

contra-Paradise: (en)Countering the Aesthetics of the Modern Kashmiri State

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For the people of Kashmir

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Encountering Paradise

All of us, I suppose, have varying pictures of our native land and no two persons will think exactly alike. When I think of India, I think of many things: of broad fields dotted with innumerable small villages; of towns and cities I have visited; of the magic of the rainy season which pours life into the dry parched up land and converts it suddenly into a glistening expanse of beauty and greenery, of great rivers and flowing water; of the Khyber Pass in all its bleak surroundings; of the southern tip of India; of people, individually and in the mass; and, above all, of the Himalayas, snow-capped, or *some mountain valley in Kashmir* in the spring, covered with new flowers, and with a brook bubbling and gurgling through it. We make and preserve the pictures of our choice, and so I have chosen this mountain background rather than the more normal picture of a hot, subtropical country.¹

WE, THE PEOPLE OF JAMMU, KASHMIR, LADAKH AND THE FRONTIER REGIONS, INCLUDING POONCH AND CHINANI ILAQAS – commonly known as JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE – in order to perfect our union in the fullest equality and self-determination, 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, in worthy participation of the historic resurgences of the peoples of the East, and the working masses of the world, and in determination to make this our country a dazzling gem upon the snowy bosom of Asia, DO PROPOSE AND PROPOUND THE FOLLOWING CONSTITUTION OF OUR STATE:²

Modelled, as argued by Andrew Whitehead³, on the Stalin Constitution of 1936, the *Naya Kashmir/New Kashmir* manifesto written in 1944 by Sheikh Abdullah and the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) was an unusually progressive socialist constitutional blueprint and dream for its time and geopolitical context. With its emphasis on land redistribution (from landowners to the tiller), peasant's and worker's rights, public health, education, housing, and its comprehensive Woman's Charter, the manifesto, which bore the indelible intellectual marks of communist, progressive sympathizers from the Communist Party of India (CPI) like B. L. Bedi, Mohammad Din Taseer, K.

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (India: Penguin Books, 2004), 63.

² Sheikh Abdullah and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, preamble to *New Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Taylor & Francis, 2022), 12.

³ Andrew Whitehead, "The Making of the *New Kashmir* Manifesto," in *India at 70: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Ruth Maxey and Paul McGarr (Routledge: London and New York, 2020), 15-32.

M. Ashraf, Daniel Latifi, Ehsan Danish, and Farida Bedi⁴, diagnosed and provided conjectural “cures”⁵ for the common Kashmiri’s social, economic, political, and constitutional concerns. It did, as Suvir Kaul puts it in his reading of what the manifesto made possible in the realm of the political, “hold out the promise of a future more egalitarian, communitarian, even feminist than those imagined by any other political party.”⁶ Despite its failure to fulfil its pledges⁷, the manifesto ushered in at the very least a vision and an aesthetic for the “re-planning and re-building of New Kashmir to fit its industrial, social and cultural structure to the requirements of the modern world”⁸. This aesthetic vision of a modern and industrial Kashmir “ruled by freedom, science and honest toil” was at best an idealist one, a potential reconfiguration of the sensible⁹. What the vision did was fabricate and determine a particular democratic-socialist map of speech and action against the existent monarchical models that had, it can be argued, ruled over the Kashmiri social landscape for centuries – from the onset of the Mughal Empire in 1586 to the contemporaneous Dogra Raj, which effectively ended in 1947 when Hari Singh signed The Jammu and Kashmir Instrument of Accession. However, by propagating through its grammar dualities of light and dark, of ailments and cures, of fetishized plentitude and endless extraction, of medieval ignorance and scientific knowledge the manifesto failed at creating any real opening or interstice for the proliferation of socio-poetic metaphors or movements emerging from the ground and flesh, from the people and not the “representatives” of the people. Instead, in language that it borrowed from colonial diction and socialist manifestos elsewhere and retailed for the audience of a “degraded” Kashmiri “people” and a monarch, the Dogra Hari Singh, the

⁴ Aijaz Ashraf Wani, “How *New* Was the New Kashmir (1948-53),” in *What Happened to Governance in Kashmir?* (India: Oxford University Press, 2019), 69.

⁵ Abdullah, 12.

⁶ Suvir Kaul, “On Naya Kashmir,” in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Kashmir Studies*, eds. Haley Duschinski, Mona Bhan, and Deepti Misri (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2022), 37.

⁷ Kaul, “On Naya Kashmir,” 46.

⁸ Abdullah, 12.

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trns. and ed. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 35-36.

suggestions of *New Kashmir*, despite their revolutionary aspirational reconstitution of Kashmiri society and economy, foreclosed the possibilities for *other* atypical definitions of Kashmir. The new aesthetic regime pronounced by the manifesto maintained the sovereign's old weave.

Reading the language of *New Kashmir* and Sheikh Abdullah in apposition to Jawaharlal Nehru's "pictures" of his native land illuminates the frontiers of thought that predetermine what an emergent Kashmiri state, always filially related to India, *needed to look* like. A pertinent and lasting figuration of Kashmir is found in Nehru's *Discovery of India*, which he wrote during his incarceration in 1942–1945 at Ahmadnagar Fort for his involvement in the Quit India Movement. In spite of Nehru's repeated reassurances of upholding the rules of referendum drafted in the UN Security Council, Nehru's rhetoric on Kashmir always betrayed a colonial-nostalgic sensibility and a totalizing aesthetic vision. Nehru, who couldn't help but be nostalgic for the landscape of his Kashmiri ancestors, collapsed the terrain of India into a paradisaical vision of "some mountain valley in Kashmir in the spring, covered with new flowers, and with a brook bubbling and gurgling through it"¹⁰. As Ananya Jahanara Kabir aptly reminds us, the fantasy of the integer, the promise of the contained secular republic of parts that Nehru and the Congress harbored required him to "produce a place" in order to "produce a past"¹¹ and actualize the dream of an Indian Nation. Nehru's Kashmir carried in it a pregnant nostalgic history from which a modern integrated India could be conceived and nurtured, making the capture of any emergent aesthetic of a New Kashmiri State by ambrosial descriptions of spring, new flowers, and brooks tantamount to the project of Indian State building. Alongside the naturalistic symbols Nehru used to displace Kashmir from history and topography into aesthetic material for a Nation to come, Nehru also employed the longstanding colonial tactic of sexualization to set up Kashmir as the

¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (India: Penguin Books, 2004), 63.

¹¹ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Territory of Desire : Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 81.

quintessential orientalist enchantress, as “some supremely beautiful woman, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire”.¹² After all, only slightly extending Nehru’s own concern, “how [could] they who had fallen under [Kashmir’s] spell release themselves from this enchantment”¹³ unless they drafted and operationalized an incantation of their own? In this manner, the topos of the *sublime* beauty of Kashmir figured and refigured the people, the land, and the woman as objects to be dispossessed of subjectivity and socio-poiesis and repossessed oracularly as the sovereign’s pre-determined keep.

As a modern state, Kashmir has been reproduced aesthetically as some version of Abdullah’s Kashmir, which is a dazzling Kashmiri Nation of working masses snuggling the oriental bosom of Asia, or Nehru’s Kashmir, which is Secular India’s Kashmir in another tongue. Be it Prime Minister and Sadr-i-Riyasat Sheikh Abdullah’s “sunlit valleys of plenty” or Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s Kashmiri “addicted to easy living” or Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s conceptualization of an essentialist, racist *Kashmiriyat* or Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s insistence on the need to manufacture an integrated (Newer) New Kashmir, the public facing image of Kashmir and Kashmiris created by the hegemon, the Great Man representative of the people, has long attempted to regulate and make invisible nearly all the variegated revolutionary aspirations and political configurations of Kashmiris by counterposing a fetishized ancient idyllic sensibility or a markedly Indian global corporate future against the heterotopias of the undesirable and unmanageable other – the people of Kashmir *themselves*. This is to say that all alternatives to the filially determined aspirations, the aspirations of the Sovereign/Indian State, have been contained and recalibrated to fit the patriarch’s need of maintaining the filial dependency of Kashmir on India precisely because what the patriarch

¹² Jawaharlal Nehru quoted in Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Kashmir* (Bombay: New Jack Printing Works Private LTD, 1956), 3.

