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6 SEPTEMBER 2013

**The Kashmir Conflict of 1947:**  
**Testimonies of a Contested History**

**Andrew Whitehead**

**A critical overview submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy by published works in History**

Supervisor: Professor David Hardiman

**University of Warwick, Department of History**

**May 2013**

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### **Appendix: Personal bibliography relating to Partition and Kashmir in 1947**

Accompanying the critical overview are two articles being put forward for this Ph D, the details of which follow. The book *A Mission in Kashmir* is submitted separately.

## Introduction

The published works that I am putting forward for this PhD are as follows:

- Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 2007, xii + 244pp, ISBN-13: 978-0-67008-127-1, ISBN-10: 0-67008-127-2
- Andrew Whitehead, 'The People's Militia: Communists and Kashmiri nationalism in the 1940s', *Twentieth Century Communism: a journal of international history*, 2, 2010, pp.141-68
- Andrew Whitehead, 'Kashmir's Conflicting Identities' [review essay], *History Workshop Journal*, 58, 2004, pp.335-40

This critical overview will explain how these works came to be written and the methodology of the underlying research. It will establish that these writings are rigorous and objective and that they constitute a significant contribution to original knowledge about an issue of substance, the early stages of a dispute which has continued to bedevil India and Pakistan since independence in 1947. The overview will discuss the purpose and value of oral history in Partition and related studies. It will describe the historiographical context of the published work and their critical reception, establishing that the research has been recognised as innovative and important by scholars of repute. The overview also considers subsequent scholarship

about the origins of the Kashmir crisis and more general informed discussion about Kashmir's recent history.

This overview concludes, as required, with a bibliography of my writing (and a list of my radio documentaries) about Partition in 1947, which created out of the British Raj the independent nations of India and Pakistan, and about the Kashmir conflict which arose from Partition and the end of British 'paramountcy' over India's princely states.

## 1. Context of the research

My writing about Kashmir in the late 1940s is a retelling of a deeply contested historical narrative. I use oral history and first hand testimony to explore the lived experience of a period of political turbulence and military conflict which saw the eruption of a continuing crisis about who rules the Kashmir valley. The published works which you are being asked to consider seek to challenge narrowly geopolitical accounts of the origins of the Kashmir conflict, which often give little regard to how Kashmiris and others on the spot experienced, and viewed, the emerging rivalry between India and Pakistan for control of the princely state. It also interrogates the established nationalist narratives – Indian, Pakistani and indeed Kashmiri – of how the conflict began, disputing some of the elements of these rival versions of history. I seek to develop a more nuanced and complex account of how this intractable territorial and political dispute arose, and thus in part to suggest why it has been so difficult to resolve.

Kashmir has tended to stand apart from the rest of India in the historiography of independence and Partition in 1947, and the re-examining of the communal violence, sexual aggression and mass population movements which Partition occasioned. The new writing about Partition – which is built around first person accounts, often of those marginalised in conventional historical narratives – pays little regard to Kashmir.<sup>1</sup> The Kashmir valley's experience of Partition was distinct from that of

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: voices from the Partition of India*, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1998



Punjab to the south, which witnessed the most acute violence and population movement in 1947. In Kashmir, the communal character of the crisis was less pronounced, it involved both conventional and irregular military forces rather than unorganised or loosely organised violence, and the conflict was pursued by states and those acting on their behalf. It is seen as exceptional. Part of my argument is that it is less exceptional than perceived by historians, both conventional and revisionist, and is better incorporated into accounts of Partition than standing on the margins or awkwardly outside.

There has been much innovative scholarship about Kashmir, but by and large this has avoided directly addressing the events of 1947. Certainly, recent scholarly writing has not sought to make use of oral history in narrating how the Kashmir conflict began. The most refreshing aspect of much of this scholarship is the absence of polemic or of a politicised undertow. Much of the earlier writing about Kashmir, including well researched accounts of its history, has been tarnished by partisan comment. Alastair Lamb, for example, has achieved eminence as a historian of Kashmir, but for him to write in extenuation of killings by Pakistani tribesmen, the event at the heart of my book *A Mission in Kashmir*, that ‘whatever happened in Baramula [sic] that day is as nothing when compared to what has happened to Kashmiri men, women and children at Indian hands since 1989’<sup>2</sup> is to diminish his own authority. One of the most profound problems of writing about Kashmir, where

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<sup>2</sup> Alastair Lamb, *Incomplete Partition: the genesis of the Kashmir dispute, 1947-1948*, Hertingfordbury: Roxford, 1997, p.187

suspensions are so deep rooted and loyalties so deeply entrenched, is in gaining the attention and confidence of those from different political, religious and national traditions, and seeking to establish a narrative which supercedes these often competing identities.

In my own work, I have tried to avoid any partiality – a task which is difficult when writing about Kashmir, where even descriptive terms of political geography (Indian-held Kashmir, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Azad Kashmir) are taken as betraying an allegiance. The sensitivity stems above all, of course, because of the continuing violence and political instability in Indian-administered Kashmir, where an armed insurgency erupted (some would say was rekindled) in 1989 prompting a massive, and continuing, deployment of Indian security forces. The published works submitted are not about the recent insurgency, but these items would not have been written but for the renewed and profound violence, nor would they have received the same attention. All writing about contemporary Kashmir is inevitably seen through the prism of the long-lasting political and security crisis there, and in my case, it was that crisis which first took me to Srinagar. I should explain how I came to know Kashmir, and how I came to be in a position to write with a claim to academic rigour. As my career has been, for a PhD candidate, rather unconventional I will explain at some length how I became involved in gathering oral testimony, and my growing interest in Kashmir.

