

INDIAN NECROPOLITICS AND WEAPONIZING COVID-19 IN KASHMIR

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Spring 2020: Double Lockdown

In the middle of March 2020, rumours of the Covid-19 lockdown were getting stronger in Kashmir. A friend observed: "*Hindustanan korr asi satay gazz asmaan! khabar ami Covid-lockdown-eh seeth ma gatche thoda farakh 35-A badlawness?*" The literal translation of the maxim used by my friend is that the sky [for the people] was brought down [by India] to a distance of mere 7 "gazz", an old Mughal measurement amounting to a yard. It was a pithy shorthand that conveyed the extraordinary duress enforced since August 5, 2019 when India unilaterally and militarily removed Kashmir's autonomy. The coercive policies of the Indian Government had proceeded at an extraordinary speed, choking and diminishing any remnants of free space and expression. My friend, a quintessential ever-optimistic Kashmiri, in the same sentence, also expressed hope that the impending Covid-19 lockdown might either slow or halt the Government of India's policies geared towards bringing demographic change, which has been the biggest fear after the revoking of autonomy. Thus, when the Covid-19 lockdown was taking effect across India, Kashmir, already under a full and partial siege for over 9 months, was slapped with another lockdown; bringing the region under a double lockdown.

Across the globe, the pandemic manifests the operation of Foucauldian biopower, subjecting life to extreme control and regulation in order to administer, optimize, and multiply it. In Kashmir, the only prevailing mode of biopower is what Achille Mbembe¹ calls necropolitics,² a decolonial analytic lens that focuses on how governmentality operates in a system of hegemonic neoliberal and neocolonial violence dictating who may live and who must die. Necropolitics becomes apparent in a situation of siege, or a camp where dissident and unwanted populations are detained in order to make it easy to govern, control, harass, and annihilate them. Kashmir, one of the most densely militarized regions in the world, is a de-facto camp

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¹ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press 2001).

² Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press 2019).

militarily controlled and occupied by laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.³ Such laws give the military power to control the region with impunity and zero accountability, resulting in the cessation and abuse of basic human and civil rights. These laws, an evidence of India's colonial constitutionalism, have been deployed to perfect the necropolitical practices inside Kashmir. In this context, how could it be that the Indian state would suddenly turn a benevolent caregiver and the imposition of the Covid-19 lockdown would solely be aimed at safeguarding Kashmiri life—one that is considered “a killable body”⁴ in the Indian nationalistic vision? It was not a surprise that my friend's hope for some ease, however, remained only that—a hope.

While most of the globe is dealing with the singular infection of Covid-19, Kashmiris are facing multiple infections from a military occupation, the latest of which is its necropolitical weaponization of the pandemic. The Covid-19 lockdown became a ready camouflage for the military occupation to operate upon a population doubly quarantined. It is evident that the Indian Government is taking advantage of the population's immobilization and continuing its nationalistic agenda at a breakneck speed—both militarily and administratively—which further subjugates the Kashmiris.

Summer 2019: The Siege Before Covid-19 Lockdown

On August 4, 2019, my WhatsApp lit up with a luminous photograph (see *figure 1*) of the shrine of Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (*figure 2*). It was my parents sharing with me their visit to the shrine, which is an enduring symbol of the spiritual, political, and cultural independence of Kashmir. They were planning to visit the shrine for seven consecutive days, a pledge that devotees often take for their spiritual salvation. But they only made it to day one. The photograph became the last contact I had with my parents for the next three months or so.

On the fateful day when my parents visited the shrine praying for peace, they were surrounded by the panic of an undeclared war. The Indian Government had flown in 48,000-plus troops on top of the 650,000-plus already present in the region. With rumours and speculation rife, Kashmiris single-mindedly began to do the only thing in their control: stocking up and hunkering down for whatever was to come. People flocked to the markets for rations, medicines, baby food, and gas. A photo of an old Kashmiri man stocking gas in a small plastic flask went viral.⁵ Living in the “postcolonial” aftermath which has steadily eroded their sovereignty, responding to the contingencies of a protracted and invisible war has become a part of the Kashmiri life.