¹³ Nehru, 3.

confronts in its absence is the collapse of an abusive, exploitative family-structure, and world-fantasy, of the integrated Nation. The collapse of a National aesthetic regime. In other words, the political entities that are allowed attention and nurturing by the State in Kashmir were historically those that the State could surely define and firmly contain. This doubled jurisdiction, of image and counterimage, this supreme incantation that contains within it prefigured readjustments to deviations from the normative, is a fundamental instrument of Indian Nation-State Craft. Here, it becomes pertinent to ask, can Kashmir as paradise be rehabilitated and reconstituted in our current historical moment to contain emergent political visions or forms-of-life or must it be disavowed and annihilated to facilitate the possibility of thinking and living in Kashmir otherwise?

To build an understanding of contemporary radical aesthetics in the valley that resists repeating the pre-existent regimes of the sensible via locked neocolonial critiques of prevalent representations of Kashmir-as-paradise it is important that the objects that historiography on Kashmir considers important to the project of State Building in the valley are consistently re-examined alongside novel developments in aesthetics emerging from the valley. This is to say that context (re)building, while already a necessary method to implement against the atmosphere of historic amnesia being fabricated by the Indian State, should also identify and proliferate varied muffled representations of the Kashmir Issue – which is, as one must strive to remember against the efforts of the Indian propaganda machine, still an *issue*. Learning from the American context, from the concerns of Black Studies and Fred Moten’s reading of Frank B. Wilderson III, in the study of Kashmir too the improvisational imperative, which is always already entangled with structured practice, is to “stay in the hold of the ship” despite one’s fantasies of flight.¹⁴ What is thus needed is an improvisational practice of holding

¹⁴ Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons : Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe Etc.: Minor Compositions, 2013), 94.

the unsensed, the muted and silenced, with the sensible, the vociferous. Considering this, I will in this paper return to the preamble and introduction of JKNC's *Naya Kashmir, New Kashmir* (of 1944) and to Jawaharlal Nehru's letters, speeches, and writings on Kashmir, both of which formulate Kashmir's imaginary of paradise, in order to chart some of the aesthetic terrain upon which the political state of Kashmir and thus Kashmiri political life has been set up. Next to these and to interrupt the valley's visions of paradise, I will place other, contradictory visions of Kashmir as they figure in peasant life from 1940-1960 and as they appear in the more recent line drawings made by Kashmiri artist Khytul Abyad. What I ultimately hope to attend to and detail through this reading of visions is the dynamics of the antagonism between aesthetic regimes imposed onto a territory and history; done so by dominant political discourses and the aesthetics that emerge otherwise in response to such imposition.

“The Sunlit Valleys of Plenty” Are “Like Some Supremely Beautiful Woman”

By utilizing the synecdochic formula of Kashmir as the “sunlit valley of plenty” in the preamble, *New Kashmir’s* articles expand the implied symbolic equation of the administrative unit of Kashmir to the metaphoric latently plentiful valley. The manifesto insists upon a broader geographic constitution of Kashmir, one that includes, as is evident from the subtitle itself, the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and the Frontier regions, and the Poonch and Chinani ilakas (regions). However, against its instructions for a larger cohesive political and administrative entity, the symbolic reach of the manifesto is limited by the metaphor of the plentiful valley. What precisely is this plenty being referred to here? An abundance of what? There are no concrete answers to these questions, only speculative futurisms. Freedom, science, honest toil, historic resurgences of the peoples of the East – all these phrases present vague but charged notions of plenty that are operationalized by the manifesto to foster, what seems to be its rhetorical goal, a revolutionary feeling and hope of self-governance.¹⁵ Additionally, not only does this language morph the diverse geographies of the included regions into the depression of valleys, but by negatively valuating darkness it obscures the histories of the regions as well. Already before reaching the body of the text, we find ourselves in the hold of multiple transfigurations: abstractions and morphoses of land and history. The expansive regions, each with their own distinct cultural lives, are articulated materially by the preamble as one homogenous territory and determined by its logic of a promissory aesthetic regime of the sensible which is forcefully imposed upon the polyvalent differences of historical fact. The fact that the Dogra Kingdom extended over these lands is constructed as the singular fiction of the region and what is made visible, which is to say what is made available to politics, is that which immediately helps the causes of a nationalist, collective

¹⁵ Abdullah, 12.

movement defined from above: degradation and the promise of plenty strike out entire pasts and off-center forms of life to establish a normative, aesthetically curtailed Kashmir in need of preservation.

Further delimitation of the past of Kashmir for the purposes of state-building can be found in Sheikh Abdullah's introduction to the manifesto. "Our path in the past has been rough and stony, like the precipitous paths which wind up our mountains. The memory of our hundreds of martyrs is still green. Every year their graves are covered with flowers by the people, and every year in their presence we renew our pledge to achieve the freedom for which they died," writes Abdullah, indicating an infinite and commendable persistence of aspiration in the face of an abundance of death during the reign of the Dogras. The equation of the general past to the recent past of the Dogras marks out new contours on the terrain upon which the Kashmiri Nation State to come can be set up. In this maneuver, an originary definition for the aesthetics of a Kashmiri Nation State makes itself known. New Kashmir begins to form primarily in opposition to the Dogra regime and secondarily in opposition to the general antagonisms against the poor (of the East). While on the one hand, such rhetoric surely has real political use against an oppressive monarchical state in the modern world, on the other it prefigures the alterity that the emergent Kashmiri Nation will tolerate.

A sense of the tolerable is found later in Sheikh Abdullah's introduction: "The inspiring picture of the regeneration of all the different nationalities and peoples of the U.S.S.R., and their wielding together into the united mighty Soviet State that is throwing back its barbarous invaders with deathless heroism, is an unanswerable argument for the building of democracy on the cornerstone of economic equality"¹⁶; and, "In our New Kashmir we shall build again the men and women of our State, who

¹⁶ Sheikh Abdullah and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, introduction to *New Kashmir* (New Delhi: Taylor & Francis, 2022), 5.

have been dwarfed by centuries of servitude and create a people worthy of our glorious motherland.”¹⁷ This project of building again the dwarfed masses into “people worthy of our glorious motherland” highlights a biopolitical transformational project, one in which the body is always already determined by the aspirations of the socialist state. The disregard for historical specificity that we saw earlier in terms of geography and regional history works here too and functions to collapse all the varied forms of life that existed under the Buddhists, the Sultanates, the Mughals, the Afghans, and the Dogras into one category of servants. Class divides, labor and social distinctions, religious differences, non-normative gender identities, and all other complexities of social life in the regions are muddled and forced into the singular container of an egalitarian society wrapped together by the notion of servitude and constituted by clean containers of socio-economic categories. Similarly, but now facing the future, the deathless heroism of the supporters of the Soviet State is left undetailed and is used in its imprecision as rhetorical flourish to establish the character of the citizen of New Kashmir. What we understand is that the state of New Kashmir would be built by heroes and the poor men and women of new Kashmir would be heroic. The heroic is “deathless”¹⁸ – mythic and non-human.

In the logic of Abdullah’s introduction and in the preamble of the manifesto there is an authoritarian impulse. The language is revolutionary, but it is prescriptive, and it is pertinent to remember that no matter how laudatory the manifesto’s language of economic emancipation might seem, it is based after all on the constitution of the Soviet State, which as is now understood through the complicated history of the U.S.S.R., wasn’t in reality as liberatory as its quixotic promises. Read ex post facto, the heartening imagery of a green, lasting memory of Kashmir’s martyrs contrasted with the arduous journey of Kashmiris along rough, stony, winding mountain paths reveal an ironic

¹⁷ Abdullah, 8.