## 2. Personal history

I studied history as an undergraduate at Oxford University, and was awarded first class honours. While I took a paper in 'Imperialism and Nationalism', my main interest was in British history, particularly of the nineteenth century. I was influenced by the 'history from below' approach, read E.P. Thompson, and subscribed to the then recently established *History Workshop Journal*. As a postgraduate, I studied at the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick, which had been founded by E.P. Thompson. I developed a modest acquaintance with Raphael Samuel and some others in the History Workshop circle, in part because I invited them to come and speak at the Radical History Group which I helped to set up at Warwick. I was awarded an M.A. in Social History, the research component of which concerned tramping artisans,<sup>3</sup> and then began work on a doctoral thesis at Warwick with the title 'Popular Politics and Society in late-Victorian Clerkenwell'. The subject was suggested to me by Jay Winter and I was supervised by Michael Shepherd and later by Royden Harrison. This was a study of political activity and occupational and social structure in an area of inner London which was, at various times, seen as a heartland of artisan radicalism and of a strand of socialism which attracted support in part from the semi-skilled and unskilled. My SSRC funding only allowed two years full-time research towards my doctorate and while I have continued both to research and

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<sup>3</sup> 'The decline of tramping in two trade unions (the Amalgamated Union of Cabinet Makers and the Typographical Association) 1840-1914', M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1978. This research also led to the publication of J.W. Rounsfell, *On the Road: journeys of a tramping printer*, Horsham: Caliban, 1982, a first-hand account of the life of a tramping artisan originally published in the journal of the Typographical Association, which I edited as well as providing an introduction and postscript.

write about London radicalism, to my regret, I never completed this PhD. I have however written articles for peer reviewed and other journals and entries for reference series based on this work, and copies of the five chapters of the thesis which were tolerably close to completion have been deposited in local reference libraries.<sup>4</sup>

My career has been as a news journalist with the BBC, and principally with the BBC World Service where I am currently the editor of news and current affairs programmes. Early in my career, I made a number of radio programmes for which I gathered oral testimony, and this became a hallmark of my broadcast work. Several of these documentaries were about aspects of British popular politics, and my audio archive of interviews with British political activists – sixty-five interviews in all, some conducted on behalf of the BBC and others out of personal interest – has been deposited with the British Library Sound Archive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 'Notes on Sources: Labour history and dissolved company records', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 44, 1982, pp.45-6; 'Quorum Pars Fui: the autobiography of H.H. Champion' [documentary essay], *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 47, 1983, pp.17-35; "'Against the Tyranny of Kings and Princes": radicalism in *Workers in the Dawn*', *Gissing Newsletter*, 22/4, 1986, pp.13-28; 'Dan Chatterton and his "Atheistic Communistic Scorchers"', *History Workshop Journal*, 25, 1988, pp.85-99; 'Notes on the Labour Press: the *New World* and the O'Brienite colony in Kansas', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 53/3, 1988, pp.40-3; 'Red London: radicals and socialists in late-Victorian Clerkenwell', *Socialist History*, 18, 2000, pp.1-31; 'Clerkenwell Tales' [review essay], *History Workshop Journal*, 68, 2009, pp.247-50; 'Clerkenwell as hell – Gissing's "nether world"', *Gissing Journal*, 46/4, 2010, pp.27-34; 'George Gissing, *The Nether World*' in Andrew Whitehead and Jerry White (eds), *London Fictions*, Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2013; entries in the multi-volume *Dictionary of Labour Biography* on H.H. Champion, Daniel Chatterton, Martin Boon and (co-authored with Gary Entz) Joseph Radford. Chapters towards my uncompleted thesis have been deposited with the Islington Local History Library and the Marx Memorial Library, both of which are located in Clerkenwell.

<sup>5</sup> British Library Sound Archive, C1377. A full list of the material deposited is given on my personal website - <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/oral-history-list.html>. Audio of several of the BBC radio programmes for which the interviews were conducted is also on my website - <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/documentaries-and-features.html> (sites accessed 1 January 2013).

In 1992, the year after the fall of Soviet Communism, I made my most ambitious radio documentaries to date, a series of five programmes entitled 'What's Left of Communism?' The opening programme was a quick march through the history of international communism, including material from interviews with onetime British communists, among them E.P. Thompson and Denis Healey, and voices from around the world. Subsequent programmes examined the resilience of the communist movement in Cuba, Italy, South Africa and India. This last programme occasioned my first visit to India, and won a prestigious international award.<sup>6</sup>

The following year, my career took a new path when I became a BBC news correspondent based in Delhi reporting for radio and television. Within weeks, I made my first reporting trip to Kashmir, where the separatist insurgency and Indian response to it had led to exceptional levels of violence and civil unrest. It was a running story throughout my time in India as a correspondent, and I made a dozen or more visits to Srinagar and other parts of Jammu and Kashmir, got to know key figures in the dispute (including Indian government ministers and separatist leaders) and through Kashmiri journalists in particular, gained some sense of Kashmiri opinion. I later was able to visit Pakistan Kashmir. Kashmir was the most difficult story on the foreign correspondent's South Asia beat – above all, because almost every detail of every story was contested, in a manner I haven't otherwise encountered except in Sri Lanka during its civil war.

