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India's Obsession With Kashmir: Democracy, Gender, (Anti)Nationalism

Abstract

This article attempts to make sense of India's obsession with Kashmir by way of a gendered analysis. I begin by drawing attention to the historical and continuing failure of Indian democracy in Kashmir that results in the violent and multifaceted dehumanisation of Kashmiris and, in turn, domesticates dissent on the question of Kashmir within India. This scenario has been enabled by the persuasive appeal of a gendered masculinist nationalist neoliberal state currently enhanced in its Hindutva avatar. My focus is on understanding how the violence enacted upon the Kashmiri bodies is connected to feminised understanding of the body of Kashmir in India's imagination of itself as a nation-state. I argue that the gendered discourses of representation, cartography and possession are central to the way in which such nationalism works to legitimise and normalise the violence in Kashmir. I conclude with a few reflections on how Kashmir is a litmus test for the discourse on (anti)nationalism in contemporary India.

Keywords

Kashmir, India, Gender, Democracy, Hindu Nationalism, anti-nationalism

What is the relationship between politics and death in those systems that can only function in a state of emergency?
[Mbembe, Necropolitics, 2003: 16]

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project.
[Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 2011: 1]

1. Introduction

Historically, India as the world's largest democracy has repeatedly been credited with a distinguished record which combines the anticolonial roots of its political system, and sets it favourably against its geographical neighbours such as Pakistan which are beset with problematic and violent transfers of political power, or China with its Communist one-party state. Against this reading of India's political system as a secular, multi-party, diverse democracy, there is an alternative account which relies on a serious acknowledgement of the ways in which the state in India has always been violent towards Dalits, tribals, gender, sexual and religious minorities, people of Kashmir¹ and the North-East, to name a few. In the last three decades, this violence has become additionally layered with the force of neoliberalism and the ascendancy of Hindutva. In contemporary times, we find the new post-2014 'Modi-fied' Indian nation, a neoliberal state with a Hindutva basis and a super-enhanced idea of enforced nationalism and patriotism. The question then arises as to how this state functions as a democracy for those who are not seen to, or do not wish to, belong within it. To understand this, I focus on the specific subject of Indian democratic discourse as it relates to Kashmir in highlighting how violence and failure of Indian democracy in Kashmir is disregarded and masked by the use of nationalism and anti-nationalism.

Patriarchal visions of the nation-state are an enduring feature of the (inter)national system, since "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (Enloe 2000: 64, 44). I argue that this gendered masculinist nationalism in its many forms victimises and dehumanises Kashmiris but it also domesticates and punishes dissenting views on Kashmir within India by labelling it antinationalism. The topic of Kashmir is ever more

¹ Kashmir is the popular term used here to connote the long history and contested interpretations involved in the dispute; the state of Jammu and Kashmir is used when such a definition is needed for an argument (for further details on the nuances of terminology, see Snedden, 2015, pp.1-60).

integral to the policing of contemporary nationalism in India. Dissenting positions on the issue of Kashmir (such as pointing out how numerous Kashmiris do not identify with India or speaking in favour of ‘Azaadi’ or freedom for Kashmir) pose severe consequences in the current political climate, ranging from vilification, litigation and intimidation to outright abuse and violence.

The Indian democratic ‘management’ of Kashmir echoes the British colonial practices of centre-periphery relations, and to the way in which mass protests in Kashmir are the dominant and visible form of democratic assemblies which result in tragic cycles of deaths such that funerals and demonstrations are indistinguishable (see Kaul 2010, 2016b). Gendered representation plays an enabling, legitimising and normalising Indian state violence in Kashmir. The kinds of symbolic, representational, and epistemic violence necessary for the performance of Indian democracy in Kashmir are deeply gendered in ways that have not been exhaustively understood. Kashmir figures in Indian gendered masculinist nationalism in three interconnected realms - first, it has been the Orientalist staple of the cinematic fantasy; second, as the head of Mother India ‘Bharat Mata’ in the cartographic imaginary; and third, as the feminised landscape with a restive population which needs to be controlled, chastised, disciplined and coerced into affirming its ‘marital’ relationship with India. These perceptions are significantly persuasive to greater numbers of people in the ascendant Hindutva climate where a hegemonic masculinist idea of India, of its political leaders, and of its patriotic citizens, is becoming firmly entrenched.

2. Indian Democracy and Kashmir

The experience of democracy in India has been differentially distributed across many of its marginalised populations. Kashmir, in particular, has been a political ‘issue’ that has a longer life than that of independent postcolonial India.² On 15 August 1947, when India became independent from British colonial rule, the present-day state of Jammu & Kashmir was not a part of the Indian union. It was only on 27 October 1947, following a cross-border invasion and the involvement of Indian forces in driving back the attackers, that the instrument of accession to India came into effect. What is more, there is a complex set of political entanglements that ensued over the first few years, the result of which include the following – the territory of the erstwhile princely state effectively being divided as being under the actual control of the three nations of India, Pakistan, China; the first Indo-Pakistan war in 1947-48 and the UN Security Council resolution; the promise

