

Kashmir: A Time for Freedom

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Kashmir: A Brief Background

David Finkel for the ATC editors

KASHMIR WAS DIVIDED between India and the newly created Pakistani state in the chaotic division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947-48, with little reference to the wishes of Kashmir's people. The larger part is occupied by India, with a volatile "Line of Control" separating it from the Pakistan-administered zone. The formal name of Indian-occupied Kashmir is Jammu and Kashmir; the Pakistan-controlled region is known as the Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan) and Azad Kashmir. The territory's largest city is Srinagar.

While resistance to Indian control historically has sometimes taken the form of armed militancy with Pakistani backing, as in the 1990s, since 2008 a large-scale popular movement has erupted. In the era of the "war on terror," U.S. policy has been indifferent toward India's violent repression of Kashmir's majority Muslim population. Although the complexities of the long running Kashmir crisis have been daunting for outside observers and for the international left — which sympathizes with people's aspirations for self-determination — it is high time to take seriously the Kashmiri struggle for freedom from an oppressive occupation.

Kashmir: A Time for Freedom

Angana Chatterji

"FREEDOM" REPRESENTS MANY things across rural and urban spaces in India-ruled Kashmir. These divergent meanings are steadfastly united on one point: freedom always signifies an end to India's authoritarian governance.

In the administration of brutality, India, the postcolony, has proven itself coequal to its former

colonial masters. Governing Kashmir is about India's coming of age as a power, its ability to disburse violence, to manipulate and dominate. Kashmir is about nostalgia, about resources, and buffer zones. The possession of Kashmir by India renders an imaginary past real, emblematic of India's triumphal unification as a nation-state.

Controlling Kashmir requires that Kashmiri demands for justice be depicted as threatening to India's integrity. India's contrived enemy in Kashmir is a plausible one — the Muslim "Other," India's historically manufactured nemesis.

What Is at Stake?

Between June 11 and September 22 of 2010, Kashmir witnessed the execution of 109 youth, men, and women by India's police, paramilitary and military. Indian forces opened fire on crowds, tortured children, detained elders without explanation, and coerced false confessions. Since June 7, there have been 73 days of curfew and 75 days of strikes and agitation. On September 11, the day of Eid-ul-Fitr celebrating the end of Ramadan, the violence continued. The paramilitary and police verbally abused and physically attacked civil society dissenters.

Summer 2010 was not unprecedented. Kashmir has been subjected to much, much worse. The use of public and summary execution for civic torture has been held necessary to Kashmir's subjugation by the Indian state. Militarization has asserted vigilante jurisdiction over space and politics. The violence is staged, ritualistic, and performative, used to re-assert India's power over Kashmir's body.

The military's fabrications — fake encounters, escalating perceptions of cross-border threat — function as the truth-making apparatus of the nation. We are witness to the paradox of history, as calibrated punishment — the lynching of the Muslim body, the object of criminality — enforces submission of a stateless nation (Kashmir) to the once-subaltern postcolony (India).

Kashmir is about the spectacle. The Indian state's violence functions as an intervention, to discipline and punish, to provoke and dominate. The summer of 2010 evidenced India's maneuvering against Kashmir's determination to decide its future. The use of violence by the Indian forces was deliberate, their tactics cruel and precise, amidst the groundswell of public dissent in this third summer, since 2008, of indefatigable civil society uprisings for "Azaadi" (freedom).

What is the Indian state hoping to achieve? One, that Kashmiris would submit to domination, forsaking their claim to separation from India (to be an independent state or, for some, to be assimilated with Pakistan), or their demand for full autonomy. Or, that provoked, grief-stricken and weary, Kashmiris would take up arms once again, giving India the opportunity to fortify its propaganda that Kashmiri civil society dissent against Indian rule is nurtured and endorsed today by external forces and groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

If the latter transpires, India will manipulate this to neutralize Kashmiri demands for de-militarization and conflict resolution, to extend its annexation of Kashmir, and further normalize civic and legal "states of exception" (i.e. repression). If India succeeds in both provoking local armed struggle and linking Kashmiri resistance to foreign terror, it will acquire international sanction to continue its government of Kashmir on grounds of "national security," and "have proof" that Kashmiris are not authentically debating India's government of them, but are pressured into it by external forces.

India can then reinforce its armed forces in Kashmir, presently 671,000 strong, to prolong the killing spree. Such provocation as policy is a mistake. Such legitimization of military rule will produce intractable conflict and violence. All indications are that Kashmiri civil society dissent will not abate: It is not externally motivated, but historically compelled.