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<sup>6</sup> The audio of this series is available at <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/whats-left-of-communism.html> (accessed 1 January 2013). The programme about Indian Communism won the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union Prize in 1993.

At the end of my tour in Delhi, I was commissioned by the BBC to make a five part radio documentary series on the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of India and Pakistan. This was intended to be about the lived experience of Partition, not the diplomacy and politics of that process. Although it occasioned one of the most profound population movements of the century and huge loss of life, at that time the history of Partition had been told almost exclusively as a political rather than social story. The personal accounts of living through violence or being a refugee had been reflected in fiction and in cinema but not in historical narrative. There had been until the mid-1990s very little organised oral history about Partition, and to add urgency to the need to retrieve and give shape to these memories, those who had lived through Partition as adults were of advanced years. For this award- winning series 'India: a people partitioned', I travelled across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh recording memories of 1947 – not the high politics of that year (though a few of those I talked to had a role in that process), but the upheaval, the trauma and the migration.<sup>7</sup> The interviews conducted for this series formed the basis of an oral history collection now held by the archive of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London.<sup>8</sup> This has been supplemented by subsequent interviews about

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<sup>7</sup> The audio of these radio documentaries is available at <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/india-a-people-partitioned.html> (accessed 2 January 2013). 'India: a people partitioned' won a bronze award at the 1998 New York Festival.

<sup>8</sup> SOAS archive, OA3. The deposit was made in three stages, the first two of which are described in this website entry: <http://squirrel.soas.ac.uk/dserve/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=show.tcl&dsqSearch=%28RefNo==%27OA3%20%20%27%29> . A full list of the items, and some of the audio, is posted on my personal website: <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/partition-voices.html> (sites accessed 2 January 2013). Manisha Sobhrajani has also conducted interviews in Kashmir, at my initiative, particularly with veterans of the women's self-defence corps set up in 1947.

Partition and related events. The deposit now consists in total of 205 interviews and recordings of which fifty-eight relate to events in Kashmir in 1947. This archive has been used particularly by Yasmin Khan for her book *The Great Partition* which draws on twenty or so of these interviews, none relating to Kashmir.<sup>9</sup>

Several of these interviews were with writers who captured the Partition experience in their novels and short stories, often based on their personal experience. I was particularly arrested by interviews with Amrita Pritam, Krishna Baldev Vaid, Bapsi Sidhwa and Bhisham Sahni, and also spoke to Khushwant Singh, Shaukat Osman, Qurratulain Hyder and relatives of Saadat Hasan Manto. My occasional writing about Partition literature has been cited in more rigorously researched studies of the field.<sup>10</sup>

It was while gathering material for this radio series that I first visited the Kashmiri town of Baramulla and – as I relate in the first chapter of *A Mission in Kashmir* – chanced across St Joseph’s mission hospital and met Italian-born Sister Emilia. Her vivid memories of surviving the attack by the tribal lashkar (the term for an armed raiding party) fifty years earlier initially struck me as a compelling human story. As I came across others with memories of that incident, I also came to appreciate just how crucial an event that was in the first chapter of the Kashmir conflict. The ransacking and killings at the mission hospital occurred within hours of the maharaja of Kashmir’s accession to India and the beginning of an airlift to the valley of Indian

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<sup>9</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: the making of India and Pakistan*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2007

<sup>10</sup> Notably in Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*, University of Toronto Press, 2006.

troops, the first episode in a military presence that continues to this day. The accounts I heard gave a powerful human dimension to a moment of profound geopolitical crisis.

Serendipity also gave me access to the modest cache of records held by the Mill Hill Missionaries in Kashmir, and a hugely more valuable treasure trove in their London archives. This included a remarkable discovery – a hand-written account of a hundred pages reciting the details of the attack on the Baramulla mission set down by a priest who was witness to the event. This manuscript account had quite possibly never been read by anyone but its author until I came across it. Both journalists and historians relish untouched source material, and you can't get much better than this. I had a personal mission now, to retrieve memories from all sides of the attack on Baramulla, and use these to offer an informed and impartial account of the initial eruption of the Kashmir conflict and to explain why India ended 1947 in control of the Kashmir valley. This material formed the basis of a documentary I made for BBC Radio 4 in 2003.<sup>11</sup>

In the autumn of 2003, with my research well advanced, I had the good fortune to spend what amounted to a sabbatical semester as a BBC-nominated Knight-Wallace Journalism Fellow at the University of Michigan. By then, I had also been invited to become one of the editors of *History Workshop Journal*, a peer reviewed academic journal published twice yearly by Oxford University Press. This was not a result of my work on Kashmir, but it was a boost to my confidence as a practitioner of history and

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<sup>11</sup> 'An Incident in Kashmir' was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in August 2003. The audio is available on my personal website - <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/documentaries-and-features.html> (accessed 2 January 2013).



strengthened my resolve to write a book about the attack on Baramulla and what it revealed about the wider invasion of Kashmir in late 1947. The Ann Arbor campus, as well as having a talented array of scholars of South Asia, offered a library with excellent holdings, where I was able to immerse myself in another range of testimony about Kashmir in 1947 - the contemporary reporting of journalists on the spot.