² By the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar, the British sold Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh and the subsequent Hindu Dogra rule was oppressive and exploitative (see ‘March 16 1846: A nation sold’ 2010; Rai, 2004).

of a plebiscite made by the first Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru; the enduring presence of the line of control that divides Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir; and the permanent status of article 370 of the Indian Constitution which grants special autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (see Kaul, 2010; Lamb 1991, 1994; Noorani 2011, 2014; Rai, 2004; Schofield 2010; Snedden, 2015; Whitehead 2007). This autonomy was subsequently substantially eroded over the coming decades, both as a result of the changing internal dynamics between Nehru and the right-wing nationalists, and between Nehru and prominent Kashmiri leaders such as Sheikh Abdullah. This resulted in electoral interference in the state by India, the often arbitrary use of presidential powers, and the accumulation of resentment against Indians for many Kashmiris. There have been multiple wars between India and Pakistan in the last seven decades, and the continual tension along the border ‘line of control’ (LoC). The historico-political context is well documented, however, to this day, the wider Indian public is generally unaware of the specific nature of the relationship between India and Jammu and Kashmir (original provisions of Article 370), often comparing it to any other state in India.

Indian press reportage is routinely state-centric on the issue of Kashmir, “characteris[ing] it as a dispute over real estate between India and Pakistan, and a matter of national prestige” (Joseph 2000: 42). In many Indian narratives, the issue of Kashmir only figures from the late 1980s onwards when, following on from the rigging of the 1987 elections in the state (to prevent the Muslim United Front from coming to power), there was a massive uprising against India supported by militants from across the border in Pakistan and elsewhere (see Bose 2005; Dulat 2015). With the violence of 1989-90 combining indigenous resentment and Islamist insurgency in the Kashmir Valley (which is the hub of the state that has its capital in Srinagar), and under the shadow of a puzzling and controversial role played by the then Governor Jagmohan (a BJP politician),³ there was an indiscriminate use of violence by the state and those who were resisting it.

The decade of the 1990s in Kashmir was a period of extreme violence against the Kashmiri Muslim inhabitants who were, and continue to be, caught between militancy, resistance, and state oppression (see Mathur 2016). The emergency powers put into effect through the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), in Kashmir in September 1990 continue to be under operation till now (see Duschinski 2009). This act gives the armed forces of India special immunity in “a disturbed area”, and has meant no prosecutions for wanton violence and human rights abuses in a large number of cases. In spite of international condemnation and numerous judicial recommendations to

³ For journalistic accounts to the events and the aftermath, for instance, see Gulati (2016), Donthi (2016), Mishra (2000).

repeal it, this act continues to be in force in places such as Kashmir and the North-East (see Bhattacharyya 2016), where the indigenous resistance struggles are met with human rights violations and a thinly-veiled military occupation including: tens of thousands of people killed, thousands disappeared, instances of mass rapes as in the villages of Kunan Poshpora, well-documented evidence of routinised humiliation, torture camps, extrajudicial and encounter killings, mass graves, a list of massacres by place names, and the existence of half-widows (a large number of women who have to live without knowledge of the whereabouts of their husbands who may have been disappeared or killed).⁴

In the last few years, there have been cycles of summer uprisings (in 2008, in 2010, in 2016) mainly led by the youth of Kashmir, including those who pelt stones, which are met with a fierce response by way of bullets, metal pellets and other lethal means. Even a cursory glance at the physical landscape of Kashmir today reveals the strongly felt hostility and resentment against the Indian state; entire areas are covered with anti-India and pro-freedom graffiti of various kinds (see Kaul 2017b). The Kashmiris of the post-1990 generation are comprised of two main constituencies—Kashmiri Muslims who have grown up in Kashmir in an atmosphere surrounded by bunkers, barbed wires, ‘encounters’, civilian deaths, routine curfews, arbitrary suspension of telecommunications, restrictions on rights and liberties, and daily news of disturbances and crackdowns; and Kashmiri Pandits, many of whom have grown up as refugees in India away from their ancestral communities, surrounded by the ascending Hindu majoritarian redefinition of the Indian nation, inheriting the pain and loss of life of many members of their community in the 1990s. As a result, the centuries-old narrative of ‘Kashmiriyat’ as a non-communal pan-Kashmiri sense of belonging and identity has become hollowed out and is mostly appropriated by the Indian state as another legitimising narrative for claiming Kashmir as its integral part (see Aggarwal 2008; Kaul 2016a, 2017a; Rai 2004; Tak 2013; Zutshi 2004).

