

# Kashmir in an Era of Dying Democracy

Tuesday 25 August 2020, by [JUNAID Mohamad](#) (Date first published: 23 March 2020).

## I.

**Late last November, after months of being cut off from Kashmir, I managed to get through to an old friend in my hometown in South Kashmir over a rickety landline connection. There was clicking, popping, and static in the line. “These sounds you hear,” my friend said matter-of-factly, “are coming from third-party interference.” I understood that Indian agencies were listening in. We tried to keep the conversation short and mostly about how our families were doing.**

“Is it dead there as well?” he said finally, sounding exasperated and unable to control himself any longer.

“What is dead?” I asked, confused.

“Democracy! Is it dead everywhere?”

Dark humor and cynicism have become part of Kashmiri political culture. Understandably, a society cruelly suppressed for decades should be expected to adopt a weary attitude toward the world. After all, “the world” has also largely maintained an indifferent attitude toward the suffering of societies like Kashmir. The months-long military siege and communication lockdown that India imposed in August 2019 to remove Articles 370 and 35A, and effectively annex Kashmir, to which my friend was alluding, had only exacerbated a sense of political futility.

“The world has moved on to the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” he said, as his voice began to break, “And, here we are, still trying to convince India that colonialism and military sieges are indecent and immoral, and so passé.”

As a Kashmiri, it feels odd to mourn the death of democracy. It is odd because democracy is something Kashmiris have long been denied by India, ostensibly the “world’s largest democracy.” How does one mourn the loss of something one never had! And, how does one reconcile with the fact that India’s colonial crackdown against defenseless Kashmiris, who are no threat to the Indian people, is backed by an electorate, hundreds of millions in number, which has given an unprecedented mandate to a hateful majoritarian regime!

Was my friend possibly referring to how “democracy” is wielded by the powerful in pursuit of the most undemocratic ends? On August 5, 2019, India’s home minister declared in the Parliament that Articles 370 and 35A were defunct and the historic state of Kashmir had been degraded into two federal territories. The Article 370 was a renegotiation of the terms of Kashmir’s 1947 accession to India, signed by an unpopular feudal monarch and conditionally endorsed by a set of Kashmiri politicians, especially Sheikh Abdullah. Article 370 provided a framework that would recognize the “special circumstances” under which Kashmir had come under Indian control, and thus guarantee Kashmir’s autonomous status.

The “special circumstances” was essentially euphemism for invasion and annexation, since India had no valid claim on Kashmir, neither based on the communal demographic logic of the partition India had agreed to, nor the democratic logic that would most likely have left Kashmir independent. Under 370, Kashmir was to have its own PM, Sadr e Riyasat (president), flag, and the constitution, as well as ability to formulate its own constitution and laws. Even Sheikh Abdullah, among the few Kashmiris who favored closer ties with India at the time, understood Article 370 to be unchangeable. It could only change when the final status of Kashmir was determined through the plebiscite that the Indian leaders had pledged and which several UN Security Council resolutions had called for. In effect, Kashmir as a “special” state underscored that Kashmir was not a state of India. The crucial Article 35A was a part of Article 370 that gave the elected legislature of Kashmir the power to determine Permanent Residency requirements in Kashmir.

The abrogation of these articles denied Kashmiris an ability to democratically determine land use and permanent residency in the state, and opened Kashmir for Indian settlements. The move was accompanied by a military siege and communication lockdown in Kashmir, clearly showing that India intended to force the decision down the throats of thirteen million residents of the state. While some saw the decision as the removal of Kashmir’s autonomy and its annexation, in reality, India simply removed the last vestiges of a seven-decade-long façade it had maintained in the region. India finally acknowledged in law what was already a reality on the ground. Kashmir was annexed in 1947, when Indian military invaded and occupied the territory, and subsequently denied Kashmiris their right to self-determination. Since then, Indian rule over Kashmir has mostly looked like the management of a military occupation, involving control over everyday life, brutal counterinsurgency wars, selectively using native collaborators, treaty violations, and legal manipulation. In all this, Indians—except a few voices criminalized as “anti-national”—have aggressively backed repression in Kashmir, looked away, and tried to persuade and browbeat the world to look away as well.