*A Mission in Kashmir* was published late in 2007, and its critical reception will be discussed later in this essay. I was invited back to the University of Michigan to give the Hovey lecture in 2008. I have also given papers based on my research at international conferences at the University of Southampton and at SOAS, as well as giving more informal talks in Delhi and at several other venues.

### **3. Research method and argument**

The emphasis of my research has been on the use of personal stories to illustrate, supplement and challenge the established accounts of the origins of the Kashmir conflict, and to provide a sense of how the turmoil of 1947 was experienced by those in Kashmir who lived through it. There is a powerful feeling in Kashmir that Kashmiris have been marginalised – in the governance of their state, in the crucial moments of decision about Kashmir's future, and in the historical narrative. Part of my purpose was to collect and collate individual accounts of events in Kashmir in late 1947, and to place the lived experience of this crucial time in Kashmir's history at the centre of the narrative.

My initial goal in gathering oral testimony was to retrieve accounts of the event at the heart of my study, the attack on the mission hospital at Baramulla. Over time, I succeeded in securing interviews with a range of people who were in or close to the mission during the attack and its immediate aftermath – conversations conducted (on a few occasions by others on my behalf) on four continents. I also tracked down several others with direct memories of the attack who declined to be interviewed – two of whom were willing, however, to set down in writing their personal recollection of the event as long as they were not named. In my initial visit to Baramulla, I also talked to two elderly townspeople who had lived through the tribal army's entry to the town and provided a vivid account of that visitation. As my research developed, it

broadened out beyond testimony directly relating to Baramulla into an enquiry into the conflict in the Kashmir valley in 1947, and the popular response to it.

Conducting oral history in a conflict zone presents profound problems. The simple issue of safety is one of them. I have visited the town of Baramulla several times, usually accompanied by the BBC reporter based in Srinagar, but the security situation has never been sufficiently calm to allow me to stroll through the centre of the town. While my initial meeting with Sister Emilia was a matter of chance, most of the other interviews I have conducted in Baramulla have been arranged by local journalists on my behalf. There is a deeper problem – in a region as battered by violence as the Kashmir valley, where at least 1% of the adult population has died in the past quarter-century of insurgency and instability, there is an understandable reluctance to share memories which might entail risk, or which might conflict with the current political or community interests shared by the interviewee. There is also a carapace that needs to be broken through when dealing with memories which have been hallowed by frequent repetition, to get beyond a much stated personal narrative and retrieve memories which have not been hardened by constant rendition.

My general approach to the retrieval of oral testimonies has been:

- to seek the widest possible range of testimonies, from civilians, missionaries, public figures and combatants on both sides;
- where possible when talking to local residents in particular, to be introduced and accompanied by a local intermediary;

- to focus on direct memories of events and incidents witnessed and experienced rather than a more general, indirectly remembered, account;
- to start without preconceived notions, and be willing to 'go with the flow' of an interview, so often interviewing at some length;
- to probe and interrogate memories of particularly noteworthy events, asking for details and personal aspect and involvement to get beyond the initial recitation.

I was helped by considerable experience in conducting interviews with the elderly about memories from many decades earlier. The job of a radio correspondent is in large measure that of a professional interviewer, and winning the confidence of an interviewee, putting them at ease, is a required skill in oral history as in radio journalism. Another key skill of a news reporter – seeking to validate recollections and memories, searching for corroboration, checking shared memory against other source material – is also essential to the practise of oral history. While shared memory of events many years earlier is often unreliable, other more conventional historical source material – official records, memoirs, reports and inquiries – are also often partisan and incomplete, and oral history offers the very considerable advantage of being able to challenge and interrogate the memories offered.

In the course of my research, I also have made use of other forms of first-hand testimony. Father Shanks's manuscript account of the attack on the Baramulla

mission, held in the archive of the Mill Hill missionaries<sup>12</sup>, is the most revealing such source. There are other briefer accounts, particularly in British archives as diplomats sought to understand the circumstances of the killing of British nationals at Baramulla, arrange the evacuation of the sizeable British community in Srinagar and gain purchase on the rapidly developing military and political situation in the Kashmir valley. Some archive holdings of correspondence have also been of value, particularly the letters of the American news correspondent, Margaret Parton. That leads me to mention the other primary source on which I relied – contemporary news reports. Sidney Smith of the *Daily Express* was held hostage at the Baramulla hospital alongside the survivors of the lashkar's initial attack. Two other foreign correspondents, Margaret Parton and her husband-to-be Eric Britter, were also – by chance – in Kashmir as the invasion force approached. A battalion of Indian and foreign news reporters made their way to Kashmir as soon as they could find space – officially or otherwise – on the Indian military airlift. Some of their reports were included in the Indian government's *White Paper on Jammu & Kashmir*, published in 1948, but this was inevitably a partisan selection. Otherwise there has previously been no systematic attempt to make use of this rich source material which, when even the basic chronology of the conflict is in dispute, is at the least an unfortunate oversight.

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<sup>12</sup> The order's archives are now at Freshfield on Merseyside. With the permission of the archivist, I have posted a full transcript of Father Shanks's manuscript on my personal website - <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/father-shankss-kashmir-diary.html> (accessed 4 January 2013).