Dominant nation-states overlook that freedom struggles are not adherent to the moralities of violence versus nonviolence, but reflect a desire to be free. Dominant nation-states forget that the greater the oppression, the more fervent is resistance. The greater the violence, the more likely is the provocation to counter-violence.

Whether dissent in Kashmir turns into organized armed struggle or continues as mass-based peaceful resistance is dependent upon India's political decisions. If India's subjugation persists, it is conceivable that the movement for nonviolent dissent, mobilized since 2004, will erode. Signs indicate that it is already slightly threadbare. It is conceivable that India's brutality will induce Kashmiri youth to close the distance between stones and petrol bombs, or more.

If India fails to act, if Pakistan acts only in its self-interest, and if the international community does not insist on an equitable resolution to the Kashmir dispute, it is conceivable, that, forsaken by the world, Kashmiris will be compelled to take up arms again.

Misogynist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba [fundamentalist Pakistani group — ed.], al-Qaeda or the Taliban are mercenaries looking for takers in Kashmir. By the Indian state's record, there are between 500-700 militants in the Kashmir Valley today. These groups have not been successful because Kashmiris have been disinterested in alliances with them, not because the Indian army is successful in controlling them. This time, an armed mobilization by Kashmiris would include an even stronger mass movement than that which occurred between 1990 and 2004/2007, led by youth whose lives have been shaped by the two-decade long violence of militarization.

Who wants that? Can the South Asian Subcontinent, already nuclearized, survive that? India is accountable to keep this from happening — not through the use of unmitigated force, but through listening to the demands for change made by Kashmiris.

Will to Power

This summer, India's violence on Kashmir was threaded through with strategic calculation. The police, military and paramilitary, without provocation, brutalized widespread peaceable protests across Kashmir that were opposing the suppression of civil society. Hostile Indian forces acted with the knowledge and sanction of the government of India and the government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The repeated repression by state forces provoked civilians, whose political means of expression and demands have been systematically denied, to engage in stone pelting. The conditions of militarization prompted them to be in non-compliance with declared, undeclared, and unremitting curfews. In instances, civilians engaged in acts of violence, including arson.

Each instance of civilian violence was provoked by the unmitigated and first use of force on civilians and/or extrajudicial killings on the part of Indian forces. Peaceable civilian demonstrations by women and men protested the actions of Indian forces. Individuals caught in the midst of the unrest, or mourning the death of a civilian, were fired upon by Indian forces, leading to other killings by Indian forces, more civilian protests, greater use of force by the police and paramilitary, use of torture in certain instances by Indian forces, more killings by Indian forces, larger, even violent, civilian protests, and further state repression.

In Summer 2010, dominant discourse focused on the use of stone pelting and on the instances of violence by youth in Kashmir as the reason for armed action on the part of the state. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh focused on the need for efficient tactics in "crowd control." India's elite intelligentsia, inculcated into "rational" conduct, and no longer outraged by suffering, assessed the

costs and benefits of militaristic violence.

Civil society demonstrations in Kashmir are not a law-and-order problem, as they have been reported. Stone pelting, and incidents of arson and violence, are not causal to the violence that is routine in Kashmir today. Stone pelting does not seek to kill, and has not resulted in death. Pro-freedom leaders (termed “separatists” by the Indian state) have emphasized nonviolent civil disobedience, and have appealed to civil society not to engage in violent protests in reaction to the violence and killings by Indian forces.

Indian rulers disregard that suppression acts to catalyze the resistance movement in Kashmir. The Government of India continues to monitor the resistance movement, shifting the boundaries of acceptable practice of civil liberties. Kashmiris are allowed to protest in New Delhi, while in Kashmir sloganeering (“Go, India, Go Back,” “Indian Dogs Go Home,” “Quit Kashmir”) is met with force. When Masarat Alam Bhat, a rising pro-freedom leader, issued an appeal to Indian soldiers in July to “Quit Kashmir,” Indian authorities banned its circulation.

Acts of violence by protesting civilians increased as military violence continued into September. On September 13, crowds in Kashmir torched a Christian missionary school and some government offices while protesting the call to desecrate the Qur’an by Florida Pastor Terry Jones. On September 13, 18 civilians were killed by the Indian forces in Kashmir (a police officer also died). Provocation is easy in a context of sustained brutality. Provoking Kashmiri dissenters to violence serves to confirm the dominant story of Muslims as “violent.” Yet again, several pro-freedom leaders condemned the attack on the Christian school and renewed their call for nonviolent dissent.