In contemporary Kashmir therefore, the experience of Indian democracy is marked by the two divergent strands of voting, on the one hand, and public assemblies of protest, on the other. While the Indian perspective celebrates the periodically held elections in Jammu and Kashmir as ‘a festival of democracy’, most Kashmiris consider voting in the elections for the necessity of ‘sadaq, bijli, paani’ (roads, electricity, water). The promises of good governance, employment and development are used in such a scenario as a trade-off against aspirations for the resolution of a

⁴ See reports by different human rights organisations including Amnesty International (2015), Human Rights Watch (1999, 2006), Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights (1993), International People’s Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (2009), International People’s Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir and Association for Parents of Disappeared Persons (2015). See also Batool et al (2016).

political dispute. In any case, in order to be claimed as an integral part of the ‘world’s largest democracy’ Kashmir Valley is held under occupation as one of the most militarised regions of the world, and in spite of the formal democratic practice of elections, is marked by a widespread and continuous simmering resentment which results in cycles of mass uprisings. These protests which repeat *ad infinitum* the calls for freedom (‘Hum Kya Chahte? Azaadi’, ‘What do we want? Freedom’) are, one could argue, the Kashmiri version of a festival of democracy as popular sovereignty — a democracy not of identity, but of alterity; a drawing of attention to the radical otherness of democratic aspirations that cannot be accommodated within the circumscribing of elections alone in the fraught context of Kashmir. When the protesters gather in Kashmir to chant slogans of resistance against the Indian occupation, they are aware of the inherent defiance and incitement of that public assembly. When their chants and stone pelting is met with live ammunition or metal pellets, it is already clear that they are not part of any Indian democratic imagination. Nowhere else in the world have metal pellets been used in this way against political protesters, especially targeting their eyes (see Waheed 2016). Live ammunition is hardly used in India on political protestors, whatever the provocation.⁵

When the funerals of those who die in such protests are held, the gatherings once again transform into political demonstrations and so result in funerals again. In her notes on a performative theory of assembly, Butler (2015: 156, italics original) argues that the bodies of people gathered in the public sphere are, before any utterance, itself a statement, an act of resistance: “*the assembly is already speaking before it utters any words* and its coming together is *already* an enactment of popular will”. In a hauntingly memorable formulation, she speaks of “the ungrievable [who] gather sometimes in public insurgencies of grief” (ibid.: 197); that is, those who are not seen as being worthy of mourning by the public, sometimes gather to mourn in public – making a funeral and a demonstration in some places look alike. In linking this to Kashmir, it can further be said that the funeral and the demonstration do not just look indistinguishable, but are necessarily continuous and the same. The funeral is an act of grief that folds into protest, and the demonstration is fired upon and results in funerals (Kaul 2016b). The violence that has been experienced by a majority of Kashmiri women and men in the name of Indian democracy is not limited to that which is conspicuous and easily observed. The next section highlights some hitherto unrecognised connections between gender and violence in the context of Kashmir.

⁵ A reflection from an ex-Army officer (Singh 2016):

Can we be unmoved if this had happened in any other part of ‘undisputed’ part of India? There must have been a reason why pellet guns were not used during the Jat agitation in Haryana. There must have been a logic behind security forces not firing live bullets during the Patidar and, more recently, Dalit agitations in Gujarat.

3. Gender, Violence and Kashmir in the Indian Imagination

There are various ways in which gender and violence have been studied in the context of Kashmir. The experiences of Kashmiri women have been the central theme of studies on sexual violence and abuse that has ranged from rapes and abuse by armed forces, rapes and abductions by militants, domestic abuse, instances of mass rapes (see Batool et al 2016; English 2015; Kazi 2010; Naik 2014; Shekhawat 2014). There are works that make the links between sexual warfare in Kashmir and the nature of militarised zones, that connect post-colonial democracy, securitised regimes and cultures of impunity (see Chatterji, Buluswar and Kaur 2016; Duchinski 2010; Mohanty, 2011; Mathur 2012; Zia 2014) or draw attention to how issues of gender are personally experienced by Kashmiri women and the feminist labour of witnessing (see Butalia 2002; Chatterji 2012; Dewan 1994; Kanjwal 2011; Kaul 2013b). Another line of analysis is the way in which militant women activists such as Asiya Andrabi (founder of Dukhtaran-e-Millat)⁶ and others have participated in the conflict and resistance as active agents and not only as passive victims, highlighting their complex relationship with feminism and religion (see Jeffrey and Basu 1999; Khan 2009; Marino 2010; Parashar 2009, 2011; Malik 2013). A significant thread within this refers to the various aspects of resistance offered by women campaigners such as Parveena Ahangar (co-founder of Association for the Parents of Disappeared Persons, APDP)⁷ who have worked consistently over two decades to keep the issue of enforced disappearances and the subsequent miscarriages of justice alive in the public memory and mourning of the conflict (Mathur 2016; Misri 2016; Zia 2016). In general, despite these works, mainstream feminist movement and scholarship in India has usually maintained silence around Kashmir and it is important that we challenge it. This paper not only makes an intervention in feminist debates around Kashmir but also brings to the study of Kashmir conflict a critical feminist approach that offers a more comprehensive understanding.

There is a specifically gendered nature of the exoticisation of Kashmir as a territory that results in a feminisation of the Kashmiri landscape and Kashmiri bodies. This representation of Kashmir and Kashmiris is intrinsic and ever more crucial to the 'strong' hegemonically masculinist neoliberal state of India to perform its violent democracy in Kashmir by dehumanising Kashmiris. It is this feminised understanding of Kashmir that has historically been a driver of the violent Indian nationalist urge to possess the territory of Kashmir even if it means killing, torturing and abusing the Kashmiri people. Further, since this feminised understanding of Kashmir as a woman, by

⁶ Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of the Nation) is a women-only right wing Islamist conservative group.