#### 4. Original contribution to knowledge

The biggest achievement of *A Mission in Kashmir*, I would suggest, has been to reclaim space for lived experience and personal testimony in a history which is often told in impersonal terms, as a battle between two newly independent states for territory. It has demonstrated that even with such a bitter and enduring conflict, and testimony gathered half-a-century or more after the event, oral history can redefine a historical narrative and reshape the contours of historical discourse. In support of these assertions, I want to spend a moment arguing about the value of oral history in the particular circumstances of telling the story of how the Kashmir conflict arose.

Oral history, in the telling phrase of one of its leading practitioners in South Asia, has to be more than 'a seasoning to enliven documentary evidence'.<sup>13</sup> Such seasoning has a value in itself. Historians tell stories, just as journalists do, and to tell them well they need to get as near to the events they relate as they can, and to retrieve the anecdote and personal detail which makes a moment or an event memorable. Hearing from those who witnessed the killings at the Baramulla mission, who were bereaved by those events and whose lives were thrown out of kilter, is to sense the shock and confusion they lived through. Those memories have, even when not shared, been rehearsed and burnished over the decades. They are not entirely reliable, though when there has been an opportunity to corroborate even incidental details, most direct memory bears tolerably accurate witness - and those who share

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<sup>13</sup> The phrase is that of Shahid Amin, 'They Also Followed Gandhi', in Saurabh Dube (ed), *Postcolonial Passages: contemporary history-writing on India*, New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2004, pp.132-58.

recollections are speaking their own truth, which helps to tease out the different perspectives to and narratives of an event. Yet the purpose of oral history is not to illustrate and add piquancy to an already established narrative, but to interrogate and challenge - and on some occasions to repudiate - that narrative. The personal testimony I have gathered about the attack on the Baramulla mission, the organisation and indiscipline of the invading lashkar, the response to the invasion among Kashmiris, and the steps taken in Srinagar to save the city from ransack have been the determinants of my narrative – supported by other source material – rather than ancillary to the fact.

There is another peril in oral history, and in narratives which focus on personal experience. The use of testimony and memory, it has been argued in the context of Partition studies, 'only become[s] meaningful if they retain some measure of understanding of the broader developments that have framed the Partition and post-Partition processes'.<sup>14</sup> My own work has not been a rejection of conventional political history, the story of nations and wars, but a re-examination of a profoundly important political moment which gives voice to those who lived through that moment. The emphasis on personal testimony has not been at the expense of more traditional sources. The official archives have been scoured, contemporary newspapers trawled, military and political memoirs imbibed, secondary accounts – the partisan as well as the scholarly – sought and read. The result is a synthesis, but

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009, p.5.

the element which is most innovative, within the context of Kashmiri studies, is the embracing of oral history.

So, what has this use of first hand testimony, supported by secondary sources, added precisely to knowledge about the start of the Kashmir crisis? I would suggest that my work has -

- established the course of events at the Baramulla mission, including who the attackers were, how they conducted themselves, and the level of casualties inflicted, so for the first time setting down an authoritative account of the most notorious single episode in the opening stages of the Kashmir conflict;
- demonstrated the significant initial local support for the Pakistani tribal force, and the manner in which looting and attacks on civilians squandered that support;
- put forward evidence of assistance from some elements of the new Pakistani state for the invasion, and detailed for the first time the remedial actions taken by Pakistan's leadership to address indiscipline in the lashkar;
- offered fresh evidence that the delay in the lashkar's advance as a result of indiscipline may have been crucial in frustrating their ambition to take control of Srinagar;
- established the extent of the popular mobilisation in the Kashmiri capital against princely rule and the manner in which this was transformed into a popular force to protect the city from the tribal army;



- discussed the evidence of abduction and sexual violence in the Kashmir valley in 1947, with the arresting, if tentative, suggestion that a number of non-Muslim Kashmiri women were abducted locally and may well have lived out their lives close to their area of upbringing but with a new name and religion.

While *A Mission in Kashmir* did not set out to add to the substantial corpus of writing about the details of Kashmir's accession to India, it presents the most forceful and best evidenced argument to date that the maharaja signed the accession document a few hours after (not a few hours before, as Indian official accounts insist) the start of India's military airlift to Kashmir which eventually succeeded in repulsing the invasion force.<sup>15</sup>

All this amounts to an important addition to an understanding of the modern history of Kashmir and of South Asia, based on rigorous research and on the use of original source material, much of it never before used as a basis for scholarship.

*A Mission in Kashmir* is limited in its scope, as its title suggests. It is not an attempt to redefine Kashmir's place in the wider narrative of Partition. Yet it is worth pausing for a moment to consider whether Kashmiri exceptionalism – the supposition that Kashmir moved to a different rhythm to the rest of South Asia – is justified. Talbot and Singh have put forward five defining elements of what they describe as the

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<sup>15</sup> The evidence presented that the maharaja signed the instrument of accession to India in Jammu on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1947 is, if not conclusive, then very strong – broadly confirming the supposition advanced by Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the unfinished war*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp.54-60 and inferred in Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, Delhi: Oxford UP, 1998 (first published 1984), p.349.