¹⁸ Abdullah, 7.

blemish. The blemish of the repeat of oppression. One can't read the manifesto today without a sense of bemusement at the naivete and contradictions of the revolutionary project put forth by the JKNC. The borrowed language and the lofty claims of emancipation for the poor are shown to be a little more than mere rhetoric just a few years after the publication of the manifesto. Through the efforts of Kashmiri historians, Sheikh Abdullah's despotic governance and crackdown on dissent right after the publication of *New Kashmir* are well documented¹⁹.

Before bringing Nehru into conversation with Sheikh Abdullah, it is important to build historical context and document some important events from the JKNC's reign and Sheikh Abdullah's governance (1944-47 & 1947-53) that highlight the discord between the manifesto's dreams and ground realities in Kashmir. Against the promises of the manifesto, several voices of dissent were registered in the mid-1940s and early 1950s. Overturning his position on Mohammad Ali Jinnah (leader of the All India Muslim League from 1917-1947), who was branded a fanatic for demanding an independent Pakistan by pro-JKNC newspapers earlier, Sheikh Abdullah, threatened by the growing influence of the Muslim League in Kashmir, claimed in 1943 that Jinnah's ask for Pakistan was justified.²⁰ During Jinnah's visit to Kashmir in May-June of 1944, workers of Abdullah's JKNC hurled abusive slogans and jeered at the Muslim League supporters who had come out in favor of the leader, leading to riots between the two groups. With Jinnah's growing interest in the region, the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, a local Kashmiri party demanding accession to Pakistan in the event of partition, deepened its ties with Jinnah's Muslim League and provided in the valley an alternative to Sheikh Abdullah's seemingly secular-socialist vision entangled with the emergence of the Indian State. In response to these tensions, the JKNC drafted the *New Kashmir* manifesto and

¹⁹ Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (Kiribati: Oxford University Press, 2004), 334.

²⁰ Zutshi, 311.

presented it to the Dogra State in 1944 as a blueprint for economic, social, political, and cultural reconstruction. With its proposal to overhaul governing structures and its promises of socio-economic and cultural uplift, especially its plans for a drastic reworking of land distribution offering to transfer properties owned by landlords to tillers working the land, the manifesto articulated an enchanting mandate for the state of Kashmir.²¹ However, and herein lies the rub, the manifesto, especially its provisions titled “Ruler of Kashmir,”²² maintained the Dogra Maharaja’s right of general control over the administration of the state and gave him immense power over the state’s elected National Assembly. In other words, it proposed not an independent, self-governing state, but rather a dyarchy with a monarch as an essential authority figure. How could the union “in the fullest equality and self-determination” of the people of the many regions claimed to be represented by the JKNC be realized when a monarch, who by definition wields greater power than the peasant, still be at the head of the table? It is obvious to any reader of the manifesto that the language of preamble and the introduction sit at odds with this provision. Commentators, like P.N. Bazaz who called the constitution an interesting but thoughtlessly drafted opportunistic manual that maintained Dogra Raj, or Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah who called it anti-Islamic, or Lala Bansi Lal Suri who resigned from his position in the JKNC citing the provinciality of the plan and the party’s focus on tarnishing its critics as his reason for resigning, were branded reactionaries and castigated by the JKNC.²³ On the ground, peasants and farmers who were hard hit by the food and grain shortages of from 1942-1945, not benefiting from

²¹ Zutshi, 311-342.

²² 18, Naya Kashmir,

“The Ruler of Jammu and Kashmir shall:

Convene sessions of the National Assembly twice a year; shall convene extraordinary sessions of the Assembly at his own wish or at the request of the Speaker of the Assembly;

Dissolve the National Assembly and fix new elections;

Conduct a referendum upon his own initiative or upon the demand of the majority of the legislators;

Declare general or partial mobilization;

Ratify international treaties after they have been approved by the National Assembly;

Summon the leader of the largest singly party in the National Assembly to form the Ministry.”

²³ Zutshi, 317.

any provisions of the JKNC or the manifesto's promises, started forming kisan (peasant) committees to address their situation. These local political initiatives assembled as the All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan (Peasant) Conference in July 1945 and their growing political body was immediately scorned at and countered by Sheikh Abdullah and the JKNC who saw them as opponents.²⁴ The democratic-socialist ideals of the manifesto, it became clear, weren't in fact democratic; they did not consider all individual voices in the State to be equal and privileged some forms over others that they actively obscured.

Despite the strands of despotism in the JKNC's governance in Kashmir from 1944-1947, an impartial implementation of the articles of the New Kashmir manifesto did once again seem possible when Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference launched their "Quit Kashmir" movement against the Dogras and came into power in Kashmir after the first India-Pakistan War of 1947-48, which split the regions described in the New Kashmir manifesto into Pakistan controlled Azad Kashmir and the Northern Regions (now Gilgit-Baltistan) and India controlled Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh. However, within India controlled Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah's rule maintained its authoritarian impulse when the possibility of alternative visions to the JKNC's and the Indian Congress' shared plans for the future of the region came to the fore once again. The Pathan Muslims who were allegedly enraged by the massacre of Muslims in Jammu (1947) created fear in the ruling party with their advancement towards Srinagar, and Abdullah, perhaps pragmatically, publicly announced his support for Kashmir's accession to India. To equip the people of Kashmir with means to defend themselves against the Pathans, the National Conference organized militias (including a women's self-defense corps) and established a cultural front to manufacture propaganda material such as plays, poetry, and theatre complimenting their public stance against the Pakistan backed invaders.

²⁴ Zutshi, 320.

Once again, the voices of dissent against the JKNC during this period were aggressively silenced, and those of Kashmiris that supported a merger with Pakistan were especially targeted. During the war, corruption ran rampant in the party and lower ranking members of the party too began questioning its promises. Newspapers and periodicals that disagreed with Kashmir's accession to India were banned and prominent commentators on the issue like Prem Nath Bazaz were exiled from the valley.²⁵

Reading these events and the manifesto's language alongside Nehru's comments on Kashmir, especially those registered in his book *The Discovery of India* (written between 1942-1945), his speech in the Indian parliament on 7th August 1952 titled "A Friendly and Affectionate Union", his note to Sheikh Abdullah on 25th August 1952 titled "Impartibility of an Independent Kashmir," and his preface to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India's 1956 travel book/publication titled *Kashmir*, show clearly Nehru's plans for Kashmir and illuminate striking overlaps between the visions of Kashmir that Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah harbored.

In *The Discovery of India*, whose title itself suggests the colonial act of stumbling upon, or becoming aware, uncovering, Nehru reveals to the reader his image, the picture in his mind which is of course more valuable than the vision in the mind of an Indian or Kashmiri peasant, of India. Unsurprisingly, considering his personal political aims, his Kashmiri lineage, and the already present, colonially constructed vision of Kashmir as paradise, India and Kashmir could only be thought of by Nehru as entangled in each other's realizations. When Nehru *thinks* of India, he envisions first and foremost, dreamingly, "innumerable small villages" and "the magic of the rainy season"²⁶. What arrests his musing and frames his conception of India is the thought of "some mountain valley in Kashmir

²⁵ Hafsa Kanjwal, *Colonizing Kashmir* (California: Stanford University Press, 2023), 53-61.

²⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (India: Penguin Books, 2004), 61-63.

in the spring, covered with new flowers, and with a brook bubbling and gurgling through it.” Paradise, in other words, is the operative image that Nehru settles on and frames India in. This paradisaical vision finds its perfect articulation in “some mountain valley in Kashmir”, signifying not only an immense abstraction of the landscape of Kashmir, but also a fetishization and repetition of imagined plentitude and tranquility. In fact, this image of Kashmir is articulated by Nehru in opposition to “the more normal picture of a hot, subtropical country,” suggesting that the pleasantness of the valley supersedes the “hot” reality of mainland India as Nehru’s preferred imagination of the Indian republic.²⁷

Not only is Kashmir abstracted as a paradisaical valley, but through a double transfiguration is presented first as entangled with the imagination of India and then set up as the *other* to the normative picture of the country. Recalling Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s argument about Nehru’s need to visualize Kashmir as the antique land upon which a modern India could be built, Nehru’s language appears to conjoin Kashmir’s natural beauty to its ancient culture.²⁸ This move, markedly different from *New Kashmir’s* collapse of the ancient past into the recent past, does similar work to the manifesto’s condensation of land and history, albeit utilizing different operations. Kabir notes that Nehru inherits his diction from “a legacy of collaboration between the Dogra Maharajas of Kashmir and a veritable battalion of European scholars who visited Kashmir from the 1870s onward to study its Sanskrit manuscripts and its Hindu and Buddhist material remains.”²⁹ While with Abdullah’s privileging of the poor, who in the 1800s and 1900s were made up in large part of Muslim peasants, Nehru’s appeal to antiquity privileges Kashmir’s Buddhist and Hindu pasts. At odds here in the two images of Kashmir are two topographies of the valley: Nehru’s attention to ancient Hindu cultural life in Kashmir and Abdullah’s gaze on the dejected Muslim present. Both visions curtail Kashmir and draw their

²⁷ Nehru, 63.

²⁸ Kabir, 81.

²⁹ Kabir, 85.

politically motivated contours upon the land. While Nehru tethers Kashmir to his secular India directly via ancient cultural history and communal affinities, Abdullah and *Naya Kashmir* blur prevailing contemporary social differences for a vague secular ideal. Both, as we can see, dress Kashmir in the garb of paradise.

What Nehru really discovers, or uncovers, in his writings is his own designs for the valley, which though in public and international forums are presented as subservient to the will of the Kashmiri people, in private are conquistadorial, to say the least. To make Nehru's duplicity on the Kashmir issue evident, let us now compare a speech he made in the Indian parliament on the 7th of August 1952 arguing for a solution to the Kashmir issue to a private note he left for Sheikh Abdullah some days later on the 25th of August. In his parliamentary address, Nehru stresses repeatedly that Kashmir's future is to be decided by the people of Kashmir. He promises to withdraw Indian troops from Kashmir on the condition that it is made clear to him and the Indian Congress that the exit of Indian influence is what the Kashmiri people desire. The will of the people, he notes elsewhere in his communications with Abdullah, is contained in the reports that the JKNC provide him – in the proclamations of the self-proclaimed representatives of the people. In an ironic gesture, Nehru goes on in his address to say: "We are not going to impose ourselves on them at the point of the bayonet."

³⁰ Further, he states: "Of course, this does not mean that we are prepared to do what we consider wrong if the people of Kashmir should desire it. If they want us to do something wrong in Kashmir, we shall refuse to do it....We are almost a part of each other and are considering a difficult and delicate

³⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series 2, Vol.19, July 1952-October 1952, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984, 301, "I want to stress *that it is only the people of Kashmir who can decide the future of Kashmir*. It is not that we have merely said that to the United Nations and to the people of Kashmir; it is our conviction and one that is borne out by the policy we have pursued, not only in Kashmir but everywhere. Though these five years have meant a lot of trouble and expense and in spite of all we have done, we would willingly leave Kashmir if it was made clear to us that the people of Kashmir wanted us to go. However sad we may feel about leaving, we are not going to stay against the wishes of the people. *We are not going to impose ourselves on them at the point of the bayonet.*"

problem together as partners in order to try and find a way out.”³¹ The multiple ironies of these claims make evident Nehru’s strategy of cunning with regards to Kashmir: Not only is there already a large bayonet carrying Indian armed force present in the valley when Nehru makes these statements, the will of the Kashmiri people is also, despite his insistence on the assurance of individual sovereignty, tethered to an indeterminate ethical matrix constructed by Nehru himself. He might as well have said plainly that Kashmiris have a right to self-determination, but only a right that I allow them for we are after all filially related – a family. Here, while on the one hand Nehru’s public facing commitments for referendum to the UN and to people of Kashmir are pronounced, what is slyly inserted into the discourse is an analogue to Article 370, a conditional. As with the infamous Article 370 of the Indian Constitution strengthened after the 1952 Delhi Agreement between Abdullah and Nehru and the debates about its “provisional” nature, Nehru’s comments make visible the distance between legislative provision/political promise and political action. This distance between the promised and the provided is what silhouettes Nehru’s attitude towards Kashmir.

In his note to Sheikh Abdullah, Nehru, while admitting to being influenced in his views on Kashmir by his own “personal feelings,” insists on a synergy between his personal and professional opinions. He makes it clear to Sheikh Abdullah that he believes “the only possible course for Kashmir is for the State to be closely associated with India” and that “Jammu and Kashmir have to hold together for the sake of each other...they cannot be separated.”³² He further says, “Our general outlook should be such as to make people think that the association of Kashmir State with India is an accomplished and final fact, and nothing is going to undo it.”³³ Right after, Nehru writes, “I am not talking of speeches repeating this, but rather of other facts being mentioned which tend to make

³¹ Nehru, 301-302.

³² Nehru, 330.

³³ Nehru, 330.

people believe it.”³⁴ The will of the people makes no appearance in this note. What is working in Nehru’s language here is the making sensible of a particular aesthetic regime that agrees with his fantasy of an integrated Indian republic. By his injunction demanding the fabrication of a consensus among the people of Kashmir for an integration with India, Nehru nudges further into the political thought world of Abdullah and the JKNC an inevitable merger of Kashmir with India. The fantasy of the integer has already surrounded mainstream discourse on Kashmir, and it is evident from the note that Kashmir is now a matter of material implementation. This can also be seen in Nehru’s strategic dismissals of all alternative political solutions and his positioning of Kashmir’s merger with India as the most attractive and sound option. By first deeming the contents of the note objective, then repeatedly mentioning clear-mindedness and presenting arguments and counterarguments to indicate balanced thought, and then finally nodding towards a preferred course of action with regards to Kashmir, Nehru’s note reads, peculiarly enough, as the advice of a father to a doubtful child: What is in Nehru’s speeches in parliament or the UN hidden or tangential is given straight to Sheikh Abdullah personally. A more direct instantiation of the patriarchal flavor which functions to influence Abdullah is to be found in Nehru’s characterization of the Kashmiri people. For him “the people of the Kashmir valley and roundabout, though highly gifted in many ways—in intelligence, in artisanship, etc.— are not what are called a virile people.”³⁵ The articulation of Kashmiris as *not* virile people, “soft and addicted to easy living”, is set up on the equation of Kashmiri intelligence and artisanship to softness and a lack of power – to the infantilization of Kashmiris. Articulating the character of Kashmiris, Nehru describes, in a colonial register we’ve encountered before, the incapacity of Kashmiris to “survive by themselves, if left to their own resources.”³⁶ In the essentialist diction of biological determinism and in the language of paradise, Nehru’s soft Kashmiris live in Eden in a state of innocence, as is evident

³⁴ Nehru, 330.

³⁵ Nehru, 328.

³⁶ Nehru, 329.

from the general abundance of comfort and luxury and the Kashmiri inability to protect themselves described by Nehru. What can protect Kashmiris from the hardy tribes in the north-west of Pakistan and the northern areas of the Kashmiri state, which are in themselves biologically determined categorizations of people as well, is a “suzerain” power like England and, by extension, the emergent Indian Nation.³⁷ As we have seen earlier in *New Kashmir’s* preamble, through these descriptions too a paradisaical quality is bestowed upon Kashmir and the valley is aesthetically captured. Visions of plentitude and the benevolent sovereign’s fear of degradation determine Nehru’s rhetoric.