³ H. Duschinski et al. (eds), *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2018).

⁴ Ather Zia, ‘The Killable Kashmiri Body: The Life and Execution of Afzal Guru’ in H. Duschinski et al. (eds) *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2018).

⁵ Mudassir Ahmed, ‘Amidst Kashmir Panic, Political Parties Want Centre to Break Silence’ *South Asia Journal* (3 August 2019) <<http://southasiajournal.net/amidst-kashmir-panic-political-parties-want-centre-to-break-the-silence/>>.

On August 5, 2019, the right-wing Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government put into motion a multi-pronged military approach for the complete annexation of Indian administered Kashmir.⁶ The spectacle of military power wielded by the Indian nation-state was super-charged with religious and nationalistic zeal, the hallmark of BJP. An elderly Kashmiri man called it a “chadayi” (invasion/annexation) mounted by India.⁷ This happened under the camouflage of “integration” to consolidate the Indian nation state. India’s local client-politicians in Kashmir who have run sham governments for New Delhi since 1947 were also arrested and detained. Average civilians, resistance leaders, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and businesspeople were put under detention or house arrest.

Towards the end of October, the detainees were being released only if they signed a bond that banned them from any kind of political activity, most of all speaking against the removal of autonomy. Many prisoners were booked under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978 (PSA), notoriously known as the lawless law because it allows the arrest and incarceration of people without charge or trial for up to two years. The number of civilians under arrest grew to the extent that the Government forces began looking to rent private property to use as detention centres. Mass arrests continued and at one point more than 13,000 juvenile children were put under detention and many were imprisoned in jails outside Kashmir.⁸ Kashmiri journalists were barred from reporting. Initially, foreign reporters were allowed but were later stopped from going into the region. The trickle of news reports that did surface in the international media reflected a fearful yet a resistant population.⁹

Kashmir’s autonomy was illegally removed by a rushed presidential decree without consulting the Kashmiri legislature, which had been disbanded previously, or the people¹⁰; this was decried as an “unconstitutional deed accomplished by deceitful means”,¹¹ and a “constitutionally suspect” deed which [could not have been] achieved

⁶ Goldie Osuri, ‘Kashmiris Are Living a Long Nightmare of Indian Colonialism’ (*The Conversation*, 2019) <<https://theconversation.com/kashmiris-are-living-a-long-nightmare-of-indian-colonialism-121925>>.

⁷ Interview with Mohammad Abbas Shah (Personal Communication, 12 January 2020).

⁸ ‘Full Text: Women’s Voice; Fact-Finding Report on Kashmir – Maktoob’ (*Maktoob*, 24 September 2019) <<https://maktoobmedia.com/2019/09/24/full-text-womens-voice-fact-finding-report-on-kashmir/>>.

⁹ Jean Drèze et al., ‘Kashmir Caged: A Fact-Finding Report’ (*NCHRO*, 2019) <<https://www.nchro.org/index.php/2019/08/14/kashmir-caged-a-fact-finding-report-by-jean-dreze-kavita-krishnan-maimoona-mollah-and-vimal-bhai/>>.

¹⁰ Suhrith Parthasarathy, ‘An Exercise of Executive Whim: Negation of Article 370 In J&K Doesn’t Stand Up to Constitutional Test, Strikes at Federalism’ (*Times of India Blog*, 2019) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/a-plainly-illegal-order-why-the-overturning-of-article-370-in-jk-doesnt-stand-up-to-constitutional-test/>>.

¹¹ A Deshmane, ‘Kashmir: Scrapping Article 370 "Unconstitutional", "Deceitful," Says Legal Expert A.G. Noorani’ (*Huffington Post India*, August 2019).



