Integrating Kashmir: Modernity, Development and Sedimented Narratives

KASHMIR IN THE AFTERMATH OF PARTITION

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COLONIZING KASHMIR: STATE-BUILDING UNDER INDIAN OCCUPATION

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How to make sense of the politics and history of Kashmir since decolonization? Two new important books deal with this question and provide a detailed account of what is/was happening in Kashmir—one

of the most densely militarized regions in the world with a long history of a self-determination movement. For many years now, and these two books are part of that conversation, scholars have centered Kashmir in their analysis instead of fixating on the dispute between India and Pakistan or the internationalisation of the conflict. This change has brought new perspectives and conceptual categories to study the region. This is a much-needed corrective especially considering that scholarly work on Kashmir has relied on the 'nation-state' framework for too long.

In this review essay, I address some of the themes of these two books, focusing in particular on modernity as a hegemonic project in Kashmir. Both books deal with the constituent elements of this project including constitutionalism, democracy, human rights, secularism, law and development.[1] Yet there is, to a certain extent, an unwillingness to see Kashmir as a site for the implementation of this project. Modernity is often simply equated with human progress. Thus, any critique of modernity is fundamentally a critique of its excesses. Meanwhile, the inbuilt violence of modernity in a postcolonial setting like Kashmir emerges partly in the refusal to allow for any other radical or alternative future be even considered. For the most part, one needs to ask what modernity does. This questioning is important because, despite the overpowering violence of this project in Kashmir, modernity presents itself as a benign force. That, however, does not mean Shahla Hussain and Hafsal Kanjwal—both trained historians—let modernity off the hook, rather they, describe in excruciating detail what the nation-state, modernity's most cherished element, has done in Kashmir.

I also concern myself with the politics of these books. In other words, I ask what purpose academic writing serves in a contested political climate. I am interested in this question for two reasons: one, because of the attempts by Kashmiri scholars to challenge the knowledge produced by Indian academia, and second, to consider what this dynamic does to the study of Kashmir and what direction it has to take. First though, I will briefly summarise the two books and present what I consider to be their central concerns.

Two Stones, One Bush: Thinking about Kashmir

In her book, *Colonizing Kashmir: State-Building under Indian Occupation* (hereafter CK), Hafsa Kanjwal is direct and provocative. From the title of the book, much is immediately clear: Kashmir is under a colonial occupation and the Indian state is trying to maintain its rule through state-building. These are important parameters for her book and also inform her style. A key question that Kanjwal foregrounds in her analysis is the way India acquired Kashmir without the popular consent of the people. The argument that follows is that Kashmir is/was ruled by India through client regimes which help it to effectively control the region through a particular form of state-building, that is, the processes through which modern states expand their capacities to govern. While Kanjwal does focus on state-building, she makes it clear early on in the book that such state-building is different from nation-building, although there are some overlaps.

A classic example of a nation-building exercise is France, where peasants were turned into Frenchmen.[2] For the state-building exercise, the classic example can be Kashmir, as Kanjwal shows through a careful analysis of archival research. She focuses on the ten-year rule of Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, the Prime Minister of Kashmir from 1953-1963. Using the term *politics of life,* which she borrows from Neve Gordon's conceptualisation of Palestinian life under Israel's occupation,[3] Kanjwal notes that state-building was done through implementing economic and educational policies meant to empower the people. These policies served another purpose, as they were intended to showcase the practical benefits of integrating with India. For Indian rule to be legitimized, Kashmiris had to be convinced that such a rule was in their best interests. For that to happen, Kashmiris had to develop an emotional bond with India, and it was here that state-building was preferred over nation-building. Kanjwal highlights how state-building was used "to establish normalcy in the region, territorialize Kashmir in the Indian imagination, create economic dependency, shape Kashmiri subjectivities and culture, and manage dissent" (CK, 32). This was achieved through propaganda, producing films, coopting journalism, patronizing literary culture, managing

foreign relations with Muslim countries and notably, through repression. Despite the historical period (a little more than a decade) that Kanjwal covers, there is urgency in her writing and the book unfolds quickly.

Shahla Hussain presents her work with a more descriptive title, *Kashmir in the Aftermath of Partition* (hereafter KAP). As the title suggests, the book provides a longer history of Kashmir covering almost the whole twentieth century. The book intends to find the historical roots of the deepening estrangement between Kashmiris and the Indian state, and examines different ways in which Kashmiris have thought, and think, about freedom. In addition to showing how Kashmiris have retained the popular notion of self-determination in relation to freedom, Hussain argues that diverse understandings of Kashmiri political identity also complicate this notion. This is because, Hussain suggests, the concept is primarily limited by its political and territorial definition. However, for Kashmiris, freedom is more than self-determination. Instead, freedom is grounded in *Insaaf* (justice), *Haq* (rights), and *Izzat* (human dignity). Hussain situates these ideas of justice, rights, and human dignity in a modern language and suggests that self-determination provided people "with psychological space to question the hegemony of the nation-states treating Kashmiri destiny as a mere territorial dispute" (KAP, 185).

