

## Introduction

From Zero Bridge  
 a shadow chased by searchlights is running  
 away to find its body.  
 On the edge  
 of the Cantonment, where Gupkar Road ends,  
 it shrinks almost into nothing, is  
 nothing by interrogation gates, so it can slip, unseen, into the cells:  
 Drippings from a suspended burning tire  
 are falling on the back of a prisoner,  
 the naked boy screaming, “I know nothing.”  
 The shadow slips out, beckons *Console Me*,  
 “Rizwan, it’s you, Rizwan, it’s you,” I cry out  
 as he steps closer, the sleeves of his *phiren* torn.  
 “Each night put Kashmir in your dreams,” he says,  
 then touches me, his hands crusted with snow,  
 whispers, “I have been cold a long, long time.”  
 “Don’t tell my father I have died,” he says,  
 and I follow him through blood on the road  
 and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners  
 left behind, as they ran from the funeral,  
 victims of the firing. From windows we hear  
 grieving mothers, and snow begins to fall  
 on us, like ash. Black on the edges of flames,  
 it cannot extinguish the neighborhoods,  
 the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers.  
 Kashmir is burning:  
 I won’t tell your father you have died, Rizwan  
 but where has your shadow fallen, like cloth  
 on the tomb of which saint, or the body  
 of which unburied boy in the mountains,  
 bullet-torn, like you, his blood sheer rubies

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on Himalayan snow?  
 I've tied a knot  
 with green thread at Shah Hamdan, to be  
 untied only when the atrocities  
 are stunned by your jeweled return.

—Agha Shahid Ali,  
 “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight”<sup>1</sup>

The prominent Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali's poem “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight,” written in the 1990s, captures the violence and death embedded in Kashmiri bodies and minds as the Valley became embroiled in a full-fledged insurgency against the Indian state. Thousands of young Kashmiris, disillusioned with Indian democracy, found themselves enamored of the idea of *aazadi*, freedom. Because the mass upsurge took the form of a pro-independence movement, Indian security forces responded with aggression, failing to differentiate between insurgents and civilians as they protected their nation's territorial integrity. As pain, terror, and torture gripped almost every Kashmiri home, young Kashmiris were consumed with anger, resentment, and humiliation, and expressed frustration at their loss of human dignity. With teenage passions running high, some youth decided to trek the high mountain passes and cross into Pakistan-administered Kashmir to search for weapons and join the *tehbreek-i-aazadi*, the “movement for freedom,” unaware that death awaited them at the invisible, artificial border cutting through their ancient homeland.

Ali's poem is a eulogy for one such young Kashmiri. Rizwan, the eighteen-year-old son of the poet's family friend, had died, like thousands of other Kashmiris, while crossing the line of control. Deeply shaken, the poet imagines conversing with Rizwan's shadow, wandering through interrogation centers and sites of massacres in the Valley, searching for his body. The poet consoles Rizwan, referring to a green thread he has tied to the mesh of Shah Hamdan's shrine at Srinagar, an old Sufi practice for those seeking to have a specific wish granted: in this case, that atrocities in Kashmir end so that Rizwan's restless soul can find tranquility. But the green thread has not yet done its work. Twenty years have now passed since Rizwan's death, yet peace continues to elude the contested region of Kashmir, a contingent product of the postcolonial partition of the subcontinent that created the new states of India and Pakistan. The ongoing bloodbath in present-day Kashmir and Kashmiri Muslims' growing alienation from India stands in stark

contrast to the historic year of 1947, when the popular leader Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, hoping for a peaceful and prosperous Kashmir, tied its fate to India.

Since partition, Indian nationalists have obsessively viewed unrest in Kashmir through the lens of their fears about Pakistan, rather than as a result of the Indian state's abject failure to emotionally integrate Kashmiri Muslims into the rest of the nation. Because the Indian state views Kashmir from the perspective of "national security," individuals like Rizwan who challenge New Delhi's hegemony are consistently perceived as threats; the army feels justified in eliminating such citizens to protect its borders. In contrast, Kashmiri Muslim narratives portray young men like Rizwan as heroes, willing to sacrifice their lives to secure Kashmiri honor and dignity. What do these conflicting perceptions of Kashmiri resistance reveal about India's relationship with Kashmir? Why does the slogan "Freedom!" have such an appeal for Kashmiri Muslims? Why do thousands of Kashmiris turn up at the funerals of individuals the Indian state views as terrorists? The heart of this book is a search for the historical roots of this deepening estrangement between Kashmiris and the Indian state.<sup>2</sup>