Another aspect of Nehru’s characterization of Kashmir that demands attention is his maneuver to first de-sexualize (to protect) and then re-sexualize (to promote) Kashmir and its people. The castration implicit in naming a people *not* virile sits uncomfortably with Nehru’s highly sexualized rendering of the Kashmir valley in his preface to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India’s 1956 travel book titled *Kashmir*. Before the Delhi Agreement of 1953, the people of Kashmir aren’t virile. After it, the valley and by extension its people, now firmly attached to India, are highly desirable, fetishized to the point of being “above human desire.” To get a fuller sense of the diction of colonial travelogues employed by Nehru to describe Kashmir and highlight its desirability to tourists, it is important to quote the preface in its entirety here. Under the title “The Charm of Kashmir”, Nehru, in his preface to *Kashmir*, writes:

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 and lake and graceful trees. And then another aspect of this magic beauty would come to view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and precipices, and snow-capped peaks and glaciers, and cruel and fierce torrents rushing down to the valleys below. It had a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, everchanging, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow. The mist would creep up from the Dal Lake and, like a transparent veil, give glimpses of what was behind. The clouds would throw out their

³⁷ Nehru, 329.

arms to embrace a mountain-top, or creep down stealthily like children at play. I watched this everchanging spectacle, and sometimes the sheer loveliness of it was overpowering and I felt almost faint. As I gazed at it, it seemed to me dreamlike and unreal, like the hopes and desires that fill us and so seldom find fulfilment. It was like the face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening. / Twelve days in Kashmir, twelve days after three-and-twenty years. Yet one vital moment is worth more than years of stagnation and vegetation, and to spend twelve days in Kashmir was good fortune indeed. But Kashmir calls back, its pull is stronger than ever, it whispers its fairy magic to the ears, and its memory disturbs the mind. How can they who had fallen under its spell release themselves from this enchantment?³⁸

Engendered desire, awe, mystic unveiling, dreams, nostalgia, spectacle, fantasy, enchantment and incantation, all the elements of utopia are operationalized by Nehru's preface. To uphold the notion of Kashmir as paradise, not for political but rather economic and tourism purposes this time, Nehru inscribes Kashmir and its people with desirability. What was just a few years ago a forlorn "soft" land in need of protection is now the Elysian Fields of tourism. As can be seen, Nehru's earlier emphasis on virility is replaced by a complex of beauty that is at once feminine, masculine, impersonal, above human desire, and enchanting. Everything a tourist desires, be it a beloved or the masculine hardness of precipices or the weakening loveliness of a spectacle, can be found endlessly in Kashmir.

What we have seen so far is the repetition and morphing of the aesthetic of Kashmir as Paradise through the mid 1940s and the early 1950s. Authoritatively and cunningly, Kashmir and its people have been dispossessed of much historical and cultural matter and repossessed as varied politically favorable images. Whether for one or the other political agenda, the common Kashmiri's imaginations of Kashmir have either been discarded, predefined, or overshadowed by Sheikh Abdullah's and Jawaharlal Nehru's erect (despotic) edifices. What is erected as Kashmir in the first half of the 20th century through manifestos, speeches, pictures, travel books, and cultural events is

³⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru quoted in Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Kashmir* (Bombay: New Jack Printing Works Private LTD, 1956), 3.

furthered through the second half of the 20th century by the deployment of a new technology – film. Before moving on to place *otherwise* imaginations of the valley in apposition to the Kashmirs we’ve encountered so far, I will close this section of the paper by briefly addressing the important interrelation between the Indian Film Industry and the Indian Tourism Industry that sustains paradisaical visions of Kashmir and carries them into the discourses on Kashmir through the 1960s and onwards into our times³⁹. As historian Hafsa Kanjwal notes in *Colonizing Kashmir*, Prime Minister Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, who with the assistance of the Indian Government and Dogra ruler Karan Singh leads a coup against Sheikh Abdullah and has him arrested in 1953 on anti-national charges, opens Kashmir’s landscapes to Indian filmmakers during his time in office from 1953-1963, allowing for a proliferation of “holiday films”⁴⁰. These holiday films displace the troubled, war-torn realities of Kashmir visually and sonically to solidify the image of Kashmir as a desirous South Asian Eden. This South Asian Eden is identifiably an improvisation on the “sunlit valleys of plenty” and the “supremely beautiful woman” imagined by Abdullah and Nehru, but in addition to being utilized symbolically for the explicitly political purposes of setting up an aesthetic regime of Kashmir as paradise, the notion of a South Asian Eden is also used through the second half of the century to capitalize upon the disposable incomes of the growing middle-class Indian population, who are throughout this time being taught to think this Eden as an exceptional holiday destination.⁴¹ The characters, plots, programming, and visual imagery of films like *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964), *Junglee* (1961), *Janwar* (1965), and *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965) among dozens of others produced during the 60s and 70s interlace political integration and a fetishism of the other in order to ornament the edifice of Kashmir, materialize the fantasy of the integer, and channel the savings of the middle class back into a national

³⁹ Martinique’s development as tourist destination by the French State comes to mind.

⁴⁰ Kanjwal, 95-102.

⁴¹ Kanjwal, 102-108.

industry⁴². Because of the Indian film industry's gaze on Kashmir, new forms of employment are created for Kashmiris and Indians in the valley, contributing to demographic changes, and the rhetoric of an integrated Kashmir is further strengthened. Again, Indian State propaganda, this time voiced as the Kashmiri State's aspirations by a ventriloquized Bakshi, fashions new, agreeable subjectivities and orientations on the Kashmir issue while upholding a celebratory biopolitics of paradise – a literal cultural transmission and figurative carnival spell of a *Jashn-e-Kashmir* (Celebration of Kashmir)⁴³. To create a Kashmiri body that wears the “public spectacle” of paradisaical normalization and carnival celebration as its everyday attire, but also, more importantly, a body that behaves in line with the national integration project, Kashmiri flesh is dressed by this incantational force. This is to say that the social, visible body in the modern state of Jammu and Kashmir isn't simply a blazon of penalties⁴⁴, but is also symbolically draped in an ancient but unfamiliar attire, a desirable but commodifiable garment, that makes sensible a palatable, integrated Kashmiri, and hides all else. Kanjwal's reading of Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Kashmir in 1955 as a grand normalizing event, a spectacle lauding an integrated India aimed at showcasing to the world, through cultural events and shikara rides, filial ties between Indians and Kashmiris, is a convincing example of this fabrication of flesh, or of what Kanjwal calls “narrating normalization”⁴⁵. Owing to this method of spectacular clothing, various classes of the public indispensable to the Indian National Project, like the growing Indian middle-class or the visiting international dignitaries and UN representatives, were seduced by the tourism industry's production of Kashmir.

⁴² The rhetoric of “development” implemented by the Modi government in Gujarat, and subsequently in Kashmir, disguises common land acquirement and manipulation as a modern, progressive economic goal.

⁴³ “Celebration of Kashmir”. Kanjwal, 78.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, “Foreward” in *The Punitive Society*, 8, “...the visible or social body must be the blazon of the penalties.”

⁴⁵ “Narrating Normalization,” 68-95.