On September 13, the Government of India stated its willingness to engage with Kashmiri groups that reject violence. New Delhi did not apply the same precondition to itself. Nor did it acknowledge that pro-freedom groups have repeatedly opposed the use of violence in recent years.

The Kashmiri Muslim is caricatured as violent by India’s dominant political and media apparatus. There is a refusal to recognize the inequitable historical-political power relations at play between Muslim-prevalent Kashmir’s governance by Hindu-dominant India. The racialization of the Muslim, as “Other” and barbaric, reveals the xenophobia of the Indian state. Distinctions in method and power, between stone pelter and armed soldier, between “terrorist” and “freedom fighter,” are inconvenient.

The Indian state’s discourse is animated by the prejudice that Kashmiri inclinations to violence are subsidized by Pakistan. Such misconceptions ignore that while Kashmiris did travel to Pakistan to seek arms training, such activity was largely confined to the early days of the armed militancy, circa late 1980s through the mid-1990s. Pathologies of “violent Muslims” legitimate the discursive and physical violence of the Indian “security” forces, which is presented as necessary protection for the maintenance of the Hindu majoritarian Indian nation.

Witnessing

I have spent considerable time between July 2006 and July 2010 learning about Kashmir, working in Kashmir. In undertaking the work of the International People’s Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir, I have travelled across Kashmir’s cities and countryside, from Srinagar to Kupwara, through Shopian and Islamabad (Anantnag), with Parvez Imroz, Zahir-Ud-Din, and Khurram Parvez.

I have witnessed the violence that is perpetrated on Kashmiris by India’s military, paramilitary and

police. I have walked through the graveyards that hold Kashmir's dead, and have met with grieving families. I have sat with witnesses, young men, who described how Indian forces chased down and executed their friends for participating in civil disobedience. I have met women whose sons were disappeared. I have met with "half-widows" [women whose husbands have been "disappeared" — ed.]

I have spoken with youth, women and men, who are enraged. I have also spoken with persons who were violated by militants in the 1990s. People's experiences with the reprehensible atrocities of militancy do not imply the abdication of their desires for self-determination. The Indian state deliberately conflates militancy with the people's mass movement for liberation.

I have met with torture survivors, non-militants and former militants, who testified to the sadism of the forces. Men who had petrol injected through the anus. Water-boarding, mutilation, being paraded naked; rape of women, children and men; starvation, humiliation, psychological torture. An eagle tattoo on the arm of a man was reportedly identified by an army officer as a symbol of Pakistan-held Azad Kashmir, even as the man clarified the tattoo was from his childhood. The skin containing it was burned. The officer said, the man recalled: "When you look at this, think of Azaadi."

A mother, reportedly asked to watch her daughter's rape by army personnel, pleaded for her release. They refused. She then pleaded that she could not watch, asking to be sent out of the room or be killed. The soldier pointed a gun to her forehead, stating he would grant her wish, and shot her dead before they proceeded to rape the daughter.

Who are the Indian forces? Disenfranchised caste and other groups, Assamese, Nagas, Sikhs, Dalits (erstwhile "untouchable" peoples), and Muslims from Kashmir, are being used to combat Kashmiris. Why did 34 soldiers commit suicide in Kashmir in 2008, and 52 fratricidal killings take place between January 21, 2004 and July 14, 2009? Why did 16 soldiers commit suicide and two die in fratricidal killings between January and early August in 2010?

Laws authorize soldiers to question, raid houses, detain and arrest without bringing charges, and to prolong incarceration without due process. They blur distinctions between military/paramilitary, "legality"/"illegality." Citing "national security," Indian forces in Kashmir shoot and kill on uncorroborated suspicion, with impunity from prosecution.

Yet revoking the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, for example, will not stop the horror in Kashmir. India's laws are not the primary contention. India's political and military existence in Kashmir is the issue. Legal impunity is the cover for the moral impunity of Indian rule. Human rights violations in Kashmir will not stop without removing the military. The military cannot be removed without surgically rupturing India's will to power over Kashmir.

Is the military willing to withdraw from Kashmir? Since 2002, the Government of India has procured five billion U.S. dollars in weaponry from the Israeli state — a colossal sum for India, where 38% of the world's poor reside and where eight of the country's poorest states are more impoverished than the 26 poorest countries of the African continent. Five billion dollars, in addition to the other monies and resources invested in the militarization of Kashmir, do not evidence an intent to withdraw.