⁷ Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), formed in 1994, is a collective of relatives of victims of enforced and involuntary disappearances in Kashmir. See <http://www.apdpkashmir.com> [last accessed 18 March 2017].

contrast, posits the Indian state in conventionally masculinist and patriarchal terms, it makes the possession and control of Kashmir an integral part of the Indian nationalist imagination of itself. In contrast to work on gender and violence in relation to Kashmir that locates this violence in Kashmir and upon Kashmiri bodies, this article attempts to shed light upon how this violence is enabled, justified, and perpetuated in ways that are shockingly spectacular but seemingly banal. In other words, my focus is on understanding how the violence enacted upon the Kashmiri bodies is connected to feminised understandings of the body of Kashmir in the Indian state's imagination of itself. There are three specific ways in which the feminisation of Kashmir occurs, which I will focus upon here.

Firstly, there is the realm of cinematic representation, feminisation and exoticisation. Studies of Indian popular culture have analysed Bollywood's cinematic obsession with Kashmir in terms of the role played by a fetishised idea of Kashmir in the collective desires of the Indian nation (see Kabir 2005, 2009). Kashmir as a territory was not quite a part of the mainstream Indian nationalist anticolonial imagination; when India had its Quit India movement, there was a Quit Kashmir movement in Kashmir (Kaul 2010). 'We the people' of the preamble of the Indian Constitution did not include the Kashmiris in any straightforward manner if we consider the special status of Kashmir earlier discussed. This complicated political relationship of Kashmir with the Indian Union was, from the very outset, supplanted in the Indian cultural imagination by a cinematic imaginary of an exoticised feminine Other. Especially from the 1960s onwards, numerous Hindi films were shot in Kashmir (a place referred to as the 'Switzerland of India') and generally featured a romance between the visiting Indian man and the local Kashmiri woman. It was not until the 1990s, that this romanticised version of Kashmir also included the representation of Kashmiris as Islamists and militants. This idea of untrustworthy Kashmiri men who are politically dangerous militants has been repeated in many recent films. Both these paradigms of 'Kashmir the beautiful' and 'Kashmir the cruel'⁸ reflect conventionally stark orientalist stereotypes of viewing the Other in polarised binary terms - as naïve and innocent, thus in need of guidance; or as cruel and reckless, that is in need of subduing. Such deeply ingrained stereotypes and constantly repeated cinematic tropes allow for the perception of Kashmiri women as objects of desire in the Indian imagination while simultaneously positing Kashmiri men as potential terrorists. This becomes especially salient in the context of Kashmiri Muslims since it ties up neatly with the wider global image of Islam as an inherently regressive religion with a unique propensity for encouraging violence among its

⁸ See (Kaul 2010): "What do Indians know about Kashmir anyway?"

1. Exotic tourist version / Kashmir the beautiful (from holiday photographs) ...

2. Security problem version / Kashmir the cruel (from media photographs)..."

In addition, for Western Orientalist imaginaries of travels in Kashmir, see Ahmad (2011).

adherents. Such representations of Kashmir are not confined to the realms of cinema or popular culture. Such framings ultimately utilise gender and patriarchy, which are a part of both Indian and Kashmiri society, as a source of power and subjectification. Kashmiri women speaking up as feminists or on issues of gender in Kashmiri society have an uneasy position between feminism and Kashmiri nationalism since they run the risk of being coopted by the Indian position on the ‘backwardness’ of Kashmiri society. On the other hand, any individual Kashmiri women who are a recognisable part of the Indian mainstream popular culture face a difficult situation of being at the intersection of patriarchal Kashmiri and Indian, Kashmiri nationalist and Indian nationalist discourses.⁹

Secondly, the cartographical imagination of India as ‘Bharat Mata’ (Mother India) has historically functioned and played a key role in creating a special kind of fervent nationalist piety around the question of Kashmir’s relationship to India. Ramaswamy (2002) provides a detailed account of how India’s geo-body has been visualised in colonial and postcolonial times as a way of eliciting a patriotic response from the citizen beholder. She notes here how Kashmir and the head of Mother India coincide in these representations:

First and most commonly, Bharat Mata literally occupies the map of India, filling up what would otherwise be empty social and cartographic space with her body. There are many ingenious ways in which her body blurs the neatly drawn boundaries of state cartography which virtually disappear, particularly in postcolonial bodyscapes. Invariably, her head is made to occupy Kashmir, and the territories of neighbouring nation-states, especially (west and east) Pakistan and Bangladesh, more often than not fade away in the folds of her billowing saree or her flowing tresses... (175)

The geo-body emerges as an object of geopiety in and through such bodyscapes. The most explicit of these that celebrates the virtues of patriotic martyrdom was published in 1966, soon after the wars with China and Pakistan of that decade... Entitled ‘Ma ki Pukar’, ‘The Mother’s Call’, it shows Bharat Mata occupying a map of India (whose borders are fairly clearly delineated, but with the contested territory of Kashmir hidden by her head), her two arms held out in a gesture of blessing (181).