‘communal’ violence of Partition which mark a break with earlier, ‘traditional’ forms of violence. These are:

- a desire to ethnically cleanse minority populations;
- violence within the end of empire political context of the contest for power and territory;
- violence that was more intense and sadistic than anything that had preceded it;
- violence that invaded the private sphere;
- with evidence of a high degree of preparation and organisation by para-military groups.<sup>16</sup>

All these defining features were evident in the Kashmir valley in the closing weeks of 1947. The invasion of Kashmir in October 1947 led eventually to war between India and Pakistan, and the Kashmir issue has a particular standing as a *causus belli*, but the events on the ground in the aftermath of Partition fit (not perfectly, but tolerably well) the pattern evident more widely across the sub-continent. More than that, the mobilising of the *lashkar* that entered Kashmir, and the nature of its actions there, were shaped by Partition – not simply by the desire to forestall Kashmir’s accession to India, but by religious or communal grievance about a Hindu prince ruling a largely Muslim populace, and a desire for vengeance against the Sikh communities in Muzaffarabad and Baramulla in response to anti-Muslim pogroms in Punjab. The

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009, p.66.

nature of the violence in the Kashmir valley in October and November 1947 cannot be understood other than as part of the upheaval of Partition.

My work on Kashmir has also used documentary evidence and personal testimony to look at the way in which myths have been developed and enshrined in support of a particular narrative – so touching on the increasing academic focus on testimony as texts which enlighten an understanding of how events are remembered and re-remembered to serve a personal, community or political purpose. A conflict which has produced so many martyrs, and where the level of contestation has been so intense, is fruitful ground for studying layers of memory, the meaning attached to shared recollection and the making and remaking of myths. Alessandro Portelli, a leading practitioner of how memory and myth become entwined, has studied accounts of valour among the Italian Resistance to Nazi occupation which have close analogies to the stories developed in Baramulla just a few years later. His argument that ‘public memory manipulates the events into contrasting morality tales about guilt, responsibility and innocence, and into political apologues on the meaning and morality of Resistance’ could apply with equal force to Kashmir’s martyrs of 1947.<sup>17</sup> The work of Shahid Amin on the memories of the violence in Chauri Chaura in 1922, and the manner in which oral accounts even almost seventy years later can retrieve a subaltern viewpoint of the nationalist movement inspired (but not entirely shaped) by Gandhi, is another powerful reference point for the use of distant memories of an

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<sup>17</sup> Alessandro Portelli, ‘Myth and Morality in the History of the Italian Resistance: the Hero of Palidoro’, *History Workshop Journal*, 74, 2012, pp.211-23.

exceptional and traumatic moment.<sup>18</sup> My research treads, albeit less expertly, on similar ground in looking at the propagation of stories and myths (by which I mean not that they are invented, but their most familiar telling has been moulded for a particular purpose) of valour.

The violence in Baramulla in 1947 produced two 'martyrs' in particular whose memory has been kept alive, and shaped, to support a particular goal or interest. Take the various accounts of the death at the hands of the invading force of Spanish-born Mother Teresalina and of her dying words. Father Shanks, who was present at her death at the mission hospital, recorded that she 'slowly sank into unconsciousness' and made no mention of any last words. Within a few years, her dying words were widely cited within the Roman Catholic church as 'I offer myself as a victim for the conversion of Kashmir'. More recently, in a climate where seeking converts in Muslim areas is seen as hazardous, these words have been revised, rather crudely in some clerical publications, to suggest her concern was 'the people' rather than the conversion of Kashmir. This is a story which has at its root a personal tragedy and perhaps an element of heroism, which has been retold with the goal of valorising the church's missionary activity in Kashmir.

The myth of Maqbool Sherwani, a member of the pro-India National Conference militia who was killed (crucified would be the word used by some) by the Pakistani invaders, is an even more powerfully cultivated and contested narrative. His story has

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<sup>18</sup> Shahid Amin, 'They Also Followed Gandhi', in Saurabh Dube (ed), *Postcolonial Passages: contemporary history-writing on India*, New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2004, pp.132-58.

been told and retold by the likes of Gandhi, Margaret Bourke-White and Mulk Raj Anand, who have depicted him as a martyr to a tolerant and secular (and so, Indian) vision of Kashmir's future. That myth has been so energetically propagated over the years – made use of in Indian official statements and, for example, in the naming of buildings – that many Kashmiris have developed a countervailing viewpoint, that Sherwani was a traitorous agent of Indian aggression.<sup>19</sup>

After the publication of *A Mission in Kashmir*, I continued to pursue research into the origins of the Kashmir dispute, which has led to a further publication – an article in a peer reviewed journal<sup>20</sup> – again drawing on the testimony I gathered from those who lived through the violence in Kashmir in late 1947. It is the first rigorous discussion of communist influence within the mainstream Kashmiri nationalist movement in the 1940s. The influence of a small number of communists within Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference has often been asserted, usually by political critics of Abdullah, but never before examined in any depth. The radical 'Naya Kashmir' manifesto adopted by the National Conference in 1944, a quite exceptional document endorsing land redistribution, constitutional reform and gender equality, was drafted by communists. In the turbulent weeks of October and November 1947, with the maharaja absent and an invading force approaching, communists led in

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<sup>19</sup> I discuss the myths surrounding Maqbool Sherwani and Mother Teresalina, in part testing these narratives against the recollections of those who knew both these 'martyrs', in a chapter entitled 'Telling Stories and Making Myths', *A Mission in Kashmir*, pp.209-32.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Whitehead, 'The People's Militia: Communists and Kashmiri nationalism in the 1940s', *Twentieth Century Communism: a journal of international history*, 2, 2010, pp.141-68.

mobilising a popular militia to enhance security in the capital, and to assist Indian troops in repulsing the raiders from Pakistan.