## II.

“Modi wouldn’t have been able to do this,” my friend surmised, “He is just taking advantage of the chaos all around.” The sense of anxiety I felt in his voice indeed reflects the general sense of anxiety everywhere. We are living through a particularly sinister moment at present. Over the last decade, formally democratic systems around the world have given extraordinary degrees of power to deeply undemocratic forces. In most cases, these powerful political forces have tapped into the feelings of hatred for people marked as alien, as well as into the pervasive senses of precarity that mark socio-economic life under neoliberal regimes. In no small measure, have these forces also simply figured ways to game the electoral systems, or, as historian Nancy MacLean shows in her book *Democracy in Chains*, poured millions into militant campaigns designed to stonewall democratic norms. From the radical right in the US, UK, Brazil and several European countries to India’s BJP, the parties in power are systematically gutting liberal institutions, and hurriedly passing discriminatory laws that aim to shred to pieces the universal principles of human rights and liberal citizenship. In their place, these forces want to institute a permanent new order of supremacist majoritarianism—with or without actual majorities backing them.

This crisis of democracy hits people across the board, but it has globally had its most pernicious consequences on national minorities, asylum seekers, occupied peoples, and other vulnerable populations, who face wars, annexations, and deprivations. The crisis is erasing the already-frayed ideals of a collective destiny and has put even the entire planet into peril. Capturing this crisis succinctly, sociologist Saskia Sassen, in her book *Expulsions*, has pointed to the rise of new “predatory formations that produce elementary brutalities.” Sassen sees these formations as the coming together of ideologies, knowledge, and interests that deem the expulsion of certain populations necessary, not just for the continued viability of national-state security but the functioning of capitalism itself. One could easily add that supremacist majoritarian “democracies”

act as predatory formations, which have also deemed expulsion, in the form of slow genocide and settler colonialism, necessary for the continued functioning of democracy itself—or at least their notion of democracy.

As a member of one of the peoples facing an existential danger within the global order Sassen writes about, I see India's most recent political crackdown and territorial disordering of Kashmir, the longer term military occupation of the region, and the rise of fascist power in India, as providing a particularly striking moment in this larger crisis. Crisis of democracy in India has taken two forms: the historical production of states of exception as intrinsic to the existence of India as a successor state to the British Indian Empire; and, the gradual rise of Hindu supremacism as India's state ideology, which essentially demands the disappearance of minorities, especially Muslims, from the public sphere. In Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region with a long-standing movement for independence from India, these two forms interweave and reinforce each other. In Kashmir, not only is democracy denied because of the supremacist impulse within the Indian politics, but such a denial is seen as imperative for India's continued sovereignty over Kashmir. Indeed, democracy in Kashmir would mean Kashmir will be a free independent country, reflecting the political will and the historical aspirations of Kashmiris.

Perhaps the only redeeming aspect of this new assault on Kashmir is that it finally casts aside the clever Indian subterfuge that Kashmiris have no reason to demand independence, and in fact must thank their good fortune, since "because of India" they have the "elections." With the August 2019 unilateral changes in the constitution, not only are the elections under occupation—which had always been a rude joke anyway—gone, but even the pro-India native collaborator class in Kashmir, which dabbled in electoral politics, has been momentarily shut aside.

How India has treated Kashmiris resonates strongly with the trajectories of two other important contemporary global actors—US and Israel—both in terms of how they represent themselves, as well as their persistent historical amnesia around genocidal logic and violence. India calls itself the "largest democracy in the world;" US calls itself the "greatest democracy in history;" and, Israel calls itself the "only democracy in the region." All three countries see each other as "natural allies." Yet, all three have left deep-rooted legacies of, or built political support for, settler colonialism: the US has long ago completed that project against Native Americans; Israel is almost finishing their own version against the Palestinians; and India has started its own settler colonial project in Kashmir. In US and Israel, settler colonialism is framed as a choice between self-existence and justice, and is therefore ignored, or erased from historical memory. India did not have to go down that path. But as Kashmiris, when we look at India's natural allies and their "democratic" trajectories, it is not hard to despair. Supremacist majoritarianism in India merely means that the country has put a "democratic" stamp on the state decision that Kashmiris shall not exist as a people in their own land.

### III.

Much has been written to make visible the broader systemic political economy behind the rise of anti-democratic supremacist forces. It is tempting to see Kashmir in isolation from the world as a unique example, but our fate is deeply tied to what is happening the world over—not just to other similarly occupied and colonized populations, but to vulnerable peoples in general. Below, I briefly outline some of the features of the crisis of democracy and the new global predatory order that relate to the contemporary experience of Kashmiris under the Indian state.