Image 1: “[M]y WhatsApp lit up with a luminous photograph”



Image 2: The inner sanctum of the shrine of Hazarat Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, Khankah, Srinagar

unilaterally.¹² An Indian actor and a prominent BJP supporter tweeted, “Kashmir solution has begun”. It sounded ominous and the similarity with the *final solution* was not lost on the Kashmiris. The Indian Government put eight million Kashmiris under curfew and an unprecedented communication lockdown.¹³ Strict restrictions were put in place on mobility and all forms of media, internet, landlines, and cell phones. A radio silence emanated from the valley; in effect, it was an enforced disappearance of the entire region of Kashmir. Genocide Watch, alarmed by the turn of events, issued an alert on the region.¹⁴

The Indian Government labelled the military siege as a vaguely benign sounding “lockdown” which was for the “good” of the Kashmiris, lest they come on streets to protest. Since protests are met by the Government with the use indiscriminate force, they become disproportionately lethal. The Indian Government was portraying

¹² Balu G. Nair ‘Abrogation of Article 370: Can the President Act Without the Recommendation of the Constituent Assembly?’ (2019) 3(3) Indian Law Review 254.

¹³ Jeffrey Gettleman, ‘In Kashmir, Growing Anger and Misery’ (NY Times, 2019) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/30/world/asia/Kashmir-lockdown-photos.html>>.

¹⁴ Gregory Stanton, ‘Genocide Alert for Kashmir, India’ (Genocidewatch.com, 2019) <<https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2019/08/15/Genocide-Alert-for-Kashmir-India>>.

the lockdown as a means to safeguard Kashmiri life rather than a means to curb any potential protests which might have created a law-and-order situation and caused casualties. Such an eventuality would have complicated the narrative of normalcy that Government was trying hard to portray.

The valley was made to disappear into a curfewed communication black hole; the Indian Government's policy of curbing Kashmiri dissent by indirect and direct military action was a mega-spectacle. The Government and media continuously projected the situation on the ground as normal. The word "normal" said in the context of Kashmir in the Indian narrative is an antithesis of its meaning. For Kashmiris it has acquired the status of a slur. Massive protests were erupting from time to time, which resulted in more than 100 injured and several dead.¹⁵ Kashmiris mainly protested through a civil boycott or *hartal* and voluntarily refused to engage in daily activities by staying indoors. The device of *hartal* as a means of protest manifests the haplessness of Kashmiris where a politics of self-injury often is the only way to show their resistance. While India kept boasting of accelerating development, the economic loss inflicted on Kashmiris by the lockdown was estimated to be upwards of USD 5.3 billion. Only small stores, vegetable vendors, and automobiles were operating for short durations to keep the essential supplies circulating. The region reeled under a humanitarian crisis—basic rights including healthcare, education, and economy were all suspended.

Re/Annexation not Integration

The Government of India declared that the "integration" of Kashmir was "complete". The word integration sounds so benign, but its violence is marked on each Kashmiri body—it is a wound that never heals. For Kashmiris, integration means seventy-two years of political trauma and subjugation inflicted by India. It means democracy deployed as "politics" with symbolic elections—a sham production involving India's own client-politicians, collaborators, sell-outs, and thugs. It means the UN mandate over Kashmir being sidelined; it means illicit elections which the UN (when they were first held) had deemed "out of order" and have since been used as a farce of democratic governance. It means these very elections being rigged—and the manufacturing of consent by propping up predetermined governments that favoured Indians hold over Kashmir. For the lack of a better categorization, such politicians are called "pro-India politicians" that Kashmiris see as client-politicians, collaborators, and traitors to the cause of self-determination and independence. In Mathematics, integration is a way of adding slices to find the whole. In Kashmir's case, Indian integration has muddled the math, it has sliced Kashmir into bits. In August 2019, not only was the region downgraded to a Union Territory meant to be governed directly from Delhi, but it has also been sliced into two: Jammu and Kashmir being one part and Ladakh the other. This, not counting the fragmentation that the Indian occupation's systemic and

¹⁵ 'Annual Human Rights Review 2019' (*Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society*, 2019) <<https://jkccs.net/annual-human-rights-review-2019-2/>>.

institutional violence has wrecked on Kashmiri communities. While slicing Kashmir into bits, it formed its own whole, however incomplete and tenuous.