The article also discusses the remarkable initiative of the raising of a women's self-defence force in Srinagar, which drilled and was trained in the use of rifles, in response to the peril in which the city was placed. In the highly politicised climate of present day Kashmir, the forming of an armed volunteer force in support of Indian rule has been blotted out of the popular memory. Retrieving the role of communists within Kashmiri nationalism, and particularly in this volunteer force, again challenges the over-simple narrative propagated by those with a claim to Kashmir.<sup>21</sup>

Also submitted for consideration is a review essay in a peer reviewed journal<sup>22</sup> discussing four titles about Kashmir's modern history. This is put forward to demonstrate my sustained scholarly interest in Kashmir. The review identified an increased scholarly focus, and rigour of research and argument, on Kashmir during and after Dogra princely rule. The article asserts:

There's an enormous literature about Kashmir, much of it deeply partisan, densely written and ill researched. The corpus of informed and tolerably unbiased historical writing about Kashmir is slender. That makes the volumes

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<sup>21</sup> The article has been commended by Nitasha Kaul, 'Kashmir: a place of blood and memory', in Sanjay Kak (ed.), *Until my Freedom has Come: the new intifada in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2011, pp.189-212. It is also cited in Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior: refugee families and the making of Kashmiri jihadists*, University of California Press, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Whitehead, 'Kashmir's Conflicting Identities', *History Workshop Journal*, 58, 2004, pp.335-40.

reviewed here all the more welcome. Together, they appear to augur a new, and enormously more promising, chapter in Kashmir studies. Almost a coming of age.

That assessment remains valid and the review essay has been cited by other scholars of modern Kashmir<sup>23</sup> and widely consulted<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> For instance in Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women and Violence: between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2009

<sup>24</sup> This review essay is one of the most frequently accessed *History Workshop Journal* articles via Project Muse, being viewed on 141 occasions in 2012 – ‘History Workshop Journal: Publisher’s Report, March 2013’, an unpublished document prepared by the Oxford Journals department of Oxford University Press and in the possession of the author.

## 5. Critical reception

*A Mission in Kashmir* was fortunate in attracting attention in the news media, including reviews by leading scholars and journalists, and in prompting considered discussion in scholarly journals. The book was generally recognised as well researched and innovative in its approach, clearly argued and expressed, and a considerable addition to the literature on Kashmir's (and so the region's) modern history. Some of these reviews challenge aspects of the argument and suggest shortcomings – but there has been, as far as I am aware, no hostile review of the book.

The most substantial academic consideration of *A Mission in Kashmir* is by Chitralekha Zutshi, a distinguished historian of Kashmir, in the course of a review essay looking at a spate of recent literature on Kashmir.<sup>25</sup> Zutshi devotes a substantial section of her article to the book, asserting that its account of the violence in the Kashmir Valley in 1947 'adds a significant chapter to the historiography of the independence of India, from which Kashmir is usually absent'. She endorses the value of the accounts of survivors and others with first-hand memories of Kashmir in 1947, but challenges two incidental aspects of the book's argument. These are the link suggested between events in October 1947 and the more recent crisis in Kashmir and the argued longstanding affinity of Afghans for Kashmir which is evidenced as part of the explanation for the invasion by a tribal force from close to the border with Afghanistan. Zutshi goes on to state:

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<sup>25</sup> Chitralekha Zutshi, 'Whither Kashmir Studies? A Review', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46/4, 2012, pp.1033-48



The importance of the book lies not in drawing a connection between the tribal incursion in 1947 and the current crisis in Kashmir, but rather in its detailed, meticulous, and objective discussion of the events of 1947, which adds much to our knowledge about the causes and mechanics of the tribal invasion and serves to remove some of the confusion surrounding the political situation in Kashmir in 1947.

‘The fact that the book explains the situation using the stories and memories of people who experienced this attack’, Zutshi states, ‘makes it all the more compelling.’

In the journal *Interventions*, Gowhar Fazili describes *A Mission in Kashmir* as ‘an attempt at a new way of writing on Kashmir’. He says that ‘it critically examines sources and tries to use new discoveries to contest mainstream ideas on the accession, the raiders and the role of Pakistani regulars in the debacle.’<sup>26</sup> Fazili argues that the focus on the attack on the Baramulla mission, which necessarily relies heavily on the voices of non-Kashmiris, is however not the ideal starting point for a wider consideration of how Kashmiris experienced the events of 1947:

its attempt to try to understand Kashmir through this event ... is half-hearted.

[Whitehead] might have done better by including more narratives from ordinary local people whose lives were permanently shaped by the circumstances that spiralled out of control.