Inflexible Diplomacy

Yet India needs to make the "Kashmir problem" disappear. India's diplomacy is directed toward assuming a role as a world power, a world market, and a world negotiator in global politics. India is

also seeking a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

What constitutes India's dialogue with Kashmiris in conditions of extreme subjugation? The Government of India has scheduled a hurried time frame in propelling Track II diplomacy into success, to secure a proposal for resolution that is acceptable to India and Pakistan and, ostensibly, to Kashmiris. The terms of reference set by New Delhi exclude discussions of self-determination or heightened autonomy, boundary negotiations, the Siachen glacier and critical water resources, and renegotiations of the Line of Control.

New Delhi and Islamabad appear to be in collusion. If Pakistan overlooks India's annexation of Jammu and Kashmir, India would be willing to forget Pakistan's occupation of another fragment of Kashmir. For the Government of Pakistan, however, Afghanistan is the current priority, not Kashmir. Conversations on the phased withdrawal of troops by India and Pakistan at the border, local self-government, and the creation of a joint supervision mechanism in Jammu and Kashmir, involving India, Pakistan and Kashmir, are at an impasse.

The Government in New Delhi is looking to neutralize Kashmir's demand for self-determination or unabridged autonomy, pushing forward a diluted "autonomy," seeking to assimilate Kashmir with finality into the Indian nation-state. New Delhi is seeking buy-in, which it hopes to push through using the collaborator coterie in Srinagar. Local self-government would be New Delhi's compromise — a weak autonomy — with a joint supervisory apparatus constituted of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

New Delhi hopes that the Kashmiri leadership, including pro-freedom groups, can be restrained for a price, and weakened through infighting. Certain segments of the pro-freedom leadership, throughout history, have lacked vision, honesty, and the ability to prioritize collaboration for justice and peace in Kashmir. Certain segments of the religious and political leadership have been unable to collaborate meaningfully with civil society, with observant Muslims and those irreligious, and with non-Muslims.

The spiritual commitment to justice in Islamic tradition has receded as religious determinations embrace instrumental political rationality. The determination of what "freedom" is has been deferred since 1931; instead there has been a focus on immediate and small political gains. This has plagued and rendered ineffectual segments of the complex Hurriyat (Freedom) alliance in the present, which is often unable to capitalize on the exuberant people's movement on the streets and pathways of Kashmir.

Segments of the pro-freedom leadership have focused on New Delhi rather than Kashmir civil society. New Delhi has fixated on enabling this dynamic, using vast resources to create a collaborator class in Srinagar that undermines the will of the Kashmiri people. And while Pakistan's politicians have pointed to India's injustices, they have not reciprocally addressed issues in the management of Pakistan-held Kashmir, including the deflation of movements for the unification of Kashmir.

The crisis of state in Pakistan, and the role of its ruling elite in vitiating people's democratic processes, remains a pitfall for regional security. The logic that Muslim-prevalent Kashmir must either stay with secular India or join Muslim-dominated Pakistan is configured by India's and Pakistan's internal ideological needs and identitarian politics. Neither is inevitable. Neither speak to the foremost aspiration of Kashmiris.

The Government of India's "inclusive dialogue" this summer has systematically disregarded Kashmiri civil society demands, thrusting a violent peace brokered by New Delhi's agents of change.

New Delhi has invited various Kashmiri stakeholders from civil society as well. Their articulations, however, have not shifted the agenda, even as bringing people to the table is used to legitimate India's visage of inclusivity.

What Kashmiris Want

What do a majority of Kashmiris want? First, to secure a good-faith agreement with New Delhi and Islamabad regarding the right of Kashmiris to determine the course of their future, set a time frame, and define the interim conditions necessary to proceed.

Following this, civil society and political leaders would put in motion processes to educate, debate and consult with society, including minority groups, in sketching the terms of reference for a resolution, prior to negotiations with India and Pakistan.

Significantly, pro-freedom leader Syeed Ali Geelani's statement of August 31 sought to shift the terms of engagement, not requiring the precondition of self-determination or the engagement of Pakistan. Unless New Delhi responds, the protests in Kashmir will continue. Geelani's statement, supported by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, testifies to this. The mood in the streets testifies to this.