Since 1947, under the terms of the disputed treaty of accession (or *ilhaaq* as Kashmiri's call it) to the Indian Union, Kashmir was to be a quasi-independent territory and India had jurisdiction only over the matters of defence, currency/communications, and foreign affairs till the plebiscite was held. This was formalized through Article 370, which ensured that Kashmir had its own constitution and flag. India needed consensus from the Kashmiri legislature in all matters pertaining to the state. The accompanying Article 35-A safeguarded the territorial sovereignty of Kashmir, securing the right to employment, education, property ownership, and electoral franchise for the indigenous population. In the immediate postcolonial aftermath, the Indian Government used autonomy to placate deep-rooted Kashmiri nationalism but in the long run, was determined to "integrate" the region by hook or crook. The Indian Government deployed Article 370 as a Trojan gift which enabled Indian laws and statutes to be juridically imposed on Kashmir. Kashmir's governance, operationalized through clientelist regimes, ensured that New Delhi eroded Article 370 through administrative, military, and judicial means. It is telling that the word to control Kashmir in the Indian policy narrative has always been "handling" or "managing"—an evident colonial-speak for a region that has been as restive as a kitten in the hands of a cat thief. By August 2019, only a few symbolic parts and Article 35-A of the original autonomy treaty remained in force.

Kashmiris largely referred to the 1947 accession to India as a "*Jabri-naata*" (forced relation) imposed by the sole will of the fleeing monarch of the erstwhile princely state who was facing a large-scale rebellion. Many Kashmiris felt the removal of Article 370 was a relief from the forcible relation. Kashmiri resistance leaders have also long claimed that ending Article 370 would automatically free Kashmir from the Indian rule. In the past, legal analysts had observed that the removal of Article 370 would be a constitutional nightmare for India. Being the only mechanism that establishes Kashmir's status with its federation, its removal was seen as next to impossible. The Article was declared as a permanent feature of the Indian Constitution by the Supreme Court of India and the Kashmir High Court.¹⁶ Some Indian jurists observed that the removal of Article 370 turned India's de-facto occupation into de-jure and put the already established relationship between the two in jeopardy. But the Indian Government, drunk on neoliberal ethnoreligious nationalism and with a tight grip on its people, behaved as a routine occupying force and did not desist from tampering its own Constitution and ignoring all legal ramifications. In any case, the

¹⁶ 'Article 370 is Permanent, Rules J&K High Court' *The Hindu* (11 October 2015) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/article-370-is-permanent-rules-jk-high-court/article7749839.ece>>.

historic precedent is that Indian governments have never honoured their constitutional promises to Kashmiris.

The Government of India's policy since 1947 itself manifests a "legal annexation" made possible by judicial means. In 1954, a presidential order extended Indian citizenship to Kashmiris, who until then were only designated as "Permanent Residents" of the dominion of the Jammu & Kashmir. Simultaneously, the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution were also extended to the region, becoming one of the proverbial Trojan horses in India's larger policy of "legal" annexation of Kashmir. The Fundamental Rights charter of the Indian Constitution is unique in permitting preventive detention to curb threats on national sovereignty or public order. Rather than protecting citizens' rights, the charter has primarily enabled the Indian Government to control dissent inside Kashmir. This steadily criminalized Kashmiri resistance and the movement for plebiscite. A legal essay by Haley Duschinski and Shrimoyee Ghosh¹⁷ analyses in painstaking detail how from 1954 onwards, India has used this feature advantageously to repress the Kashmiri sentiment for sovereignty. The authors illustrate how India legitimized its governance of Kashmir through legal rulings: calling it "occupational constitutionalism"—a form of legal incorporation of Kashmir that "became sedimented through the work of the courts across time".¹⁸

For the BJP, the removal of Article 370 has always been foremost on the agenda fuelled by its brazen hyper-religious and nationalistic roots entrenched in Hindu supremacy and ethnonationalism (or Hindutva). This enterprise is fully fuelled by the neoliberal order that aims to sustain India as a modern neocolonial force. Currently in India, the ideology of Hindu indigeneity which casts Muslims living in India as invaders and foreigners has taken a deep hold. In that equation, Kashmiri Muslims are doubly marked as the demonized other: first as Muslims, and second as Kashmiris who are long-standing dissidents committed to the fight for a UN-mandated plebiscite, democratic sovereignty, and freedom from India. In the Indian Government's necropolitical equation, Kashmiris are doubly killable bodies.