One of the reasons Hussain focuses on the modern history of Kashmir is to flesh out common themes through which Kashmiris think about their political future/s. She draws attention to political mobilization against the Hindu princely rulers of Kashmir (the Dogras) and how decolonisation affected the identity of Kashmiris. She argues that because "at the time of independence, India and Pakistan embraced the colonial construct of territorial nationalism, the retention of Kashmir—by any means necessary—came to seem indispensable to [their] national identity" (KAP, 3). In the later chapters, as she shifts her focus toward Indian rule in Kashmir, Hussain demonstrates how Kashmir became economically dependent on India (occasionally using the term 'occupation' to characterize Indian rule in Kashmir) and how that led to changing the political culture in the region. The change in political culture does not mean Kashmiris disassociated themselves from the myriad ideas of freedom or stopped referencing self-determination, but it helps

Hussain reinforce the point that there were conflicting understandings of "self-determination" in different temporal and spatial frames. These conflicting understandings have both normative and political underpinnings. Normative underpinnings are mostly related to the idea of justice and rights, while political underpinnings are concerned with governance, citizenship, and redistribution of policies and resources. Hussain does not exclusively focus on India-administered Kashmir but also broadens her attention to Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Kashmiris living in diaspora, and Kashmiris of various religious denominations. This attentiveness to different groups, communities, and categories is one of the great strengths of the book.

Endorsing Modernity: Politics, Religion, and Development

A common theme that both Hussain and Kanjwal engage is the narratives surrounding modernization and development in the context of Kashmir. They both also consider the question of what it means to be religious in an age where such sensibilities are considered irrational and pre-modern. Discussions on modernization, religion, development or even liberalism have animated scholarly work on Kashmir for a long time.[4] Sometimes, and because of the post-Cold War and then post-9/11 climates, some of these works had a parochial attitude. For example, Kashmir's war for self-determination and the resistance movement was regarded as terrorism or driven by Pakistan's security interests. India is usually considered to be the aggrieved party. The secular liberal framework of India's nationalism is seen as having the potential to accommodate the 'irrational' secessionist tendencies of Kashmiris. One major reason that this view garnered acceptance is as a result of how we have come to understand the idea of a modern nation-state—as a sovereign power enabled with mechanisms to look after the grievances of minorities (broadly defined).

Regardless of the political context (internal as well as foreign) in which Kashmir became part of India in 1947, what mattered was that Kashmir was now part of a sovereign modern state. It was not a sovereign territory, yet its relationship with India was not final. It was tied to a form of provinciality and in a state of political liminality. It is this

quintessential status quo that India has tried to maintain in the last seventy years. Both Hussain and Kanjwal show that to maintain a status quo, states resort to mechanisms ranging from benevolent practices like providing economic packages to inflicting direct violence. However, such mechanisms are also a form of the tactics of control deployed often against minorities. The question is: if modern nation-states have the innate capacity to accommodate their minorities, then why are there so many self-determination movements in the world? More so, why are these self-determination movements directed toward the formerly colonized countries? Perhaps a different story of the founding origins of the nation-state might provide answers to these questions.

Mamdani has recently argued that the twin developments that, in a historical sense, form the core of the modern state was; first, the ethnic cleansing of minorities—Jews and Muslims in Spain—so that a homogeneous nation could be created; and second, the colonial conquest of Americas by the Castilian monarchy of Spain. Mamdani argues that colonialism and the birth of the modern nation-state were intertwined, implying that nationalism and colonialism emerged simultaneously. In a way, even if India was decolonized and became a modern nation-state, the colonial way of thinking and doing things persisted. Mamdani probes a little more and suggests that the problem lies in embracing political modernity as it originated in Europe which initially drove them to conquer and 'civilize' the world, and then because such a mission was rejected, war and violence emerged. More importantly, this project failed and resulted in a postcolonial modernity in which the idea of nationhood flourished.[5] The idea of nationhood, nation-state, and the modern state is thus common to modernity (liberal, colonial, or postcolonial) in terms of how modernity wants to homogenize the territory. Since the focus is on homogenization, violence becomes part of modernity, and so does resistance. Nevertheless, as the homogenization project of the nation-state unfolds in its violent form through the cleansing of minorities (the Jammu massacres come to mind) or relegating them to second-class citizens (the current state of Indian Muslims offers a case here), its non-violent form takes different shapes. Much like the empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, postcolonial

colonialism relies on progress. In both books, the notion of progress is critically analyzed.

