early victim. Kak also reminds us that in the 1967 Assembly elections, held after G. M. Sadiq had merged the National Conference with the Congress in 1965, the Congress won sixty-one seats, of which fully fifty-three were uncontested. In the first four elections, “voter turnout . . . was consistently low, never more than 25 percent of the electorate.”

20. This is not only a question of aggressive, even murderous, forms of policing, but also of an expansion of bases into large swathes of farm land and orchards that are now denied to their owners. Access routes to adjoining working areas are occasionally blocked by undefined security considerations, and the free movement of villagers impeded (see Navlakha 2007).

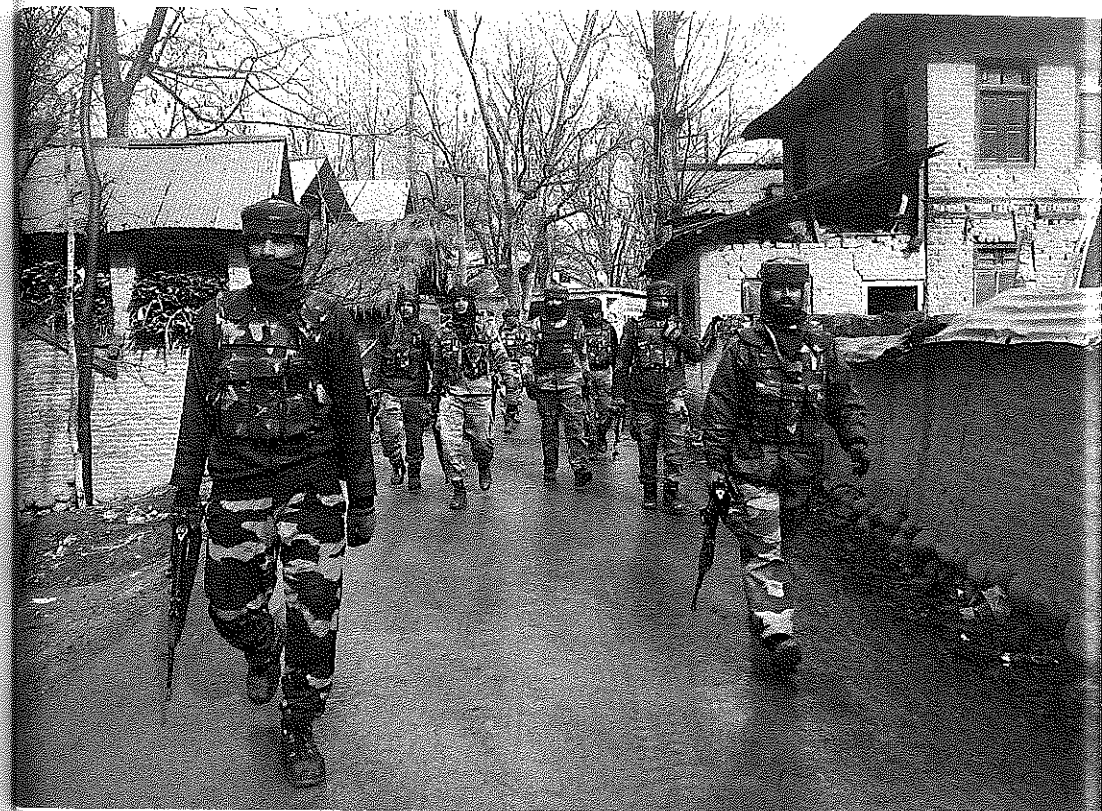
21. That Indian security officials have been liaising, and learning from, the equivalents in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) is no longer news; however, it is still startling to hear an ex-official of the IDF Advocate General’s Corps describe his surprise at the belligerent rules of engagement (vis-à-vis civilians suspected of links with militants) laid out for him by generals of the Indian army (see Nayar 2010).

22. Since 1972, an amendment gives the central government the right to declare an area “disturbed,” even over the objections of the concerned state government, and thus to apply the act. For a useful history and assessment of the AFSPA, see the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center report, “Armed Forces Special Powers Act.”

23. For a disturbing reminder of the implications of the recent advocacy of the AFSPA by serving armed forces personnel, see Noorani 2010.

24. Mirani writes: “NHPC, sometimes referred to as the East India Company of Kashmir for the imperial manner in which it exploits resources in the region, is strongly disliked as most of its income comes from its Kashmir-based power projects, while Kashmir itself reels in darkness.”

25. A great deal of central government funding actually goes into the maintenance of the security infrastructure at the borders, as well as the massive logistical apparatus required to service that infrastructure. For an argument that suggests that Jammu and Kashmir is able to use only 30 percent of these central grants on social spending because 70 percent is tied up in salaries, security expenditure, power, and interest payments, see Talib 2010.



Army soldiers leave the site of a gun battle | Audora Kulgam, February 2012