Alongside cinematico-political visions of a plentiful, paradisaical Kashmir and an integrated people, the “nature” of Kashmiri people was being forcibly and repeatedly redetermined through film as well. The emergence of the “hospitable Kashmiri”, a potent and manufactured enclosed being that appears in political discourse on Kashmir today too⁴⁶ can be traced back to Nehru’s Kashmiri addicted to “soft and easy” and then rediscovered in the characters of Raja in *Jab Jab Phool Khile* or Mamdu in *Arzoo*.⁴⁷ Hospitality, a synonym for docility in this context, was weaponized in the early 2000s as well, when a “peaceful solution” to Kashmir’s problems was being sought yet again. Against the militant forms of life erupting in the insurgency of the 1990s, this appeal to an essentialist common peace-loving Kashmiri held immense rhetorical weight. Even the JKLF’s Yasin Malik, one of Kashmir’s most visible revolutionary figures, was lured onto the negotiations table with the central government of India in 2006 by this false figuration.

Similarly, the markedly sexualized Nehruvian enchantress finds parallels in the Kashmiri flower girl, Champa, who is the wealthy Indian protagonist’s love interest in *Kashmir ki Kali*. The *Kashmiri Kali* from the films, labelled otherwise in the earlier discussed travel book *Kashmir* as the *Kashmiri Belle*, remains a highly desired figure in Indian politics. One doesn’t need to research much to notice its persistence. An example from contemporary Indian politics is readily available: in 2019, right after the abrogation of Article 370, the BJP’s MLA in Muzaffarnagar, Vikram Saini, addressed a function of BJP supporters and celebrated the fact that bachelors from the BJP party could, because of Modi’s fulfilment of the long-held BJP dream of Kashmir’s complete integration into India, go to

⁴⁶ Syed Ali Ahmed, “Kashmiris peace-loving people, they need development: Bhagat Singh's nephew,” *The Tribune* (Chandigarh, Punjab), March 23, 2019, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/nation/kashmiris-peace-loving-people-they-need-development-bhagat-singh-s-nephew-747328>.

⁴⁷ Kanjwal, 106.

Kashmir and marry some *gori* (fair) Kashmiri girl⁴⁸. These hospitable and desirable figures, intertwined with others like the *Kashmiri Tour Guide*, the *Militant Kashmiri*, the *Killable Kashmiri*, the *Manageable Kashmiri*, mark and remark on the persistent annunciation of the Kashmiri body by a cinematic, and so representative, fashioning of flesh.

⁴⁸ Outlook Web Bureau, “‘Now Marry Fair Kashmiri Girl’: BJP MLA’s Remark After Abrogation Of Article 370,” *Outlook* (India), 7 August, 2019, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/now-marry-fair-kashmiri-girl-bjp-mlas-remark-after-abrogation-of-article-370/335751>.

contra-paradise

Placing the “nationally” determined images of Kashmir from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s next to the contemporaneous peasant visions of Kashmir makes visible and brings to the fore a Kashmir thought and lived otherwise. Idrees Kanth, in his recently published study of peasant imaginaries in the valley, points to the rift between the national image of Kashmir propagated by the JKNC and Kashmir as imagined by peasants, particularly those who lived away from Srinagar, the urban capital and stronghold of popular politics in Kashmir⁴⁹. Holding central to his argument the common misunderstandings of the post-1947 land reforms of Kashmir, Kanth shows us that the ownership of land in Kashmir wasn’t transferred from traditional *jagirdars*, *chakedars*, *assamidars* (landowners, native land tenants, revenue-farmers) to *zamindars/kashtkars* (peasants/tillers) because all the land of Kashmir was in fact owned by the Dogra Monarchy, which distributed land and controlled transfers. What was actually transferred in 1947 was the ownership of land from the Monarch to the newly formed Kashmiri State. The persisting belief that a direct transfer of land to the tiller was the result of the suggestions of the Naya Kashmir manifesto and the JKNC’s efforts is shown by Kanth in his analysis to be mythic.⁵⁰ This is to say that despite several statuses of occupancy and proprietorship existing under the Dogras and in the redistribution process, the Monarch first and then the Jammu and Kashmir State ultimately held the land. In Marxist terminology, the bourgeois classes, whose class consciousness Kanth places in opposition to Partha Chatterjee’s category of a (peasant) community consciousness, owned and controlled the land, and by extension the produce of the land, while the peasant was provided land to work upon under the aegis of the State.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Idrees Kanth, “Peasant Imaginaries and ‘Kashmiri Nationalism,’” in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Kashmir Studies*, eds. Haley Duschinski, Mona Bhan, and Deepti Misri (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2022), 21-37.

⁵⁰ Kanth, 21-24.

⁵¹ Kanth, 24-26.

Highlighting the acrimony between the JKNC loyalists (primarily constituted of *peerzadas/shrine worshippers* and upper caste “Syed” Muslims) and the Muslim League supporters (who were by and large Muslims opposed to shrine worship) and the food shortage of 1942, Kanth goes on to show that the Muslim League supporters from rural areas accused the “irresponsible government” for its partiality toward the residents of Srinagar and the JKNC loyalists, alleging that the government had reduced the issue of rations to them, while making them available to those living in the city. These differences led to stray protests by peasants across Kashmir and concerted demonstrations in July 1945 in Sopore, Baramulla, and Bandipura. The peasants formed *kisan* (peasant) committees throughout Kashmir and assembled as the All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan (Peasant) Conference in order to voice their grievances directly to the monarch, who as we know held political authority still.⁵² As alluded to earlier in the essay, this conference was considered anti-JKNC and efforts were made to silence its concerns. In response to the JKNC’s black marketing, harassments, bribery, arrests, and attacks on peasant gatherings, the *kisan* committees continued their criticisms of the government, denouncing the *New Kashmir* manifesto publicly and stating that: “[the JKNC] preached that land should belong to the tillers but were purchasing land themselves.”⁵³ On May 11, 1946, after months of advocacy for Muslim-Hindu peasant unity and after urging rural communities across the state to muster under the banner of the *kisan* committees, the All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan Conference organized a gathering in Islamabad/Anantnag which was preceded over by a hundred plus delegates and attended by around 20,000 peasants. Over the next three days, “peasant songs were played, crackers fired, and resolutions passed demanding the end of exploitation and landlordism in Kashmir.”⁵⁴ Here, illuminating the collective peasant consciousness at play, Kanth, by relying on peasant insurgencies, Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of the peasant as distrustful of those who aren’t of his

⁵² Kanth, 26-28.

⁵³ Representative of Kisan Committee quoted. in Kanth, 26.

⁵⁴ Kanth, 27.

class⁵⁵, and on Partha Chatterjee's community consciousness once again⁵⁶, argues that the peasants of Kashmir weren't as concerned about the "national" Kashmir sentiment as they were about local, day-to-day matters and broader anti-peasant oppressions.

Thus, in the peasant quotidian, Kashmir was imagined differently. Noticeably, no mention of a paradisaical "valley of plenty" was found in any peasant collective visions of Kashmir. Rather, the Kashmir of the peasant was afflicted by lacks and shortages. Everyday material concerns occupied the peasant of Kashmir and struggle against "landlordism" dictated the contours of the peasant's imaginaries. In contrast to the "dazzling gem" that the New Kashmir manifesto imagined a liberated Kashmir to be and counter to Nehru's desirous mythic valley, Kashmir for the peasant was a Kashmir tied to land work and its problems. The peasant who labored in fields daily determined Kashmir as a reflection of his habit. The aesthetics of Kashmir for the peasant were tethered to the cyclical crop cycles, daily tilling demands, and agrarian ecosystems – not, as we have seen earlier, to national visions of an independent state. This isn't to say that the ideology of Kashmiri nationalism was absent from peasant life, but rather to emphasize the reality that their relation to this nationalism wasn't their primary mode of engagement with the political.

By reading the diaries of Master Ghulam Muhammad, a Kashmiri peasant from Zoohama and diarist who made disciplined entries into his dairies from the 1960s to the 1990s, Kanth evidences the difference between the life of the Kashmiri peasant and the peasant as we've seen characterized by the nationalist movements of Kashmir.⁵⁷ In Ghulam Muhammad's diaries, we almost exclusively find writings about "a peasant way of life", meaning that we encounter descriptions of weather, produce

⁵⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, 1973, "Peasants and Politics" in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 1(1), 3–22.