One of the most progressive documents that has come to define Kashmir, especially from left-leaning liberals, is the *Naya Kashmir* (New Kashmir) manifesto of 1944. The manifesto provides "a vision for a *modern* Kashmir" (KAP, 56, emphasis mine). Indeed, it is a document representative of modernity as it declared, among other things, the aspiration to "raise ourselves and our children forever from the abyss of oppression and poverty, degradation and superstition, from medieval darkness and ignorance into the sunlit valleys of plenty ruled by freedom, science and honest toil" (CK, 41). Apart from the somewhat flowery language, the manifesto defines emancipation in terms of political rights, economic freedom, and social justice. Kanjwal shows that Bakshi utilized parts of the manifesto in his state-building project.

Meanwhile, according to the manifesto, Kashmir was a distinct country with a Muslim majority but with significant provisions for Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Buddhist minorities. For the modernity project, the aim was to define political rights clearly. Thus, it declared the struggle of Kashmiris along class lines rather than a communal one (between Hindus and Muslims). However, its detractors like Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, an important political and religious leader, declared that the document held Kashmiri interests above Muslim interests (CK, 43). Pre-1947, Mridu Rai argues that the exclusion of Muslims from the economic and political resources of the Dogra state led to a religious sensibility that informed political mobilization. Thus, religious discourses became inseparable from the discourse of rights.[6] This pushed religion to the center of Kashmir's social and political life. Despite what the manifesto intended, there was not a neat divide between politics and religion, rather they were enmeshed together comfortably. Most of the political leaders were, therefore, comfortable in referencing religion.

With a secular outlook, Hussain regards Sheikh Abdullah's usage of religious terminology as a way to garner support for Western concepts like nationalism (KAP, 49-50). However, when a political party with a religious outlook such as the Muslim Conference asks the government to improve labor conditions, Hussain uses the word, 'appropriate' (KAP, 46)

to describe this move. The point is not only that the Muslim Conference cannot be honest about improving labor conditions, but that religion has to remain subservient to secular concerns, and that is the defining feature of progressive politics. In another instance, Hussain writes that, "Abdullah's instrumental use of religion to popularize 'self-determination,'… was meant to reach a wider Kashmiri audience by tying the plebiscite demand to their religious sensibilities" (KAP, 197). Yet, when a party like Jama'at-e Islami does something similar, Hussain writes that their politics must be dissociated from the articulation of the religious identity of Kashmiris (KAP, 295). Religion has no value of its own and when it has, it has to be tied to politics. At times, it becomes difficult to see Hussain's critical gaze, especially when she writes about the intersection of politics and religion. She seems herself to be deeply informed by secularization theory and secular conceptuality. In fairness to Hussain, she does advance a very important argument that the doctrine of secularism was spread to bring "Kashmiris culturally closer to India through accelerated political and financial integration" (KAP, 149).

Kanjwal is more alert to such theorization, which also informs her writing. Kanjwal argues that through state-led advances in education, "the [Indian] government attempted to shape a secular, modern Kashmiri subjectivity" (CK, 161). This led to fears that the state was undermining the Muslim identity of the community. Yet, Kashmiris utilized state-led reforms for their own ends. Nevertheless, such attempts at shaping political subjectivity can be also read as part of the expanding regulatory capacity of the Indian state. Kanjwal gives a detailed account of this development that took place during the 1950s under Bakshi's regime. She then asks: "how are we to understand the impact of these modernization schemes?" (CK, 150). One answer that she provides is in terms of the capabilities of state power, which in turn underscores the legitimacy of the government. Another way to look at this phenomena is to critique developmentalism in terms of what it is—a way for the modern state to lay effective control over the areas it governs.[7]

Development is important for another reason as it is a vital part of India's integration policy in Kashmir. Economic integration presented the potential for economic growth (the living conditions were, indeed,

improved) but Hussain makes a damning argument that in reality, this benefited the supporters of political elites and created a class of Indian supporters in Kashmir (KAP, 141, 144), an argument Kanjwal reiterates (CK, 156). Charges of corruption were made not only by political opponents or journalists but also by pro-government newspapers and by writers in their poems, short stories, and novels. However, it seems to me that such an understanding of corruption is rooted, in the first place, in a post-Weberian idea of modernity in which there is a distinction between family and state.[8] In Kashmir, of course, corruption takes on a notorious tone when it is used to reward political services (read affiliating oneself with India or the political establishment). Other than that, corruption is a way for ordinary people to navigate through the murkiness of the bureaucracy and the high-handedness of the police. Vishwanath argues that "corruption stems from the logic of a development model. Our moves to modernity, to development, to creating certain institutional structures either excludes many of our citizens or corrupts the society."[9] This fear or possibility of exclusion forces many to opt for a path that deviates from the institutional path as laid down by the state.