New Delhi's current approach repudiates what Kashmiris want. The Government of India's "inclusive dialogue" this summer does not recognize Kashmir as an international dispute. Nor does it include: an immediate halt to, and moratorium on, extrajudicial killings by the Indian military, paramilitary and police; an immediate halt to, and moratorium on, the use of torture, kidnapping, enforced disappearance and gendered violence by the Indian military, paramilitary, and police; a plan for the release of political prisoners, the return of those exiled, and contending with the issue of displacement; agreements on an immediate "soft border" policy between Kashmir, India and Pakistan, to enable the resurgence of Kashmir's economy; agreements to non-interference in the exercise of civil liberties of Kashmiris, including the right to civil disobedience, and freedom of speech, assembly, religion, movement and travel.

New Delhi has refused to acknowledge the extent of human rights violations, and how they are integral to maintaining dominion. New Delhi has not explained why militarization in Kashmir has been disproportionately used to brutalize Kashmiris, when ostensibly the Indian forces are in Kashmir to secure the border zones.

India's "inclusive dialogue" does not include a plan for the proactive demilitarization and the immediate revocation of all authoritarian laws. Nor does it include: a plan for the transparent identification and dismantling of detention and torture centers, including in army camps; a plan for installing a Truth and Justice Commission for calculating loss and for political and psychosocial reparation; a plan for international and transparent investigations into unknown and mass graves constituting crimes against humanity committed by the Indian military, paramilitary and police. Such omissions are a travesty of any process promising "resolution."

Islamophobia and India's Crisis

Kashmir's claims are historically unique and bona fide. But history — the United Nations Resolutions of 1948, the promise by India's first Prime Minister Nehru for a plebiscite (to rethink the temporary Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India by the Hindu-descent Maharaja, Hari Singh), Article 370 of the Indian Constitution [which gave Kashmir the right to live under its own laws — ed.] has been

jettisoned by an amnesic India. Its official nationalism seeks to rewrite history, affixing Kashmir to India, to overwrite memory. Within the battlefields of knowledge/power, official "truth" becomes the contagion sustaining cultures of repression and mass atrocity, creating cultures of grief.

New Delhi has been the self-appointed arbitrator in determining the justifications of Kashmir's claims to freedom. The Indian state is apprehensive that any change in the status quo in Kashmir would foster internal crises of gigantic proportion in India. Across the nation there is considerable discontent, as dreams and difference are mortgaged to the idea of India fabricated by the elite. Kashmir cannot remain India's excuse to avoid dealing with its own internal matters.

Adivasis (indigenous peoples), Dalits, disenfranchised caste groups, women, religious, ethnic and gender minorities are fatigued by the nation's deferred promises. Forty-four million Adivasis have been displaced since 1947. Central India is torn asunder, and as Maoists are designated as the latest "national threat," national memory forgets the systematic brutalization of peoples in the tribal belt that led to a call to arms. Then there is the Northeast, Punjab, the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, riots against Christians in Orissa, farmer suicides, the plight of peasants and Adivasis of the Narmada Valley where dams are not the "temples of India," but its burial grounds.

Indian civil society decries that Kashmir is not deserving of autonomy or separation, as it, as an assumed Islamist state, would be a threat to India's democracy. Dominant Indian (left-oriented) civil society must rethink its characterization of Kashmiri civil society as prevalently "Jamaati." Jamaat is Arabic for assembly. "Jamaati" is used by Indian civil society to imply Islamist or fundamentalist. The reference can often be translated as Muslim = Jamaati, and Muslim-observant = fundamentalist.

To assume that a Muslim-majority state in Kashmir will be ruled by Islamist extremists in support of global terror reflects majoritarian India's racism. Indians of Hindu descent too easily overlook that India's democracy is infused with Hindu cultural dominance. Indian civil society assumes that Islam and democracy are incompatible, supported by the inflamed Islamophobia in the politics of the West. Importantly, India forgets that in its own history with the British, freedom fighters had noted that the oppressor cannot adjudicate when a stateless people are "deserving" of freedom.

Freedom is fundamentally an experiment with risk that Kashmiris must be willing to take. The global community must support them in making such risk ethical. Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim majority space. The population of India-held Kashmir was recorded at approximately 6,900,000 in 2008, of which Muslims are approximately 95%. Kashmir's future as a democratic, inclusive and pro-secular space is linked to what happens within India and Pakistan.