The colonial and postcolonial visual depictions of the nation as a feminine form of the Mother have been historically powerful in evoking a patriotic devotion to the nation. In the last few decades, with the appeal of the Hindutva sentiment becoming ever stronger, this unquestioning devotion to the

⁹ This was recently illustrated in the case of Zaira Waseem, a young Kashmiri female actor in a mainstream Bollywood movie (see Gopalakrishnan 2017).

idea and service of the nation, of Mother India, has become an important signifier of who is seen as a 'nationalist' and who is liable to be attacked as an 'anti-nationalist'. Among many other reasons why Kashmir is seen as an existential matter of possession of territory for Indians, there is the important visual fact in such ubiquitous depictions of Kashmir being the 'head' of Mother India. To the adherents and devotees of Bharat Mata, it is a sacred duty to answer the call of their Mother and defend their nation. Just as India was once the 'jewel in the crown' for the British empire, the status of Kashmir in the Indian geographic and psycho-geographic imagination is that of an extremely valuable possession for the status it confers. Bharat Mata is, of course, a Hindu imaginary; and it would be well nigh impossible to find any similar depictions of an Indian geobody which would have any Islamic markers, notwithstanding the fact that right in the middle of the face of 'Bharat Mata' lies the contested valley of Kashmir with its predominantly Muslim population!

In this case of visual representation of the territory of India as the body of the woman, Kashmir is, owing to its geographical placement in the north-south depiction, the head of the Mother India. To take a position on Kashmir that dissents from the mainstream nationalist Indian position (which is that Kashmir is an integral part of India) is to opt for the 'beheading' of Mother India. Any suggestion of a complex political history of Kashmir's relationship to India such as the manifest alienation of a majority of Kashmiris from India or of the various uprisings as calls for 'Azaadi' (freedom) is instantly seen as seditious, anti-national and worthy of being met even with violence since it is seen to threaten the life and honour of the Mother, seen as the duty of every patriot to protect. This is even more important in the Hindutva context because of its link to militarised masculinity of patriarchal norms which require the male Hindu Indian to act in service of the (Hindu) nation. Further, Kashmir as an issue mobilises and unites Indians in the service of nationalism, much in the same way as anti-colonial movement once did. The 'sacred' nature of the duty required to serve the nation cannot be more important than to keep the Mother from being beheaded. This emotional, psychological intensity is evident in the Indian nationalist slogans that convey the clear potential for brutalisation if Kashmir is raised as a question. For instance, the well known: 'Doodh Mangoge to Kheer Denge, Kashmir Mangoge to Cheer Denge' (If you ask for milk, we will give you pudding, if you ask for Kashmir, we will tear you to bits).

The figure of the 'Mother' has of course, been the subject of numerous feminist analyses in the way in which it symbolises the nation. In the Indian context, the idea of nation as a mother played an important role in the anticolonial struggle against the British. This idea of service to the nation as a mother is also at work when a politician's devotion to the nation and his policies are sought to be

legitimised by using the figure of his¹⁰ mother and mother nation. Modi, for instance, in one of his early speeches in the Indian Parliament, tearily and with much emotion, declared that service to the nation is analogous to serving one's mother, a duty of which one can never tire.¹¹ He subsequently provided the media with several images that gave prominence to his care and affection for his mother, and at the peak of resentment against his demonetisation policy in 2016 (which had caused chaos, deaths and much misery), his 96 year old mother was shown going to the bank to withdraw money from an ATM in order to signal the good faith implied in his political decisions about the economy which were being borne in the interests of the nation by his mother, and thus should be endured by all Indians in the service of the nation as mother (see Ananya 2016). However, not all mothers are accorded the same status; Parveena Ahangar of the APDP, a Kashmiri mother who has led a campaign for over two decades against enforced disappearances in the quest for justice for her missing son, is clearly not a mother figure of any devotion for Indian nationalism.¹² Not only are Kashmiri mothers not part of the Indian narrative, but Kashmir itself is reduced to being the symbolic and integral head of Mother India, for the possession of which Indians must be ready and willing to sacrifice anything, including their lives.

In February 2017, Nivedita Menon, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), gave a lecture at an academic conference on "History Reconstructed through Literature: Nation, Identity, Culture" held at Jodhpur University in the western Indian state of Rajasthan in which she criticised RSS and Hindutva and showed an upside down map of India. Menon has previously spoken critically about Indian role in Kashmir, and in the aftermath of the map episode, she wrote an article stating that she saw herself as patriotic and not anti-national in criticising the RSS and Hindutva. Her remarks about the upside down map of India are salient here (Menon 2017):

Because after all, we all know the earth is round, and nothing is upside down or right side up....This was in the context of my critique of the Hindutvavaadi and RSS notion of nationalism, which sees the nation as a body, the body of the mother. This implies that the nation pre-exists the people, and so if some group wants to leave the nation, it can only be seen as amputation or dismemberment....I said the RSS Bharat Mata can be

¹⁰ The 'his' is a revealing pronoun in this case. The male political figure is an ideal nationalist in his service to the nation and/as to his mother. The female political figure is not viewed nationalist in similar terms, since her devotion to her own mother is no part of the narrative. This indicates the fundamentally gendered bedrock of (any) nation viewed as female/mother. This is also evident in the term 'Mauj Kasheer' (Mother Kashmir) used by Kashmiris, however, unlike in the Indian case, there is no analogous anthropomorphically cartographic dimension of the resistance imaginary.