To gauge the mood of Kashmiri society regarding corruption, nepotism, and greed, Hussain and Kanjwal focus on literary works too. As a society in transition coming to terms with top-down, state-led modernization, Kashmiri intellectuals "engaged in considerable soul searching over the relationship between modernity and secularism, and their respective uses and purposes, benefits, and limits. What, they asked, is modernity?" (KAP, 152). However, the modern gaze that these intellectuals and their literary works employed is a manifestation of self-flagellation entrenched by Indian rule—something one of the giants of Kashmiri literature Akhtar Mohiuddin saw through and resisted. He wrote about Kashmir and Kashmiris without pronouncing moral judgments.

However, I want to steer the conversation on corruption and state-building in a different direction. Kanjwal tries to understand the motives of Bakshi for the path he took and allows his nephew an explanation. He says, "once Kashmir had already acceded, [Bakshi] decided that India was too powerful for poor Kashmiris to fight. So he decided *to*

get the best out of India" (CK, 62 emphasis mine). This is a common way of thinking among pro-India politicians in Kashmir when they are pushed to explain their political positions. Integration with India is a practical choice (with benefits), rather than a moral or ethical one. To put "to get the best out of India" into perspective, one can look at the *Ayyangar Committee Report* published in 1967. The committee probed corruption and traced "the emergence of the 'Bakshi Brothers Corporation,' a powerful family of traders who monopolized political power for ten years." The report states that in 1947, "the family of Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad owned a small fur business in Srinagar, generating a total income of 800 rupees per month, along with all immovable property worth 10,000 rupees. Once Bakshi became prime minister of Kashmir, however, he established a monopoly over three main government departments: transport, forests, and public works. As per the report, the value of his property increased to 1.45 crore (14.5 million) rupees approximately within ten years" (KAP, 141). The family had extended into a part of the state. Nevertheless, Kanjwal argues that narratives surrounding corruption helped India to divert attention away from the political sovereignty of Kashmir to good governance in Kashmir. More so, it allowed the Indian state to accuse Kashmiris of being deviant, since they were the ones who were corrupt.

State of the Academy, Academy of the State: Studying Kashmir

In the last two decades, there has been a greater awareness of what is being written about Kashmir in academia. This awareness has led to new methodologies and concepts being employed, but there is much more to this than what meets the eye. Within this shift there emerges a critique of disciplines (say, for example, of postcolonialism) and of scholarly work influenced by state-centric perspectives. Criticism has been directed especially toward Indian academia, who often serve as the chief experts on Kashmir within Western academic circles. If there is any pushback, that does not mean that Indian academia would endorse this critique for a better-informed analysis. Navnita Chaddha Behera's recent work on Kashmir is an apt example to think through some of these questions.[10] She endorses the view that academic expertise is state-centric and that

academia has been complicit in silencing the voices of common people. What is required, Behera tells her reader, is to decolonize the episteme and tools of research.

This is a worthwhile effort but Behera's well-intentioned efforts fall short of being truly decolonial which I have critiqued elsewhere,[11] but also because there is a clear disconnect between her theoretical insights and the factual, on-the-ground situation in Kashmir. Take, for example, her usage of the word 'separatist' to refer to the resistance movement in Kashmir. Although it *was* a widely used word in Indian media circles until recently (now they simply use 'terrorist'), it is a word seldom used on the ground by common people. Using such vocabulary is not only acquiescing to a statist agenda to delegitimize genuine aspirations but, in the long run, the consequences are also more pronounced. I want to suggest that this politics of semantics leads to a sedimentation. By sedimentation, I mean when a specific vocabulary, along with the narratives it generates, remain in use for an extended period. As a result, this vocabulary becomes entrenched, or sedimented, to the point where critiquing it becomes exceedingly challenging. Besides regimes controlling knowledge production, I am also thinking about how academic hierarchies, citational politics, and peer-review processes facilitate this dynamic.