⁵⁶ Partha Chatterjee, 1988, "For an Indian History of Peasant Struggles" in *Social Scientist* 16(11): 3–17.

⁵⁷ Kanth, 29–32.

quantities, travels from village to city, among other matters influenced by peasant cosmologies and forms of life. Further, much is written about daily prayers and Muslim ethic. Once again, that which is repeatable or habitual is given and recorded daily.

What we also find reflected in the entries is Ghulam Muhammad's highly acute political awareness concerning international matters. There's mention of the Apollo II spaceflight and of the burning of masjid-i-Aqsa in 1969, but not much reference is made to India and barely any comment about personal positions regarding Kashmiri politics is to be found. Although Ghulam Mohammad's fidelity to Sheikh Abdullah is made known occasionally, it is important to highlight that this fellow-feeling and reverence for the leader come not from Abdullah's national political presence and vision, but rather his other role as a priestly Muslim figure.

Relying on Pierre Bourdieu's idea that a peasant habitus⁵⁸ is influenced by "the vagaries and vigor of the land and the seasons"⁵⁹ and his description of land being *alma mater*, the generous mother who cannot be ignored, the conclusion that Idrees Kanth draws from these observations of the Kashmiri peasant is that: "The Kashmiri peasant appears to have been more status quoist, perhaps less drawn to imagine a distant future, while hoping to become increasingly self-reliant."⁶⁰ This is to say that the peasant's attachment to land, which constitutes an essential part of his living and being, and his dream of self-sufficiency is what informs the peasant's visions of Kashmir. These visions are contra-paradise – they are firmly rooted in the peasant's labor-driven, anti-utopian earth. What loyalty the peasant might have towards a national vision is one that is constructed primarily by a personal reverence for the holy Sheikh Abdullah, indicating, as Kanth claims, that for the peasant the national in Kashmir is

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72-96.

⁵⁹ Kanth, 31.

⁶⁰ Kanth, 32.

“insufficiently imagined”⁶¹. In other words, the national aesthetic regime for the peasant isn’t sensible as it is for the city-dweller. Rather, the aesthetics of a paradisaical Kashmiri Nation is overshadowed by material and religious necessities.

Moving away from the diaries of Ghulam Muhammad, which reside in the crevices of the national imaginary of Kashmir, to two line drawings by contemporary Kashmiri artist Khytul Abyad, we perceive a further distancing from the lofty edifices of Kashmir erected by the National models we’ve encountered thus far. In “Moon Dance” and “Night Fishing,” the narrative action takes place at night, a time unlike morning when protests are held, encounters take place, and *hartaals* (general strikes) called. Typically, three strands of political action take place at night in Kashmir, in darkness: insurgent movements, counter-insurgent action, and night-time raids. On a Manichean level, this darkness/blackness is opposed to the lightness/whiteness of paradise, but away from the state politics of night-time, Abyad forces us to confront other nocturnal happenings.

⁶¹ Kanth, 27.



Figure 1: Khytul Abyad, *Moon Dance*, April 21, 2021, Instagram. Accessed November 10, 2023.
https://www.instagram.com/p/CN-a83lFtS6/?img_index=1.



Figure 2: Khytul Abyad, *Night Fishing*, January 4, 2023, Instagram, accessed November 10, 2023,
https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm_7Y7NLUal/?img_index=2.

A note to Abyad's "Moon Dance," written by the artist herself reads:

The hope for a sunrise had vanished. The six friends, waiting by the lake were thus adjured to return to the Earth that they had ascended from, for there would be no celebration. / But by the lake that had been emptied, with their mouths athirst, they stood afloat, throwing their supple arms free in the air singing for themselves like they would sing for the moon. / And with them danced the bare moonless sky.⁶²

While the mythic and the mystic are maintained in the sketch through the cyclical, rhythmic, timeless *bokech*⁶³ dance of the six celestial friends, what is striking about the situation is the descend – their return to a deficient, drained, *nether* earth. What must be understood here is that the movement of the friends from the skies to the earth, from above to below, mimics the movement of Kashmiri aesthetics from the scale of the national plentiful to the wanting peasant basal that we noticed while comparing national imaginaries to peasant imaginaries. What is also important to note is that the nether earth environment in which the friends dance is entangled with their bodies and merges into the figures themselves. Like with the peasants whose habitus informs their imaginations and actions, the dancers can't be delineated from the lake-side scene. The context of the dance, the bodies dancing, and the dance itself are figured as a totality in opposition to the one absented by Abyad's narrative – the moon kingdom. Negating the moon that previously demanded their regard and placing themselves as the receivers of their own chorus, the friends sing and dance for themselves. The peasant celebratory songs from the *kisan* conferences are recalled here. In this contradiction to paradise, this bare moonless image, a different politics emerges in contradiction to national and firmly statist models through the bodies engaged in the movements: Women wearing *pherans*⁶⁴ dance and sing in Abyad's night, indicating a politics otherwise than the one dictated in popular discourse by men in party attires, speaking party languages, dreaming fetishized futures.

⁶² Khytul Abyad, *Moon Dance*, April 21, 2021, Instagram. Accessed November 10, 2023.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CN-a83IFtS6/?img_index=1.

⁶³ Traditional Kashmiri dance form in which the dancers hold hands and perform a chain dance.

⁶⁴ Traditional Kashmiri attire worn in the winters.

In “Night Fishing,” we are drawn further down, below land, into the waters themselves. Along with the morphoses of aesthetic regimes we’ve encountered so far, we find ourselves moving from the heights of the idyllic to the grit of earth into the depths of water – where much is unknown and unseen. Abyad’s figure in the drawing, while laying on water herself, submerges her head into the water at night and breaks its surface, its veil, indicating the necessity of unveiling, undressing, the fashionable, prefigured coverings placed upon Kashmir. Abyad’s character, intricately woven into the eternal backdrop of a celestial body rising/setting, appears curious and searching. By the act of immersing her head into the water, the character sets off the emergence of the fish towards her, activating the possibility of an encounter with the other while simultaneously rendering immersion context. Like with the dance of the friends earlier, the action and the environment in which action and reaction takes places are inseparable. The lines that form the moon in the drawing merge with the character who merges with the waters and the fish, and in the presence of the moon, albeit not directly witnessing its luminescence, the immersed figure searches the netherworld of the waters in transfigured light. Not only is the panoptic moonlight of paradise eluded and contradicted, written off and articulated against, in the hydrographic and marine action of the drawing, but it is also, simultaneously, left unattended. What is given attention to is that which is below the heights of heaven and the limits of land, that which is yet unknown, unsensed.

Coda: *A Nether Aesthetic*

“Angatis che aekhri gash haawan.”⁶⁵

“Blackness is shown the last light.”⁶⁶

With each glance at the peculiar and particular constitution of Kashmir’s political imaginary, which as we have seen feeds and is fed by notions of the exotic (the foreign, the faraway, the fantastic), the vigilant observer is able to determine an obscurity, an entanglement of metaphors – *sbruks among sbruks*,⁶⁷ *knotted knots*. It is evident to her attentive senses that representations of Kashmir are improvisations on certain facile but formidable motifs that have historically captured and aesthetically surrounded and reduced the valley. The enclosed garden or keep of the sovereign, the open-air prison of the State, the UN recognized disputed territory, the insurgency for *azaadi*⁶⁸, and the developing ‘smart’ city and paradisiacal tourist destination seem to her motifs on Kashmir’s symbolic fabric of paradise. The reproduction and propagation of these motifs, she realizes, inform the discursive, reflexive, legislative, and statist grammars of Kashmiri life. Put differently, these motifs hint at the structural limits and mechanics of Kashmir’s representations, and in doing so pronounce and produce the violent (in)distinction between the figurative, the material, and the experiential. In the realm of public rhetoric, when reduced to maxims, these archetypal images are transformed into potent and repeatable political formulations: The sovereign and the despot politically, perpetually construct Kashmir as their sunlit valley, their exotic enchantress, their possession and souvenir. Paradise, Garden, and Tourist Destination are constructed thus in view of a horticultural handcrafted horizon, while the State is produced in the shadow language of discipline and punishment, and the lexicon of

⁶⁵ Mir Kashif, “Agaaz,” track 7 on *Peak Wave Descent*, Mir Kashif Iqbal, 2021, Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/track/4mkU4voikkgcFIINvTgTbA?si=8a0ba4bf8ef040e3>.