Arguably, the crisis of democracy became visible in the aftermath of several "failed" pro-democracy, anti-occupation, and anti-oligarchic mobilizations across the world, from Arab Spring to protests in Palestine to Occupy Wall Street. These worldwide protest mobilizations were used by conservative

forces to close ranks even more and, in several cases, put their weight behind illiberal strongmen, even in states that were formally democratic. The Saudi-UAE nexus to undermine pro-democracy movements in the Arab world, and the libertarian capitalist-backed American Right are clear examples. The pro-democracy and anti-oligarchic protests, however, were not the cause of the crisis, but momentary interruptions in the obstinate structures of power—dictatorships, unregulated corporate greed, or the normalized abnormalities of military occupations. In form and content, the crisis looks very much like a return of fascism, which tends to include a belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, a contempt for democracy, obedience to a strongman leader, and demagoguery as governance.

In this light, when supposedly liberal Indian experts admonish Kashmiris that the latter's protests in 2008, 2010, and 2016, demanding the end to the occupation and for azadi (freedom), had given fillip to Hindu nationalism in India, I find it akin to putting the cart in front of the horse. Even before BJP came to power, India had been in the grip of a Hindutva inspired territorial nationalism, which had denied Kashmiris their right to self-determination and had been the foundational source of Kashmiri protests. Scholars have traced the historical roots of the fascist model of politics in India to British colonial policies, but its recent successes, in my view, are in line with principally two normative and socio-economic failures worldwide.

First, there is a radical decline of the rights discourse and the liberal norms, based on which formally democratic states measured themselves and others. While "democracies" always denied rights to the peoples they had occupied, colonized, or enslaved, in formal terms the rights discourse was upheld to burnish the "civilized" or the democratic self-image. The rights discourse was upheld even to the extent of justifying war, seen as an act of "saving," as anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod wrote, critiquing the colonial feminist justification for the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Within the rights discourse, "human rights" had come into prominence but its problems are well known. As philosopher Jessica Whyte argues in her book *The Morals of the Market*, "human rights" discourse, under the neoliberal framework, was meant to undercut demands for right to self-determination and right to social welfare, to depoliticize civil society, and to open up new markets for global finance and capital. Legal historian Samuel Moyn in his book, *Human Rights in an Unequal World*, has made the argument that the "human rights" discourse shifted attention away from a commitment to material equality and social justice.

What is apparent in this stock-taking of human rights discourse, is that the key ideals of self-determination, material equality and social justice—which have been the organizing horizons of political mobilization for vulnerable populations around the world, including Kashmiris—are seen as threats to "order" and "civilization," and therefore subject to punitive control and counterinsurgency wars. But as we see today, even the limited sphere of "human rights," conceptually restricted to the state's responsibility to not violate political rights, is being whittled away as a norm. Kashmir, where human rights abuses were already rife under the occupation, has been flung into a legal purgatory, where an entire people's right to existence has been turned into a question. It is not simply that Indian courts deny habeas corpus applications of thousands of detained Kashmiris, but the courts have returned the power to adjudicate whether Kashmiris can have political rights, or basic rights of life itself, to a regime which sees Kashmiri political identity, and Kashmiris themselves, as threats to the Indian state.

Second, the principle of equality itself appears to have become moot in an era of extreme inequality. In formally democratic states, most of the new wealth generated has gone to the already wealthy. In India, where economic inequality has historically been reinforced by socially sanctioned inequality in the form of caste and communal hierarchies, the outcomes have been extreme. In a 2017 paper, Thomas Piketty and Lucas Chancel used historical tax data to show that Indian society had moved from British Raj to marginally effective redistributive policies in the postcolonial period, and since

late 1980s toward a “Billionaire Raj.” Oxfam has reported that the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. 73% of the wealth generated in 2018 went to the richest 1%. 67 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their “wealth.” Meanwhile, the number of billionaires in India increased from only 9 in 2000 to 101 in 2017. Billionaires’ fortunes increased by almost 10 times over this last decade, and their total wealth was higher than the entire Union budget of India for the fiscal year 2018-19. At the same time, 63 million Indians are pushed into poverty every year because of healthcare costs—almost two people every second.