The BJP Government's disregard for India's own constitutional mechanisms and the protections for indigenous people's rights is nothing new for Kashmiris. Only the method is different in being the ultimate spectacle of military and constitutional annexation to strike terror in the hearts of Kashmiris. While the BJP executed the final removal of autonomy, the plan for Kashmir's evisceration and full integration, as already mentioned, has been India's not-so-secret national policy. Indeed, a minister from the Indian National Congress, the old political party with roots in British politics

¹⁷ Haley Duschinski and Shrimoyee Nandini Ghosh, 'Constituting the Occupation: Preventive Detention and Permanent Emergency in Kashmir' (2017) 49(3) *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 314.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 34.

that ruled India almost uninterruptedly for 50 years, publicly boasted that they had diluted Article 370 twelve times without any controversy, unlike the BJP.¹⁹ Indeed, they had done it through deft political and juridical engineering by using Kashmiri client-politicians and collaborators and did not rely solely on military might or broad tampering with the Constitution. Thus, except for disagreements on the execution, there has been a consensus across the board for the removal of Article 370 from Indian political parties that otherwise oppose the BJP. The BJP did indeed complete the plan which has been a part of the Indian neocolonial expansionist policy in the Kashmir region all along. The Indian Government, political elite, media, and masses stood united in the project of forcible occupation and integration of Kashmir through any means possible. The ease with which the Government changed Kashmir in such a fundamental manner using direct and indirect state violence and by reneging on its own constitutional promises, while still having the common masses onboard, manifests the necropolitical policies of India that have now been normalized for Kashmiris.

While the Kashmiri people see the removal of autonomy as an attack on their ethnic, religious, and national identity, the Indian Government, in a true neocolonial idiom, claims that it is for the good of Kashmiris and is needed to pave the way for “*vikas*” (development) and to root out nepotism and “terrorism”. Yet India’s own analysts have shown that the development indices for Kashmir were already high or showing improvement.²⁰ The Indian Government’s arguments about how the removal of Article 370 will allow the implementation of corruption-free governance and a host of Fundamental Rights such as the right to education, minimum wages, social reservation, and minority rights act are misleading, disingenuous, false and strawman.²¹ It is a reasonable question to ask, if this decision is about Kashmir’s development then why were the Kashmiris caged for months on end and not celebrating on the streets? Instead, Kashmiris lament that the removal of autonomy is paving way for outright settler colonialism, dispossession of indigenous peoples, and the ecocide and exploitation of resources which will result in maldevelopment.²² It is unfortunate that since August 2019 Kashmir continues to hurtle into a massive economic sinkhole.

Article 370 was a symbol of Kashmir’s historical sovereignty and it served to underwrite the demand of self-determination by the Kashmiri people. Shamsudin, an

¹⁹ ‘We Diluted Article 370 Twelve Times Without Controversy’ (*India Today*, 19 November 2019) <<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/we-diluted-article-370-twelve-times-without-controversy-congress-1615399-2019-11-03>> accessed 12 March 2020.

²⁰ T.K. Rajalakshmi, ‘Kashmir’s Development Statistics: Nailing A Lie’ (*Frontline*, 30 August 2019) <<https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article29054385.ece>>.

²¹ Ather Zia, ‘Straw Man Arguments and the Removal of Article 370’ (*Asia Dialogue*, 2019) <<https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/09/27/the-long-read-straw-man-arguments-and-the-removal-of-article-370/>> accessed 30 July 2020.

²² Ather Zia, ‘The Haunting Specter of Hindu Ethnonationalist-Neocolonial Development in the Indian Occupied Kashmir’ (2020) 63 *Development* 60.

old Kashmiri shop owner, observed that Kashmiris have stood for Article 370 and 35-A less as a loyalty to the Indian federation and more to protect their territorial sovereignty and keep Indian settlers at bay. Kashmiris of all shades feared the removal of autonomy, which they saw as a move not to bring Kashmir on par with other states but, in reality, as a removal of protective laws to usher in demographic change and alter the Muslim majority nature of the region. Even India's own client-politicians in Kashmir were by and largely unified against the removal of autonomy. Pro-India politicians from almost all parties called an emergency meeting the night before the removal was announced, but by then any show of unity was too late for the Indian Government's plan.