The process of partition that created the states of India and Pakistan generated animosities as well. I argue 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 its national identity. In this context, "Kashmir" has been symbolically wedded to national pride, on both sides of the artificial border.<sup>3</sup> As both new nation-states set about integrating Kashmir into their respective bodies, the retention of its territory took precedence over the needs of its people. Both India and Pakistan therefore employed coercive instruments—the police, the army, and intelligence networks—to secure centralized authority over the now-divided princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and to suppress popular resistance. The concepts of "territoriality," "state sovereignty," and "national security" have dominated the nationalist discourses on the Kashmir conflict, while the Kashmiris' thwarted aspirations, which had built over decades of oppression under multiple empires, have seemed of little importance in Indian political discourse. This book, by contrast, investigates a broad range of sources to illuminate a century of political players and social structures in contested Kashmir, and to reveal Kashmiris' myriad imaginings of "freedom," transcending the borders of the nation-states between which the region is partitioned.

But the devastating postcolonial experiences of the territory's inhabitants have also been strangely marginal not just to political discourse but to the scholarly understanding of Kashmiri resistance. Scholarship on Kashmir, to date, has largely emerged from three disciplines. Political scientists and students

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of international relations, following the lead of Indian and Pakistani governing voices, have mainly seen the Kashmir question as an intractable territorial dispute or as a national security issue. In more recent times, political analysts have presented the Kashmir conflict as a manifestation of Islamist terrorism or jihad.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists, meanwhile, have addressed the impact of violence perpetrated by the state and insurgents on Kashmiri society.<sup>5</sup> Finally, existing historical scholarship has primarily focused on the pre-1947 era of Kashmir.<sup>6</sup> This book brings together ideas, institutions, and political players that have shaped the postcolonial history of fragmented Jammu and Kashmir since the drawing of the artificial ceasefire line that cuts arbitrarily across the state. Placing the events of the last few decades in deep historical context allows us to view post-partition Kashmir not as the Indian or Pakistani states have seen it, but from a Kashmiri perspective.

Without ignoring the geopolitical currents which shape people's realities at any given moment, I take a bottom-up, people-centered approach that acknowledges the existence of conflicting and contradictory Kashmiri voices, braiding this history of internal diversity into the narrative of the Kashmir conflict. My hope is that this approach awakens readers to the larger historical currents within which real people today make decisions—and to the multiple moments in the past when those holding the levers of power at local, national, and international levels failed to prioritize Kashmiris' legitimate desires for what they later termed *aazadi*. My primary focus is on the Muslim community which includes the majority of the state residents, and whose thwarted aspirations have fueled Kashmiri resentment. However, since internal diversity is both a reality of Kashmiri life and an important theme of this work, I also investigate the views of the minority Buddhist and, especially, Hindu communities, which remain essential for understanding the seemingly intractable nature of the Kashmir conflict.

The core of this book is a close examination of the shifting postcolonial meanings of "freedom." The history of this multivalent concept reveals Kashmiris' changing worldviews as they negotiated the conflicting terrain of potential identities—Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri—each of which represented a different path to the freedom all claimed to seek. Instead of being passive spectators in the face of Indian and Pakistani power plays, I show that Kashmiris have consistently reinserted their own voices into local, national, and international narratives about the Kashmir conflict, and were and are active agents in the construction of their own sociopolitical identities. These identities have not always focused on gaining political freedom. Kashmiri political elites have often acted as mouthpieces for the nation-states, promoting their political agendas while

simultaneously heightening Kashmiri misery. When their political legitimacy was in question, the collaborators' governance focused not on improving the situation of the masses but on creating networks of patronage to gain administrative acceptability.

Although the measures puppet regimes took won over certain social groups, the inhabitants of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the majority of whom suffered exclusion from structures of power and patronage, found themselves unrepresented by the political alliance between local elites and the nation-states. Conversely, the excluded Muslim majority (on both sides of divided Kashmir and within the wider British transnational community) employed the state's unique and disputed status to challenge the territorialization of state power and sovereignty by refusing to accept the ceasefire line as a permanent international border. They constructed a resistance discourse drawing inspiration from multiple international liberation movements to legitimize their own claims. The Kashmiri transnational activism enhanced feelings of political belonging, connecting even those who have never set foot in the physical territory to an imagined "homeland." In the process of charting these local, regional, and global Kashmiri connections, I map the contours of "Kashmiri-ness" in the postcolonial era.