The concentration of wealth at the top has taken place through crony financial control over state institutions. The political parties and crony capitalism have almost melded into one. In all the elections since 2014, Modi-led BJP has spent billions of dollars and consistently outspent all their opponents combined 10:1 in election campaigns. In the aftermath of BJP government’s opportunistic “reform” of campaign finances in 2017 and 2018 and the floating of electoral bonds, his party received the largest share of anonymous corporate donations (9 times more than the Congress party) and a huge influx of overseas (mostly upper-caste diasporic) contributions. Almost half of the \$8.7 billion spent on the 2019 election came from BJP’s media blitz and “roadshows.” In India, where cash-for-votes is rampant, a political party’s financial power seamlessly translates into electoral power.

It wasn’t surprising then that Modi’s corporate backers would publicly declare their intention to “invest” in Kashmir, to help the Modi regime give a “development” spin to what was patently an assault on Kashmiri people. His diasporic Indian supporters also became activated, defending India’s actions worldwide and seeking to roadblock diasporic Kashmiri efforts to mobilize international attention. Meanwhile, poorer Indians were asked to wait, that their time will come, and, that they will see their vikas or development, but only after “national problems,” like Kashmir, Pakistan, and Muslims, are solved.

Third, democracy, it was assumed, was premised on a free and fair deliberation of ideas, especially those ideas that affected people’s lives materially. However, corporate-run media’s overwhelming mediation of public sphere has ensured that there is little correspondence between political ideas and an electorate’s ability to make informed decisions. Instead of reflecting issues that emerge from the public sphere, corporate-run media sets the agenda for what the public should be discussing and what should be considered a taboo. Globally, this has meant, for instance, a strange obsession with notions like “fiscal austerity,” given that it is evoked when denying public amenities to the poor and not when the rich are given tax breaks, or rewiring public opinion on problems that require humane solutions—questions like asylum and refuge—with the paranoid logic of security.

Indian media, even at its best, has hardly left any significant evidence of ever having collectively spoken truth to power. In the last decade, however, the bottom has completely fallen off underneath it. Even the most powerful media spaces in India, which aren’t dependent on government dole, cut a pathetic figure—from practically worshipping Modi to becoming cheerleaders of genocidal violence. As Hindutva thugs go around murdering and assaulting on the streets, Indian media plays dog-whistle campaigns against minorities, justifies the state’s hounding of dissident intellectuals, and tells their audiences that they must blame “both sides” in anti-Muslim pogroms. Even in those moments when Indian media appears not to use the supremacist idiom of the Hindu Right, they “criticize” its violent manifestation on the streets only so far as it hurts India’s image abroad.

On Kashmir, much of Indian media has been at the fore front of baying for a harsher crackdown than is already in place. Over the past decade, India’s English and Hindi language news channels have—and it has become a kind of morbid ritual every evening—given unlimited freedom to some of the crudest mouths to whip up hatred against Kashmiris. After August 2019, however, when India’s

crackdown in Kashmir began to draw criticism from abroad, these news channels tried to give it a spin. As Kashmiri journalists and media on the ground in Kashmir were put under the communication lockdown for months, Indian media monopolized the Kashmir reporting, accepting Modi's framing of the August 2019 events. Couching Hindu nationalism in a progressive-sounding cloak, and perverting liberalism itself, Indian news anchors hectored global media for questioning Modi's actions, suggesting his intent was "economic development" and "women's rights" in Kashmir. Some went so far as to claim that the removal of Articles 370 and 35A will ensure "Dalit and gay rights," shamelessly transferring the burden of India's deep rooted history of casteism and homophobia onto Kashmiris.

If Indian media—except a few independent ones—have acted as cheerleaders of majoritarian supremacism, Indian judiciary has played no less a part. Led by a venal former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Indian judges have not only watched with smug satisfaction the evisceration of constitutional principles at the hands of Modi regime, but actively aided it. Instead of practicing checks and balances, different branches of the Indian government seem to have become willing cogs in the Hindutva machine—of course, greased by promises of post-retirement benefits. Throwing all propriety out the door, for instance, Modi rewarded the compliant chief justice with a seat in the upper house of the Indian parliament, and the latter shamelessly accepted it.