Weaponizing the Pandemic

In the early March 2020, Kashmiris were partially hobbling back to life from the long military siege and communication lockdown. It was after more than 7 months that the Indian Government had functionalized some cell phones and allowed access to whitelisted sites only through 2G internet. While the world began actively fighting Covid-19, the Indian Government decided to go ahead with the winter games that were to be held in Kashmir from March 7-11, 2020. Hundreds of sportspersons poured into a scared and scarred valley. On March 25, India imposed a reactionary pandemic lockdown. For Kashmir, it was nothing new. A young Kashmiri banker observed: "We are used to it; it is not much different, except this one might be saving our life!"²³

While the reaction to the pandemic lockdown was more or less favourable, it did not turn out to be a panacea from the necropolitical state. A new media policy was imposed, arming the authorities to empanel journalists and media outlets, decide what is false news or incitement, and based on compliance assign government advertisement which for many newspapers is a major source of funding. Strict censorship has been a historical reality in Kashmir, but now it is fully institutionalized and legalized. Journalists are increasingly incarcerated, beaten, humiliated, and harassed. Recently, some were booked under terror charges with arbitrary allegations pertaining to incitement, fake news, and sympathizing with Tehreek and the resistance movement. The charges reeked of harassment, prompting the United Nations special rapporteurs to send a missive to the Indian Government expressing concern over the working conditions of journalists in Kashmir.²⁴

The pandemic provided a perfect foil for the Government to step up counterinsurgency operations. The Cordon and Search Operations (CASOs) went on unabated. During CASOs, the Indian forces enter neighbourhoods and communities under the pretext of searching for militants. This is an operation filled with soldiers

²³ Interview with K.A.D. (Personal Communication, 26 March 2020).

²⁴ Khalid Bashir Gura, '3 UN Officials Take Up Case of 4 Kashmir Scribes with Delhi' (*Srinagar*, 16 July 2020) <<https://kashmirilife.net/3-un-officials-take-up-case-of-4-kashmir-scribes-with-delhi-240158/amp/>>.

creating mayhem in people's homes; arresting, beating, humiliating, physically and sexually harassing civilians. Armed encounters with militants are continuing during the lockdown. Routine surveillance, patrolling, frisking at checkpoints and convoy movement have not ceased. All this despite the United Nations calling for the cessation of violence in conflict zones across the globe. And if this was not enough, India and Pakistan began fighting on the Line of Control. The Indian Army moved its artillery into civilian areas, expanding the battlefield into the community. Locals began protesting this move, which made them de-facto human shields. In a matter of 48 hours starting April 11, 2020, three people on the Jammu and Kashmir side and in two in Azad Kashmir were wounded and some residential houses were destroyed. Despite the pandemic advisory of staying indoors, locals had to flee from the neighbourhoods where the Indian Army has deployed its artillery.

A mid-year report released by the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) revealed that between January and June 2020, Kashmir witnessed 229 killings, 107 CASOs, 55 internet shutdowns, and forty-eight instances of property destruction. The report observed that the destruction of civilian properties during encounters saw an increase during the Covid-19 lockdown, rendering many families homeless and without shelter. A Kashmiri survivor of one such encounter said, "Corona is not our main worry; it [virus] might have mercy on some of us, but Indian occupation is bent to annihilate us all".²⁵

A few years back, the BJP Government was considering putting curbs on militant funerals that are seen as emotionally charged sites where the Kashmiri resistance proliferates. It was proposed that the burials would be done "in camera" and open to only close family members. The Covid-19 protocols came in handy to deny handing over the dead bodies of the militants killed in encounters to their families. The authorities claimed the new procedure mandated the norms of social distancing. The irony of enforcing SOPs for saving Kashmiri lives from the pandemic was not lost in a place where the Indian necropolitics ensures that "small doses" of death²⁶ occur each day in addition to encounters, shootouts, and massacres.