### ■ Kashmir and Kashmiriyat: Identity, Freedom, and Self-determination

Contestations over "Kashmir" are not limited to cartographic representation and territorial boundaries; the debates extend into the validity of multiple definitions of "Kashmir," "Kashmiris," and "Kashmiri-ness." Does the term denote the occupants of the territory? Can the term "Kashmiri" be associated with only Koshur-speaking inhabitants of the state? Is it a legal term? What qualities, positive or negative, are associated with this identity? How have the answers to these questions changed with the political, economic, and social winds blowing through the province over the last century and a half?

According to a popular legend, the geographical entity of Kashmir emerged from a struggle for power between good and evil. The waters of a mighty lake covered the Kashmir Valley. It was a pleasure spot for gods and goddesses, until one day a demon came to inhabit it. The gods intervened and killed the demon; in the course of the battle water rushed out at the place where the Hindu god Vishnu struck the mountains with his trident, making the valley habitable.<sup>7</sup> The Muslim version of the same legend credits the Prophet Solomon for ordering a genie, Kashif, to drain the lake.<sup>8</sup> As Chitralkha Zutshi argues, this legend of

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divine intervention made the Valley a “sacred space” in Kashmiri oral traditions, an idea later embraced by the Muslim mystics who presented Kashmir as a “blessed landscape of Islam.”<sup>9</sup>

As the inhabitants of the valley, called “Kashmiris” regardless of their religious affiliation, remained devoted to their sacred landscape dotted with shrines and temples, the valley and its surrounding areas were incorporated into various empires. Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs in turn shaped and reshaped its geographical contours. While Kashmiris lamented the loss of their autonomy to these repressive foreign regimes, whose mismanagement reduced Kashmir to poverty, others’ narratives denigrated Kashmiris as “worshippers of tyranny” (*zulumparast*) who lacked the will and courage to alter their deplorable situation.<sup>10</sup> These pejorative labels remained embedded in Kashmiri popular memory. Kashmiri discourses invoke such negative representations, dating from various stages of their turbulent history, creating a shared sense of lost dignity to mobilize the masses in a quest for *real* freedoms.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as British colonial domination spread to the frontiers of the South Asian subcontinent, the valley of Kashmir was mapped into the colonial landscape, and new borders and boundaries were created by outsiders once again. In 1846, the English East India Company assembled the diverse regions of the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, Ladakh, Gilgit, and Baltistan into the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Until partition the Dogra maharajas, based in Jammu, administered the state as one unit while accepting British paramountcy. The maharajas privileged their own Hindu community and excluded their majority Muslim subjects from power-sharing arrangements, a practice which generated deep resentment.<sup>11</sup> In the early twentieth century, however, a generation of Kashmiri Muslim community leaders, educated in new British and Muslim institutions and living both within and outside the princely state’s territorial boundaries, tapped into the Kashmiris’ feelings of injustice and oppression. These leaders contrasted these emotions with their supposed opposites, invoking “dignity” and “self-respect” to drive mass mobilization. As they gained momentum, the Muslim inhabitants of the princely state, although representing different sub-regional cultural and linguistic groups, claimed identification with “Kashmir” to legitimate their negotiations with the Dogra state. These trends underlay the Kashmiris’ postcolonial stance toward both India and Pakistan, as well as their shared sense of identification with their homeland.

Much of the existing historiography confines Kashmiri identity to those who speak the Kashmiri language. In analyzing the early twentieth-century history of Kashmiri Muslim mobilization, scholars have focused on Kashmiriyat, a composite identity built around an imagined history where religious communities lived

in peaceful coexistence, free from tensions and discord. Historian Chitralkha Zutshi has dismantled such definitions of Kashmiriyat, revealing that in the pre-colonial era regional political culture did not erase religious differences in favor of syncretism (the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices). Rather, Kashmiris defined their identity and sought to improve their society on the terms and via the practices of their distinctive religious belongings. In the early twentieth century, however, Kashmiri nationalists “denigrated religious affiliations in favor of an all-encompassing regional nationalism.”<sup>12</sup> Zutshi’s study shows how imbricated the links between regional and religious sensibilities were in Kashmiri political culture. Yet in the process of showing why and how Kashmiriyat was invented, she reduces its meaning to an instrumentalist political project that sought to emphasize religious syncretism in the Valley for nationalist purposes. A close study of the sociopolitical discourse of the early twentieth century reveals that the exponents of nationalism as a political strategy drew from indigenous traditions of regional and religious coexistence, in which the older mystical religious traditions of Kashmir built bridges across religiously defined communities. In other words, some Kashmiris had always held out the ideal of community coexistence, and religious affinities remained central to Kashmiriyat.