Kashmiris who wish to be separate from India and Pakistan must assess the difficult alliances yet to be built among Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, and among Muslims and Hindu Pandits, Dogra Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, indigenous groups and others. Then there is the question of what lies ahead between Indian-held Kashmir and Pakistan-held Kashmir. Minority groups, such as Kashmiri Pandits, must refuse the Indian state's hyper-nationalist strategy in using the Pandit community to create opposition between Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir, as part of its strategy to religionize the issue and govern through communalization.

Where is the international community on the issue of Kashmir? In present history, Palestine, Ireland, Tibet and Kashmir share common features. In Tibet, 1.2 million died (1949-1979), and 320,000 were made refugees. In Ireland, 3,710 have died (1969-2010). For Israel, the occupation of Palestine has resulted in 10,193 dead (1987-2010), with 4.7 million refugees registered with the United Nations (1947-2010). In Kashmir, 70,000 are dead, over 8,000 have been disappeared, and 250,000 have been displaced (1989-2010).

During British Prime Minister David Cameron's recent visit to India, he was asked to refrain from bringing up the "K" word. United States President Barack Obama's proposed visit to New Delhi in November is already laden with prohibitions, India's rule in Kashmir and its larger human rights record among them. As well, right-wing Hindu advocacy groups have been successful in securing the silence of many on Capitol Hill on the issue of Kashmir.

The Kashmiri diaspora has been partly effective in bringing visibility to the issue, even as the community remains ideologically and politically fragmented. International advocates have propagated an "economic" approach to "normalcy." This avoids the fact that militarization impacts every facet of life, making economic development outside of political change impossible.

Kashmiris are caught amidst world events, regional machinations, and the unresolved histories of the Subcontinent. In 2010, as of September 23, 351 soldiers from the United States have died in Afghanistan, while the United Kingdom sustained 92 fatalities. Of paramount concern for both is bringing their forces home without compromising the principles of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) operations in the region. To accomplish this would require that Pakistan move sizeable forces from the Indo-Kashmir-Pak border to the Af-Pak frontier. This cannot be done, however, without cessation in Indo-Pak hostilities, which requires resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Kashmir's resolution, however, cannot mean a sanction to Pakistan's encroachment on Afghanistan, which, given the political situation in the region, remains a highly likely possibility. For the United States and India, the containment of China is another issue, also linked to Kashmir.

The Indian state's military governance penetrates every facet of life. The sounds of war haunt mohallas [neighborhoods —ed]. The hyper-presence of militarization forms a graphic shroud over Kashmir: Detention and interrogation centers, army cantonments, abandoned buildings, bullet holes, bunkers and watchtowers, detour signs, deserted public squares, armed personnel, counter-insurgents, and vehicular and electronic espionage. Armed control regulates and governs bodies.

It has been reported that, since 1990, Kashmir's economy has incurred a loss of more than 1,880,000 million Indian Rupees (\$40.4 billion U.S.). The immensity of psychosocial losses is impossible to calculate. The conditions of everyday life are in peril. They elicit suffocating anger and despair, telling a story of the web of violence in which civil society in Kashmir is interned.

For India, constituting a coherent national collective has required multiple wars on difference. National governance determines territory and belonging, disenfranchising subaltern claims. Local struggles for self-determination are brutalized to reproduce obedient national collectives. Systemic acts of oppression chart a history, as relations of power are choreographed by nation-states in the suppression of others. Massacre, gendercide, genocide, occupation, function within a continuum of tactics in negation/annihilation.

India's relation to Kashmir is not about Kashmir. Kashmir's aversion to being subsumed by the Indian state is not reducible to history. If violence breaks lives, Kashmir is quite broken. If oppression produces resistance, Kashmir is profusely resilient. From Michel Foucault to the African thinker Achille Mbembe [who coined the term "postcolony," — ed.] and so much in between, we are reminded of the myriad techniques in governance that seek to subjugate, while naming subjugation as subject formation, as protection, "security," law and order, and progress.

Realpolitik triumphs against a backdrop of persistent refusal. Through summer heat and winter snow, across interminable stretches of concertina wire, broken windowpanes, walls, barricades, and checkpoints, the dust settles to rise again. The agony of loss. The desecration of life. Kashmir's spiritual fatalities are staggering. The dead are not forgotten. Remembrance and mourning are

habitual practises of dissent.

"We are not free. But we know freedom," KP tells me. "The movement is our freedom. Our dreams are our freedom. The Indian state cannot take that away. Our resistance will live."

Angana Chatterji

P.S.

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