¹¹ Emotional PM-elect Modi pledges to serve 'mother' India, May 2014, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/world/article/emotional-pm-elect-modi-pledges-to-serve-mother-india>, last accessed 12 March 2017.

¹² Radhika Vemula, for instance, the mother of the Dalit scholar and activist Rohit Vemula who committed suicide in January 2016 at Hyderabad Central University, has been struggling for justice in vain. Rajini Krish, a Dalit scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University who committed suicide in March 2017 wrote about Radhika Vemula in his blog post titled 'A universal mother without a nation' (see Krish 2016).

easily transposed on to the map of India we are familiar with, with Kashmir as the head, Bengal and Gujarat as the arms and so on, but if we turn the map the other way round, which is still an accurate depiction of the region, suddenly you can see that the nation is not a natural unchanging object, but something constructed by people.

Such is the state of affairs that in spite of professing her patriotism and for explaining the reasons for showing an upside down map of the country,¹³ the fact of mentioning Kashmir and criticising the Hindutva forces can lead to an enormous backlash. The event was followed by charges of anti-nationalism and the filing of a police FIR against Menon and the suspension of the academic (Rajshree Ranawat) who organised the event.¹⁴

Thirdly, the landscape of Kashmir has been a feminised territory in the Indian imagination, functioning alongside a discourse of possession and control by the masculinist Indian state. Fabled for centuries for its natural surroundings, the ‘feminine’ aspect of Kashmir’s beauty was spelt out by none other than Nehru who compared Kashmir to a beautiful woman, echoing a beloved. “Like some supremely beautiful woman, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such was Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley...” (in Yaseen 2007). Kashmir was magical and enchanting, casting a spell upon Nehru, beckoning him to it. Korbel (1966: 4) quoted him thus:

Nehru saw Srinagar as “a fairy city of dreamlike beauty” which “is no fancy picture, for fairyland lies all around it; the magic is there already....” And Kashmir calls [him] back, its pull is stronger than ever; it whispers its magic to the ears, and its memory disturbs the mind. How can they who have fallen under its spell release themselves from this enchantment?”

¹³ In 2016, the government also introduced new legislation that seeks to ban maps that show Kashmir (and any other areas) as disputed territory, and impose fines of \$15 million and 7 year jail terms for ‘wrong’ maps of the country (see Mallet 2016).

¹⁴ This suspension was later overturned by court, however, it is one in a series of such incidents where dissenting on Kashmir in India, including by prominent figures, leads to litigation, violence and intimidation in the public sphere. Arundhati Roy and others were charged with ‘sedition’ in 2010 for their remarks on Kashmir (Roy 2010, 2011), American journalist David Barsamian was deported from New Delhi on arrival (see David Barsamian, Founder Of Boulder’s ‘Alternative Radio,’ Banned From India, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/30/david-barsamian-founder-o_n_988781.html, 30 September 2011, last accessed 18 March 2017), Indian activist Gautam Navlakha was deported from Srinagar on arrival (see Gautam Navlakha Denied Entry, Deported From Srinagar Airport | Press Note from IPTK, <http://thekashmirwalla.com/2011/05/gautam-navlakha-denied-entry-deported-from-srinagar-airport-press-note-from-iptk/>, 28 May 2011, last accessed 18 March 2017), lawyer Prashant Bhushan was beaten for his remarks on Kashmir (see Lawyer Prashant Bhushan beaten 'for Kashmir opinion', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-15280595>, 12 October 2011, last accessed 17 March 2017), and academic Mridu Rai’s seminar in Kashmir was stopped by J&K police by invoking Section 144 that bans assembly of more than four people (see Masood 2014). Some noted Indian scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (see Chatterjee 2016) and Gayatri Spivak (Spivak’s response to me between 20’10” and 33’38” ‘Q&A after Gayatri Spivak’s Keynote Speech at the CSD 25th Anniversary Conference’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-eTbOQjROE>, last accessed 15 March 2017) have in recent years been persuaded to address Kashmir in their public engagements.