Even though the Supreme Court of India has agreed that internet is a Fundamental Right,²⁷ the facility was not restored fully in Kashmir. This has had multiple implications for the patients and healthcare providers who cannot access online resources. Overall, the internet shut down has been the cause of physical, educational, and economic death of the Kashmiri masses. This imposition does not seem like the hallmark of a government that seeks the welfare of the people for life, but one that marks them for death.

²⁵ Interview with M.Y. (Personal Communication, 22 May 2020).

²⁶ Mbembe (n 2), 36.

²⁷ *Anuradha Bhasin v Union of India* 2020 SCC OnLine SC 25.

While the sword of the pandemic swings dangerously, the Government of India unilaterally continued to change the laws in Kashmir. It amended the domicile law which has opened pathways for designated categories of Indian citizens to become domiciles of the erstwhile state. The fast-track process even penalizes the local authority to the tune of 50,000 India Rupees if the domicile certificate is not issued within 15 days. This is the first time that a low rung bureaucrat will be individually penalized by the Government for not issuing paperwork within the stipulated time. Kashmiris attribute this urgency to the Government of India ensuring fast-track entry of the settler population; a move that constitutes demographic terrorism.²⁸ This demographic alteration on steroids is being imposed when Kashmiris are doubly quarantined and unable to lodge protests of any kind. The echo of “going the Palestine way” is no more a fear but a fearful reality for Kashmiris.

While the pandemic lockdown prevails on and off, the India government has thrown open tourism. Kashmiris were aghast at the irony of being locked up while tourists can freely come in and spread infection. While the cases of Covid-19 began to rise along with the daily mortalities, Kashmiris are grappling with the threats of war with China and the war clouds which are always looming with Pakistan; jails are choc-a-block, full-prone to rising infections and the Government is day in and day out changing and implementing new laws. A noted journalist remarked: “While trying to survive the pandemic, it is hard to keep track [of] the ways in which they [Indian Government] are changing Kashmir and the orders being circulated daily; we have been robbed of all agency and we cannot even express the level of helplessness we feel”.²⁹ Indeed, none can. The police register an “open FIR” under terror laws for any criticism on social media against the scraped autonomy. Recently another “open FIR” was registered against the president of the erstwhile Kashmir Bar Association, who is languishing in jail, for commenting on a high-court judgment.³⁰

As the one having power over life and death, the necropolitical Indian state has ensured that no one speaks against these unilateral decisions that are furthering the conditions of physical, psychological, and economic death in Kashmir. The necropower of who gets to live and who must die becomes key to understand the growing greed of postcolonial democracies rigged by neoliberal maldevelopment. The neocolonialist aspiration of the Indian occupation in Kashmir echoes this global condition and has created conditions for settler colonialism, mass incarceration, ecocide, and cultural destruction. The need of the hour is to understand India beyond the stereotype of biopower and governmentality; beyond the ideals of Ahimsa and Yoga, and more through a masculine necropolitical lens of imperial desire: that is so

²⁸ Hussain Showkat, ‘Kashmir: Palestine in the Making’ (Monograph, Kashmir Institute, Srinagar).

²⁹ Interview with A.B. (Personal Communication, 17 July 2020).

³⁰ ‘J&K: Police Register “Open FIR” for Social Media Criticism of High Court Verdict’ *Scroll.in* (10 June 2020) <<https://scroll.in/latest/964301/j-k-police-register-open-fir-for-social-media-criticism-of-high-court-verdict>>.

stark in Kashmir. The world powers, with ease, accepted India's fig leaf of an argument in repressing the Kashmiri people's will. They turned a blind eye to the unleashing of forced "(mal)development", neoliberal plunder, and settler colonialism on Kashmir. This manifests undemocratic repression and constitutional colonialism which will be the bane of shared global futures riven with necropolitics. Even the alert put out by Genocide Watch was conveniently ignored. The humanitarian crisis was allowed to worsen so much that even the medical journal *Lancet* published an editorial on the military siege. Currently, with the pandemic reaching its peak in the region, Kashmiris are between the hell and high water of the necropolitical desires of Indian neocolonialism. And there is dead silence about it.