This book further contends that during the twentieth century the conception of Kashmiriyat was not monolithic. To begin with, “Kashmiri-ness,” crucially, was never restricted to inhabitants of the Valley but included expatriates who retained an emotional attachment to Kashmir and called themselves Kashmiris.<sup>13</sup> The association of expatriate Kashmiris with their homeland in the colonial era, along with transnational interactions in the postcolonial period, complicate the category of Kashmiriyat. For expatriates the significance of belonging to Kashmir and being Kashmiri transcended prevalent cultural and territorial definitions of identity and referred primarily to an emotive attachment to a homeland. I emphasize that particularly in the postcolonial era, “Kashmir” has not been just a territorial space but a political imaginary, a vision that grounds Kashmiris in their negotiations for rights not only in India and Pakistan, but also in global cultural and political spaces.

I further differentiate between cultural and political identity in analyzing Kashmir’s postcolonial history. Cabeiri Robinson focuses on the political strand of Kashmiri identity to examine Kashmiri refugees’ identification with “Kashmir.” She argues that Kashmiri Muslim refugees in Pakistan identified with “Kashmir” rather than with the new nation-state because of a pre-existing concept of territorial citizenship—the “state-subject” criteria introduced by the Dogra maharaja in 1927.<sup>14</sup> Postcolonial governments retained the policy, which allowed only residents of the state and recognized displaced Kashmiris to purchase

land and seek employment in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>15</sup> Many displaced Kashmiris hoped to return home and reclaim their lives and properties due to this state law. Patricia Ellis and Zafar Khan have asserted that “Kashmiri citizenship laws” even bind diasporic Kashmiris “psychologically and politically” with the homeland.<sup>16</sup> I build on these insights, and draw from my investigation of diverse linguistic and cultural communities in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, along with several diasporic communities who called themselves Kashmiris and claimed a shared belonging with the undivided territory of Jammu and Kashmir, although none had much connection to the Valley’s culture or language. I agree with Robinson that the state-subject category not only reinforced Kashmir’s unique position in relation to the central Indian and Pakistani states, but also enabled Kashmiri Muslims on both sides of the ceasefire line to claim a relationship with the undivided whole. These definitions of Kashmiri political identity allowed those living in Indian and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, as well as in the wider transnational community, to build a common identity around their “occupied” homeland.

The state-subject category, the basis of the political identity of Kashmiri Muslims (the most contentious issue in present-day Kashmir), is vehemently rejected by non-Muslim minorities who consider Kashmiriyat an Indian subculture. Ironically, this present-day Kashmiri Hindu political position is in sharp contrast to the “Kashmir for Kashmiris” movement initiated by their early-twentieth-century predecessors in response to outsiders’ encroachment on their jobs. It was the Kashmiri Hindus’ tireless agitation that forced the Dogra maharaja to introduce the state-subject category in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. However, the changing political dynamics of the postcolonial era, with much local power transferred to the Muslim majority, made state Hindus feel insecure about their minority status within the state. As early as the 1950s an organized agitation in Jammu supported by the Hindu nationalists demanded the abrogation of Kashmir’s special status. Yet several non-Muslims within Jammu and Kashmir rejected this Hindu nationalist stance and supported Kashmir’s autonomous position within the Indian union.

In the twenty-first century, however, as the Hindu right gained momentum in India, most, if not all, of the state’s minorities have also demanded revocation of the state-subject category, considering it a hindrance to Jammu and Kashmir’s complete merger with India. In the fall of 2019, as this book was being completed, the new Hindu-nationalist government’s unilateral abrogation of Kashmir’s special status, including Article 35A authorizing the state legislature to “make special provisions for permanent residents of the state,” legally erased this special category. However, as this book reveals, the state-subject category is an important part of



Kashmir's history and is now engraved in the Kashmiri Muslim psyche as the essence of their political identity. It supports the idea of an undivided homeland free from occupation, binding Kashmiris across ideological and territorial divides. Kashmiri Muslims, jealously insistent on the state-subject category's retention, have long feared that the discontinuation of this category would alter Kashmir's demography and transform their community into a minority. These clashing identities and different understandings of Kashmiri political identity complicate the notion of "self-determination" which has been and remains central to Kashmir's resistance discourse, producing an acerbic debate in the public arena and in the sphere of print.