#### IV.

All this begs the question: how do regimes like the one led by Modi, that largely serve crony capitalist interests, survive in so-called "democratic" states, and why hasn't an effective politics based on such gross inequality emerged in India? (At least in the US, Bernie Sanders's two campaigns have provided an alternative vision to supremacist majoritarianism and neoliberal orthodoxy). It seems that as the poor among the dominant national majorities watch the growing inequality, and as they find they have little power to change their material conditions, their dominant identity becomes a crutch to hang on to. Belief in the supremacy of one's identity becomes a powerful antidote to yearnings of material well-being. For dominant groups, ability to impose violence on marginalized groups becomes an alternative and acceptable form of politics—instead of seeking to secure rights and access to amenities generally. Here, states and their majority groups see minority groups either as "free loaders" or as "impediments to prosperity," and therefore fit for expulsion.

In India, under the aegis of Hindu Right, supremacist ideology emerged in a colonial context, but its current power is linked to the cultural-symbolic insecurity of the minority upper-caste Indians. While their material and political dominance is well-entrenched, they are having to increasingly explain to the historically marginalized their disproportionate power, something they had previously sacralized based on religious tradition or notions of intrinsic worth. To borrow words from Ranajit Guha, an Indian historian, the upper-caste power is "dominance without hegemony." Hindu rightwing has spent over a century inventing traditions and signs of cultural superiority, often in competition with the proponents of Western and Islamic superiority. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century such a discourse looks bizarrely out of place, like the claims of Indian "scientists" who talk of ancient India's mastery of space travel, test-tube fertilization, stem-cell research, and guided-missile technology. To evade the uncomfortable questions from within, Hindu Right goes for the convenient; it deflects attention by fueling hatred toward its favorite trifecta of bogeymen: Muslims, Kashmiris, and Pakistan.

Much of Hindu Right's supremacist discourse is publicly disseminated by the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), which is the world's largest paramilitary rightwing militia with millions of members. Inspired in equal parts by German National Socialism, Revisionist Zionism, as well as by its own deep-rooted casteist Aryan ideology, the RSS believes in not just the supremacy of Hindu religion over other religions in India, but also the racial supremacy of upper-caste Hindus over all

others. The RSS trains its storm troopers to see Indian Muslims as foreigners, who must be expelled or subdued. It is the mothership of a large family of interlinked Hindu nationalist organizations, including the BJP. The RSS has systematically taken over the crucial cogs of the Indian establishment, from bureaucracy and military to the media, think-tanks, and “cultural” organizations. Out of BJP’s 53 government ministers, 71 percent are from the RSS, including the most significant ones like the home and the defense ministers, not to mention that Modi himself is a lifelong member.

RSS’s Hindutva ideology and its reliance on violence have inexorably led Modi to adopt policies that have, to his chagrin, begun to dampen the early enthusiasm of his pro-market liberal columnists. These columnists had even whitewashed Modi’s direct complicity in the anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002 in Gujarat where he was the chief minister, asking his critics to “give him a chance,” that he could do better as the prime minister of India. From shock doctrine-style “demonetization” (which Modi claimed would cut Pakistani funding to Kashmiri “terrorism”), to the entirely bogus and highly expensive exercise called National Register of Citizens in the state of Assam, are all based on RSS’s warped supremacist logic. So are the cow-related lynching of Muslims and the passage of discriminatory laws like Citizenship Amendment Act, which is meant to locate and expel Muslim “infiltrators.” And, of course the jubilation in India over the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, as well as public demands for collective punishment of Kashmiris for demanding self-determination, are part of the psycho-political replacement of the possibility of a progressive politics with a reactive desire to impose violence as a displaced revenge. What else would explain Indians rejoicing the trauma inflicted on Kashmiris? You may not be able to change your own pitiable condition, but you can enjoy the violence inflicted on your behalf against those below you.

V.

Annexing Kashmir for a Hindu India has been a long-standing demand of the RSS. In Kashmir, Hindu Right’s roots reach back to the pre-1947 era, when Kashmir was under the feudal Dogra monarchy. The Dogra dynasty governed Kashmir as a Hindu state and exploited its disempowered Muslim majority subjects. By 1930s, Kashmiris had had enough of the Dogras. They rose up in a mass movement, demanding the feudalism to end and for their country to become a democratic republic. In October 1947, India demanded that the last Dogra ruler accede to India in return of military help to suppress rebellions in Kashmir and to ward off Muslim militias coming in from the North West to aid Kashmiris. He acceded, and immediately plunged Kashmir into a crisis it has still to recover from.