This enchanting pull goes to the heart of a long story of unrequited love of India for Kashmir. Indians often proclaim their love for Kashmir, notwithstanding any lack of reciprocation. No commentator of Indian politics can fail to notice the obsessive way in which Kashmir is claimed by Indian popular, media and political narratives. Barring literally a handful of exceptions, it is impossible to hear Indian opinions that accord Kashmiris any right to have political agency over their own identity and belonging. This ‘possessiveness’ in India about Kashmir is not unlike the cliched Indian Bollywood hero or the patriarchal man who feels that he has a right to the affections of even a woman who refuses him.¹⁵ From PM Modi to aggressive television anchors to the average Indian on twitter - everyone declares loud and clear their love for Kashmir and claims it as their own, saying that Kashmiris who protest are ‘misled’ and swearing that not an inch of Kashmir will ever be ‘given away’. In 2016, in the midst of the atrocities by armed forces in Kashmir who were responding to civilian anti-India freedom protests by using pellet guns that blinded hundreds, injured thousands, and killed scores of people,¹⁶ when telecommunications were snapped, at times newspapers were banned and human rights activists arrested, Modi declared in his speech: “Every Indian loves Kashmir. The freedom that every Indian has also belongs to every Kashmiri. We want the same bright future for every youth in Kashmir”. With no hint of irony or recognition of the sacrifice of Kashmiris for their freedom, the PM also launched the ‘70 saal Azaadi, Yaad karo Qurbani’ [70 years of freedom, remember the sacrifices] programme to commemorate the sacrifices of Indian freedom fighters (see TNN 2016).

The nature of this unrequited and one-sided love of India for Kashmir (see Drabu 2016) became clear a day later when the Chief of CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) K. Durga Prasad was asked when he would stop using pellet guns on Kashmiri protestors. In his response, he compared use of pellet guns in Kashmir to wife beating, saying “This is like asking: ‘When will you stop beating your wife?’ or ‘Have you stopped beating your wife?’ ... We are tackling unruly crowds, there is no such pressure [to stop use of pellet guns]” (Telegraph Correspondent 2016). In the context of a patriarchal culture and the legal non-cognisance of marital rape, the deeply rooted

¹⁵ The famous Bollywood stalker hero saying ‘k...k...k’ preceding Kiran (a girl’s name) in the movie Darr (Fear), is not unlike the ‘k...k...k’ before Kashmir when it comes to the India. Others have made the same point, for example, see Sen (2016). On the normalisation of stalking in Bollywood and its effects in general, see Dhaliwal (2015).

¹⁶ The Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) released a Human Rights Review report at the end of 2016 (JKCCS 2016). The many horrors included the blinding of Insha Malik, a 14 year old girl, an ATM guard who was found dead with over 300 pellets fired from close range and lodged in all his organs, a lecturer in Khrew who was beaten to death in an unauthorised raid. In the 2016 uprising, the pellet guns were used as a so-called non-lethal weapon that had significant lethal consequences (see David 2016). 14% of the pellet victims were below the age of 15 years (Ashiq 2016). Although the 2016 uprising was reported internationally as India’s biggest crackdown in decades, this year of ‘dead eyes’ in Kashmir resulted in no change in Indian policy. On the contrary, the “iron fist policy” is set to be made stronger. In March 2017, it was reported that the “Ministry of Home Affairs has authorised 4,949 pump action guns for CRPF units deployed in Jammu and Kashmir, taking the total number to 5,589. More than six lakh pellet cartridges (each cartridge contains around 600 metallic pellets) have also been authorised, up from 1.25 lakh last year” (Ahmad 2017).

imaginary of power and control over women as signifying a valorised form of masculinity is salient. The uncompromising and continued possession of a feminised territory by whatever means possible and at any cost is crucial to maintaining the hegemonic masculinism of the Indian state. Kashmir and its people are seen to have something akin to a disturbed ‘marital relationship’ with India. The protests in Kashmir are seen as expressions of an unruly people who are instigated by outsiders, unable to know what is good for them, and who need to be controlled, chastised, disciplined and coerced into affirming their marriage with India.

Taken together, these ways of perceiving Kashmir and Kashmiris enable the erasure from memory and conscience of the violence in Kashmir. Of course, this violence is perpetrated as violence against the bodies of Kashmiris, but the gendered discourses of representation, cartography and possession allow for the perpetuation of a situation where the Indian state-centric narratives on Kashmir are unable to be challenged. Moreover, they create a situation where any political move towards demilitarisation, dialogue, repeal of unjust laws or recognition of historical injustice and trauma for Kashmiris of different religions becomes nearly impossible; the narratives of the Indian state and the Kashmiri people become ever more divergent, with an arithmetic of competing martyrdoms on each side.

4. Anti-Nationalism and ‘Democracy’

Kashmir is a litmus test for hegemonic masculinist Indian nationalism. In February 2016, on the anniversary of the hanging of Afzal Guru on 9 February 2013 (a Kashmiri man sentenced to death on the basis of circumstantial evidence for his part in an attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001; his sentencing included the mention that his hanging was ‘to satisfy the collective conscience of the Indian nation’; his body was buried in prison and his family informed after his hanging),¹⁷ student political leaders (especially Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, Anirban Bhattacharya) in JNU were accused of having raised slogans for the ‘Azaadi’ of Kashmir. This accusation led to charges of sedition against them. Kanhaiya Kumar was assaulted in court, stones were thrown at the media persons, several lawyers in their robes led marches on the streets of Delhi chanting for ‘Bharat Mata’ (see Tran 2016). In February 2017, Ramjas College in Delhi University had a planned event on ‘Cultures of Protest’ where Umar Khalid and Shehla Rashid from the JNU were to speak, and