At a global level, the concept of "self-determination" gained popularity after the First World War, based on Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points statement of principles for global peace. Self-determination broadly refers to the right of people to shape their own political destiny, and this is how it is employed in the Kashmiri vernacular. But it is worth noting that at its contemporary geopolitical origins self-determination was understood to be for the "weaker sections of Europe"—Belgians, Poles, Czechs—rather than the peoples of the colonial world.<sup>17</sup> Mark Mazower contends that imperialists pushed for the "limited applicability" of self-determination to non-European nations. For them, mandates or international trusteeships remained essential to train certain races to become "democratic civilized nations."<sup>18</sup> As Timothy Mitchell argues, these structures allowed imperial powers to maintain indirect control by creating a new class of "native rulers," who presented themselves as nationalists but exercised only partial sovereignty. These puppet rulers lacked popular support, but the imperial powers interpreted their participation in governance as an expression of self-determination.<sup>19</sup> "Self-determination," then, was systematically utilized as an "instrument for domination and consent"—as indeed happened in postcolonial India, which appropriated such imperial understandings of the term to exercise its hegemony in Jammu and Kashmir. The support of local elites allowed India to claim legitimacy, delay the United Nations-mandated plebiscite, and interpret a series of farcical and rigged elections as Kashmiri expressions of "self-determination." Despite this ambiguous history, however, the language of self-determination captured the imagination of Kashmiris, who embraced it to seek rights initially from the Dogra monarchy, and later from the postcolonial states of India and Pakistan.

A formidable body of scholarship on Kashmir debates the 1949 United Nations resolution, which promised Kashmiris "democratic method of a free and an impartial plebiscite" to decide "the question of accession of Jammu and Kashmir state to India or Pakistan."<sup>20</sup> Some of this work foregrounds the pluralism

of the state and highlights the contested allegiances that have complicated the long-promised granting of self-determination.<sup>21</sup> Others have suggested that the concepts of democracy and self-determination converge as the focal points of Kashmiri Muslim political aspirations.<sup>22</sup> Although these works correctly draw attention to the intractable fault lines that make self-determination more complex than it might seem, their limited political and territorial definition of self-determination does not address the emotional appeal this concept has had for Kashmiri Muslims across more than half a century. This book historicizes the meaning of “self-determination” to emphasize that Kashmiri imaginings of emancipation in different temporal frames were not confined to political freedom but also included concepts like human dignity, economic equity, and social justice.

These terms, contextualized in the regional environment of the Valley, reveal that Kashmiris’ history of exploitative relations between social groups and of subjugation at the hands of ruling colonial dynasties shaped their visions of freedom. Kashmiris equated freedom with the concept of *insaaf*, or justice, the equitable distribution of resources for material development so that the disadvantaged were not mired in poverty; *haq*, or rights, meaning that rulers should practice political ethics and be accountable to the people; and *izzat*, human dignity. Throughout the twentieth century these terms dominated popular discourses on freedom as Kashmiris envisioned a society where they would not have to undergo humiliations at the hands of the ruling power. This study shows that these ideas gained significance in the postcolonial era as self-determination moved from fantasy to real possibility with the United Nations–mandated plebiscite, and informed popular resistance in the region. As the Indian state remained focused on retaining Kashmir’s territory and denied Kashmiris freedom to shape their political future, Kashmiri imaginings of emancipation became intertwined with, but have never been confined to the limited territorial definition of self-determination (accession to either India or Pakistan). These developments politicized the meaning of “freedom,” and revealed deep schisms between majority and minority communities’ aspirations for “self-determination.”

### ■ Territorialization, Borders, and Transnational Networks

The emergence of territorial nationalism in India during British colonial rule developed, after decolonization, into a “territory of sovereignty.” Sumathi Ramaswamy traces the concept of territorialization to the sacredness associated with the anthropomorphic form of Mother India. As the colonial state fixed, measured, and mathematized the map of India with latitudes and longitudes,