⁶⁶ Translation mine.

⁶⁷ “Knot”; Also a form of poetry popularized by Nund Rishi, a Kashmiri Sufi poet writing in the 15th century. For more on Nund Rishi refer to Abir Bazaz, *Nund Rishi: Poetry and Politics in Medieval Kashmir*, Cambridge University Press, 2023.

⁶⁸ “Freedom”: The word *azaadi* holds a privileged place in the rhetoric of anti-state organization in Kashmir. A popular slogan: “Hum kya chahta? Azaadi! Cheen key lenge! Azaadi!” “What do we want? Freedom! We’ll snatch it from them! Freedom!”

radical expression – of insurgents and subversive thinkers/artists – grates against tattered utopias of permanence that strive to permanently whitewash traces of aesthetic oppression. With this foregrounded, the vigilant observer feels the subtle, binding filament, the tangible, (un)veiled master weave: holding together the garden, the keep, the prison, and the intransigence is the *fantasy of the integer* – the controlled, official metanarrative politics of a nationalizing, circumcising calloused promise of a whole.

What is evident to the vigilant observer is that to be in the hold – in the grip, the grasp, in the possession and embrace – of a symbol is to be marked, enclosed, enchanted, (re)defined and (re)incarnated by a promissory force. On the one hand, a paradisiacal Kashmir mimics, and so perpetuates, the historically assured sublimity of the Mughal Gardens or the Sanskrit deep past, and on the other hand the dream of the JKNC's Kashmiri Nation-State/Congress' Secular India/BJP's Hindu Rashtra inscribes temples of national rhetoric onto Kashmiri flesh. The formal content of the Kashmiri body and the silhouette of Kashmiri resistance are overdetermined by the incessant spectacle of intruders, whether in the form of Indian integration policy or Indian military forces, laying siege to and claiming the valley for their own mass. Firstly, to be used as an appendage to an ideological, capitalist, casteist, sectarian, classist, racist electoral-politics machine, and secondly to be assimilated into the foreign national body as a transplanted organ, Kashmir suffers violent definitions and entanglements. Creating discourse alongside each other on a common historic stage, these definitions and entanglements share a trait: they are written and orchestrated by the Other. The Other who is acutely aware of the necessity of suppressing and erasing all antagonistic, anti-national, improvised, "hagiopolitical"⁶⁹, militant social forms or deviations from the normative in order to keep the keep, to

⁶⁹ Dean Accardi, "Religious and Political Power in Kashmir: Recollecting the Past for the (Post)colonial Present", in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Kashmir Studies*, 239.

maintain paradise as paradise. In the realm of the symbolic, fetishized images and fantasies of integration perform the required transformative labor. In the realm of the public-political, the symbolic is transposed by realizing, making real, clear and fabricated majoritarian ideals that naturalize a delusional system⁷⁰: absolute bodily allegiance to national development is a necessary condition for the possessive individual – the Kashmiri who possesses and reproduces the Kashmir that is given him by the Other. By virtue of this machine developed and oiled by the Other, and of course the other within the self, Kashmiri flesh is made ancillary to an organization of space and a manipulation of (im)material resources – of culture and paradisaical utopias – giving way to the construction of the fashionably killable⁷¹, disposable and subsequently manageable Kashmiri body. The flesh of all Kashmiris is in this manner branded by the hold of the valley.

So, to be in the aesthetic hold of the valley is to be, perhaps most pertinently, possessed and contained in and by what Fred Moten and Stephano Harney name Logistics. Logistics, which wants to “dispense with the subject altogether”, not in service of the formless, emancipatory, improvisational *we* of community but in service of its obsession with absolute sovereignty over “the informal, the concrete and generative indeterminacy of material life”, is the operative logic of Nehru’s visions and the BJP’s integrated Hindu Rashtra project⁷². This new name of capitalist science adopted namelessly by the BJP has possessed and redrawn the contours of the national symbolic and bolstered the *fantasy of the integer*. Logistics is becoming, as is Kashmir’s aesthetic, architectural, geographic landscape, concrete – measurements of riverbank sand are being transmuted into urban, developed vistas of

⁷⁰ Fred Moten, “Notes on Passage” in *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 193.

⁷¹ Athar Zia, “The Killable Kashmiri Body: The Life and Execution of Afzal Guru” in *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 103, “While India makes it “killable,” Guru’s body also becomes potent and hypervisible, fuelling symbols of resistance that manifest in the open grave..”

⁷² Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe Etc.: Minor Compositions, 2013), 87.

mimic-modernity. In other words: Kashmir is being turned into Shimla, the perfected tourist destination for Indian middle classes, and into Gujarat⁷³, the instantly ‘developed’ industrial center. All memory of fractional dirt, blood, maternal spirit, and water is being redrawn as fractal, phallic, beautiful futures/pasts of ‘snow-capped’ mountains, ‘bubbling and gurgling’ brooks, and tulip flowers⁷⁴. This ahistoricizing fantasy of the integer commandeers transmutation by an endless promissory voyage, carrying national, militaristic, economic, corporate, administrative, legislative, and aesthetic containers into and out of the valley day and night tirelessly. Extracting what it requires to fuel the continuance of the voyage, and outlawing, possessing, emptying whatever interrupts the construction of its measureless chimera, the fantasy of the integer labors to leave no space for improvisation or the socio-poetic work of refusal.

But, in the night of the valley, when bunker-eyes grow tired, *something other than* predetermined Kashmirs and Kashmiris lurk in the shadows. The hold/hole of the valley, illuminated by surveillance and military excess from *fajr* until *ishaa* long passes, at times, in time out of joint, feels unseen, relaxed. This becoming in night, in *nether* blackness, is the opened space, the repurposed commons, the undercommons, is where flesh takes its flights of fantasy in apposition to its unrealized fantasies of flight. Opposed and touching, before and always, the movement of “things, unformed objects, deformed subjects, nothing yet and already”, the *something other than* awakens from the dream of logistics, and articulated by peasants, by women, by artists and musicians, otherwise Kashmirs and Kashmiris emerge from the shadows. Here I ask, to conclude: can beings-becomings that refuses to

⁷³ Indira Hirway, “The Truth Behind the Gujarat Growth Model,” *The Wire* (India), 8 December, 2017, <https://thewire.in/economy/the-truth-behind-the-gujarat-growth-model>, “The growth strategy had three major components: quantum jump in infrastructure to facilitate inflow of corporate investment; quantum jump in governance to address the requirements of corporate units; and unprecedented rise in incentives and subsidies on investments to the corporate sector to attract investments. Infrastructure development focused on roads, airports and power – and through reforms, 24-hour availability of power.”

⁷⁴ The Tulip Festival held each year in Srinagar attracts thousands of tourists to the valley.

subjugate the native to the usurping intruder, the impregnated, manageable other to the impregnating, totalizing other, be lived in the morning of the valley? Or differently, in what language does one speak the marks on and movements of Kashmiri flesh capacitated by the violent unceasing metamorphoses of metaphor (from sovereign garden to souvenir) unleashed on the region by the fantasy of the integer? How does one play in the interstices of these changes?

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