Behera broadly divides the scholarly literature on Kashmir into three genres: the first is grounded in a security studies framework, and analyses the conflict in Kashmir from the perspective of a protracted bilateral conflict arising from the Hindu-Muslim antagonism around India's partition. The second looks at the federal framework of the Indian state, and examines the conflict through the pressures posed by the secessionist movement in Kashmir on India's territorial sovereignty. The third, Behera notes, is the self-defined Critical Kashmir Studies, which studies the everyday effects of violence and militarization in Kashmir. Regarding its promises, Behera points out the methodological choices that have the potential for breaking new ground, but criticizes it for characterizing India as a settler colonial power and writing revisionist histories of Kashmir.

Both claims need to be properly understood in terms of the two books under review here. Although Behera recognizes the potential of

Critical Kashmir Studies (both Kanjwal and Hussain associate themselves with the project as their essays feature in the two edited volumes),[12] her eagerness to dismiss fears of settler colonialism betrays her own promise of letting the Kashmiris (the subaltern) speak and listen to them. As much as the scholarly literature is struggling to adequately conceptualize Kashmir as a settler colony, there are genuine fears that Indians would be settled in Kashmir. Kanjwal is more direct in her approach towards settler colonialism and argues that "settler logic removes… notions of belongingness in an attempt to construct a new identity, an identity that is inextricably tied to the settler state" (CK, 18). For that to happen, new ideas have to be propagated like the idea of a citizen whose subjectivity can be controlled.

Kanjwal makes an effort to grapple with colonialism and settler colonialism, likely out of an awareness that established knowledge regime might critique this effort. Thus, she devotes considerable energy to theorizing these concepts thoroughly. Kanjwal asks "what does it mean to act like a colonial power instead of being a colonial power—where is the line drawn?" (CK, 23). Immediately before that, she writes that there is little articulation that India is fundamentally colonial. What does this tell us about who is writing about India? The triumph of India's colonial project in Kashmir does not stem from employing different tactics or the absence of a clear metropolis and periphery dynamic. Rather, it hinges on India's ability to project itself as non-colonial. To craft such an image, an army of experts is required who work for the nation-state, or come to realize that they are only valued when they produce knowledge helpful to the state. This dynamic does not differ from how colonial empires recruited their own knowledge producers.

Some time back, Suvir Kaul argued that the Kashmiri quest for self-determination shares significant similarities with the anti-colonial movements of the 20th century. However, he pointed out a puzzling challenge in understanding the Kashmir situation, especially when scholars who have previously analyzed anti-colonial movements attempt to grapple with it. According to Kaul, the key hindrance lies in the "self-righteous and aggressive nationalism," of this scholarship which has effectively dampened critical assessments of the state's actions and policies.[13] I

want to go a little further, and argue that such scholarship has not only dampened critical assessments, but also influenced the way scholarship comes to be written. Put more simply, as much as new emerging scholarship assesses Kashmir, it also has to continuously engage with this sedimented nationalist scholarship. This has two ramifications: it slows down the knowledge production and second, future scholarship is seen as revisionist (used pejoratively).

To give an example regarding the events surrounding the accession of Kashmir with India, Hussain writes that "the October 1947 tribal invasion forced the maharaja to appeal to the Indian government [emphasis mine]" (KAP, 66). The usage of the sedimented term 'tribal invasion' seems deliberate here but, even if it is not, Hussain inadvertently falls into a trap laid by the Indian state narrative and adopted by Indian academics. Kanjwal does a better job by looking at the events surrounding this 'tribal invasion,' the way it has been written about, and what purpose it serves for the Indian state narrative. Meanwhile, both books locate the genesis of armed rebellion in Kashmir after the 1987 elections for the local assembly. Again, a corrective is needed, since locating this in 1987 makes it a reactionary movement and immediately ties it to electoral politics. Hussain presents a lot of evidence to show that Kashmiris were engaged in armed resistance from the 1950s onwards. Saying as much also means that 1987 only popularised and expanded armed resistance. Hussain does not make such an argument but perhaps that is as much a historian can do: provide archival evidence, and it is our job to then build upon it. Regarding archives: both Hussain and Kanjwal mention the notable lack of comprehensive records on Kashmir. This intentional absence of archives has, for a long time, posed a significant challenge to the way we understand Kashmir's past.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that to purposefully think about Kashmir necessitates a critical exploration of modernity and knowledge production. They are not givens, thus enquiries need to be directed toward the hegemony of modernity and the violence of knowledge production. First

and foremost, the question that needs to be asked is what modernity and its constituent elements do. How to make sense of the violence of knowledge production? Questions like these are far from settled. Hussain and Kanjwal look at them in different ways, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. What emerges is a devastating picture of how colonial occupations work and how there is a complete disregard for people's aspirations. Recent years have only worsened Kashmir's situation.

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Endnotes

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