In the crucial months from August 1947 to mid-1948, as India annexed a major portion of the state and Pakistan took control over the rest, RSS cadres accompanied by the Dogra armed forces committed large scale ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Kashmir state’s southern province, Jammu. After their brief confrontation with Nehru in the aftermath of Gandhi’s assassination (carried out by a Hindu rightwing activist), RSS launched its first national mobilization campaign on Kashmir. However, in demanding “integration” of Kashmir, Nehru and RSS had a very similar territorial agenda; except RSS explicitly saw Kashmir’s Muslim majority as squatters on a “Hindu territory.”

On Kashmir, RSS’s main policy agenda still openly states that the “problem in Kashmir is its oppressive Muslim majority,” clearly suggesting that the “problem” will be solved when Muslims are turned into a minority or even fully expelled, for which they had already created a template in Jammu. It is no surprise then that the RSS was itching to push for a settler colonial project—which is to settle Hindus from India in Kashmir to change its demographic profile, and turn Kashmiri Muslims into a subdued minority with no political rights. Not only has the RSS worked over-time to drum up support for such a project through systematic propaganda and lies, but with Modi’s second-term majority in the government, they have the full power of the state behind them to carry it out.

Indeed, ordinary Indians who back Modi and even those who stay silent, have nothing material to gain from further assaults on Kashmiris. It is the crony capitalists who want to quickly ransack Kashmir's forests and land. But ordinary Indians feel avenged if they can see themselves in the position of dominance, even if it is a pyrrhic dominance over someone who has nothing to do with their lives, than the ones who victimize them and cheat them of their material well-being. For days after India abrogated Articles 370 and 35A, Hindu Right activists held public rallies announcing to the mostly unemployed young Indian men, who act as a reserve army of the RSS for anti-Muslim pogroms, that Kashmiri women were available to them now. They were told that with Modi at the helm, they could go take Kashmiri women and Kashmiri land, which in the Hindu Right imagination is one and the same.

To us Kashmiris, who know Indian military occupation and the imagination behind it too well, this is not just rhetoric. It is no longer a question whether the Indian settler project will unfold in Kashmir or not. One needs only look at the history of Indian rule in Kashmir to see the logical conclusion of an intrinsically colonial policy, especially under a fascist regime backed by a majority that openly tells Kashmiris to "go to Pakistan" and "leave Kashmir for India." Under Indian control, Kashmir has systematically lost its sovereignty, and Kashmiris have lost their basic human and political rights. From the beginning, Indian government policies in Kashmir have been governed by Hindu nationalists and their territorial vision of India. This is true even during Congress-led governments in Delhi. Since 1990, Indian military has turned Kashmir into a tightly controlled occupation, building infrastructure to bring the Hindu nationalist desire for demographic change to fruition.

The pace of the settler colonial project in Kashmir will be determined by whether Kashmiris are able to resist it. Indian policy has been to create small and manageable political parties in Kashmir that prevent a coherent Kashmiri political response to emerge. With no organic ties to Kashmir's historical aspirations for freedom from external control, these parties can as easily be rolled back as they are willed into being. Conversely, these parties also realize their existence is dependent on Indian establishment's security and administrative requirements in Kashmir, not on Kashmiri people's mandate. The occupation in Kashmir has systematically denied Kashmiris of their real leadership. Currently, all of the central leadership of pro-freedom Kashmiri parties are in jail or under house arrest. Thousands of political activists are in prison, and many have been hounded or killed.

Under Modi, Indian policies in Kashmir have become more brazen, precisely because of the transformations that have taken place globally. The crisis of democracy and the predatory global order has been starkly manifest in places like Kashmir for long. But its new intensity is a result of how such an order has given regimes like the one led by Modi a *carte blanche* to do what they wish to vulnerable peoples, with the expectation that these regimes will further open access to their markets. Modi is less encumbered by these global expectations than by his Hindu nationalist ideological moorings, and by his ties to Indian corporate cronies who back him. That is perhaps why even after losing his global sheen, he is still popular with Indian corporates. For Modi, Kashmir has become a symbolic space to perform majoritarian politics of ritual violence against the marginalized—primarily to retain the loyalty of his frustrated middle and underclasses at a time of extreme inequality and crony profiteering.

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