¹⁷ It can be observed that “...the Indian state, in the curfewed aftermath of the hanging, certainly staged a rarest of the rare mis-en-abyme – the Kashmiri body in the Indian state prison and the body of Kashmir in the prison of the Indian state” (Kaul 2013a). On the background and reflection on judgement in Guru’s case, see Haksar (2006) and Roy (2013) respectively.

the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidya Parishad, student wing affiliated with the RSS/BJP) objected to their presence because of their 'anti-national' character and support for Kashmiris protesting against India. Even though the college disinvited Khalid, there was a violent clash between those objecting to the disinvitation and the RSS/ABVP supporters. Several eyewitness accounts referred to the instigation and violent attacks by the RSS/ABVP; many people were injured including a university professor who had to be hospitalised with injuries to his ribs and internal organs (see Bhattacharjee 2017). In March 2017, Gurmehar Kaur, a Delhi University student and the daughter of an Indian army captain who was killed in the Kargil (Kashmir border) war between India and Pakistan, was threatened with rape and murder by the right wing nationalists in India for saying that she was not afraid of the ABVP and that her father was not killed by Pakistan but by war (see Doshi 2017). These cases are just a snapshot of the right wing nationalist political climate in India where the right to dissent is severely compromised. On the issue of Kashmir, nationalism has subverted democracy so that when it comes to any critical mention of Kashmir, one can be sure of finding not a democratic nationalism but rather a nationalist democracy.

Much violence in Kashmir is committed in the name of democracy. Yet, the underlying principles are imperial - an assumed economic rationality and a moral superiority. The specific postcolonial economic rising power nature of the Indian rhetoric ties with the resurgence of the Hindu cultural masculinity to produce the varying kinds of in/conspicuous dynamics of violence in Kashmir. There is violence as explicit violence, such as the killings of militants which include the callous and under-reported killings of civilians, the rapes and mass rapes of women that go uninvestigated, and the everyday structural violence faced by survivors and families of disappeared. There is violence masked as progress, such as the destruction of the environment, the splitting of communities by employment rewards, the narratives of progressive Hindus versus backward Muslims who need to be enlightened. There is the violence of imaginaries that is the outcome of cartographic anxieties so that the unfolding of Kashmiri political aspirations could be a beheading of Mother India. There is ultimately the violence of concepts such as democracy so that the state is at war with women, stateless subjects are produced in democratic countries, and souverainism is seen as secession.

The ongoing enforcement of patriotism in India, the silencing of dissent with violence, the vitiated atmosphere of universities and other public bodies, the revisionist historiography, the rewriting of textbooks, the appointments of right wing hardliners to key posts, the conspicuous miscarriages of justice in cases involving Hindu right wing violence (see Ahuja 2017; Gowen 2016; Haygunde and Bhasin 2017; Kaul 2015; Safi 2017; Sudhakarani 2016; Visweswaran et al 2017) — all this pursued at the behest of Hindutva formations (such as the RSS, with its political voice the BJP in power) in

the interests of transforming India into a 'Hindu Rising Power' nation. A combination of Hindutva right wing nationalism and a stated commitment to neoliberal economic policies (even if these often translate into crony capitalism) has meant that the violent transformation of the Indian state is unchecked by any serious critique since the capitalist neoliberal state with authoritarian right wing nationalist governments in charge is multiplying globally as an outcome of the breakdown of the liberal democratic consensus of the post-second world war/ post-colonial era (see Kaul 2017c).

The violence of Indian militarisation in Kashmir is perceived as the expected natural behaviour of a strong masculinist state, as uncompromising as its leader, denouncing any weakness and dealing with 'insurgency/separatism' in a 'firm' manner. Indeed, a statement by the Indian Army Chief General Bipin Rawat in February 2017 made it clear that the Kashmiris who pelt stones or raise anti-India slogans or flags will be treated as terrorists by the Indian army and can be fired upon (Express Web Desk 2017; Mir 2017; see also Krishnan 2017). Read this alongside the remarks of Retired General V.K Singh, later Minister of State for External Affairs, which squarely tell the Kashmiri people to choose the 'epic story' of India because India is on its way to global recognition as a world power (ANI 2016):

Kashmir will always remain ours and there has been no change in thoughts since 1947 and neither will it ever come. In 2004, our Prime Minister said that the boundaries of India won't be altered anyhow, but the facility for inter-country transportation will be sanctioned. The early [sic] you accept the fact, the better the conditions will turn out to be....Cooperate with us so that we can help you. Whole world knows the power of India and knows that India has a very special recognition in future also. Do you want to be a part of this epic-story of India?

The choice between political demands and proposed economic development is being offered to Kashmiris by India - erasing the politics of the economic - under the shadow of trauma, injustice, dehumanisation and militarisation. The gendered discourses of representation, cartography and possession create a situation where violence against Kashmiris is legitimised. Indian nationalist democracy can thus finally be understood as the masculinist patriarchal bureaucratic governmentality of a postcolonial emerging power with hubris that seeks to uncompromisingly possess Kashmir and derive a validation of its identity from the exercise of such power.

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