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<sup>26</sup> *Interventions*, 11/1, 2009, pp.131-4

Fazili is right to suggest that more testimony from non-elite Kashmiris would have strengthened the narrative. As for the hazards of privileging the attack on the Baramulla convent and hospital, the argument is well made – but it is exactly the heightened attention on an incident involving Europeans which has allowed this incident to be retrieved, through official and clerical records as well as the memories of those directly affected. Alongside these pertinent observations, Fazili argues that the emphasis apparent in *A Mission in Kashmir* on retrieving the lived experience of Kashmiris and those outsiders who had a stake in events there can be of wider scholarly value. His review concludes: ‘Perhaps Whitehead’s narrative will open up possibilities for paying more heed to Kashmiri voices through the study of other institutions and events in Kashmir in which Kashmiris are central, and reopen questions assumed to be settled, through comparable scholarship.’

The testimony recited in *A Mission in Kashmir*, and the arguments advanced, have received considerable attention in expert and scholarly writing. Owen Bennett Jones, in the latest edition of his account of Pakistan’s modern history, draws on the book for his account of the Kashmir accession crisis and Jinnah’s response to it.<sup>27</sup> Srinath Raghavan and David M. Malone make reference to the book in their accounts of

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<sup>27</sup> Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: eye of the storm*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2009 (third edition), pp.82-90.

Indian foreign policy<sup>28</sup>, and there are also citations in several articles in academic journals.<sup>29</sup>

*A Mission in Kashmir*, no doubt because written by a journalist and published by a mainstream imprint, was widely noticed in the news media. It was fortunate in attracting more than twenty reviews, author interviews or substantial mentions in the Indian press and being the subject of two half-hour TV discussion and interview programmes, one featuring a panel of the author and two distinguished historians, Ramchandra Guha and Urvashi Butalia. It was also mentioned favourably in Pakistan's leading English language daily newspaper, *Dawn* – 'a seminal book about the complex skein of politics, nationalist fervour and communal zealotry laced with a wider global dimension of the brewing mess, which dogged the early days of the Kashmir dispute', commented columnist Jawed Naqvi<sup>30</sup>. Ahead of publication, a substantial feature by the author ran in a prominent British broadsheet daily.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: a strategic history of the Nehru years*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010. David M. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance? contemporary Indian foreign policy*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Islamist militancy in South Asia', *Washington Quarterly*, 33/1, 2010, pp.47-59; Swati Parashar, 'Gender, Jihad and Jingoism: women as perpetrators, planners and patrons of militancy in Kashmir', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 34/4, 2011, pp.295-317; Paul Staniland, 'Organizing Insurgency: networks, resources and rebellion in South Asia', *International Security*, 37/1, 2012, pp.142-77; Fozia Nazir Lone, 'From Sale to Accession Deed: scanning the historiography of Kashmir, 1846-1947', *History Compass*, 7/6, 2009, pp.1496-1508; Rakesh Ankit, 'Great Britain, Cold War and Kashmir 1947-1949', *Ex Plus Ultra* [ejournal], 1, 2009, pp.39-58 - <http://explusultra.wun.ac.uk/images/ankit.pdf> (accessed 30 December 2012). The review article 'Kashmir's Conflicting Identities' has been cited by Nyla Ali Khan, 'The Land of Lalla-Ded: politicization of Kashmir and construction of the Kashmiri woman', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9/1, 2007, pp.22-41.

<sup>30</sup> *Dawn*, Karachi, 6 December 2007

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Whitehead, 'Black Day in Paradise', *Financial Times Magazine*, London, 20-21 October 2007

Several of the reviews in the Indian press were written by experts in Kashmir studies. Amitabh Mattoo, at the time the vice-chancellor of the University of Jammu, stated: 'The account is brilliant and moving, and is first-rate by the standards of both a journalist and a social historian.'<sup>32</sup> Considering both *A Mission in Kashmir* and another title focussing on Kashmir<sup>33</sup>, Mattoo argued:

Ordinary stories that have remained unrecorded can often reveal much more than official documents and UN resolutions. The recovery of these accounts may not only contribute to generating a richer social history of the land and its people that does not privilege just a few, but may eventually also help in the resolution of Kashmir's problems.

A review by Sheikh Abdullah's grandson and the third generation of the dynasty to serve as chief minister of Indian Kashmir, Omar Abdullah, also argued for the need to 'learn from past mistakes'.<sup>34</sup> Another important political figure in Jammu and Kashmir, Ved Marwah, offered appreciative comment:

The author is a natural storyteller. But to say this is not to devalue his scholarly work based on painstaking research, writings and personal interviews of those directly involved in the tragic events. The author narrates the story of this tragedy with sensitivity, but without bias.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *India Today*, Delhi, 26 November 2007

<sup>33</sup> David Devdas, *In Search of a Future: the story of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 2007

<sup>34</sup> *Outlook*, Delhi, 3 December 2007

<sup>35</sup> *Pioneer*, Delhi, 9 December 2007

Dilip Menon, who at the time taught history at Delhi University and was editor of *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, commented that 'Whitehead writes in the best tradition of popular history combining archival depth with investigative zeal'.<sup>36</sup> In the left-leaning *Frontline*, A.G. Noorani, asserted: 'Integrity is ... the hallmark of Andrew Whitehead's work'.<sup>37</sup>

The most substantial review in the Indian press, by the writer and commentator Manoj Joshi for the literary journal *Biblio*, also offered the most considered criticism.<sup>38</sup> While describing the book as 'a succinct account of a many-layered happening' which has 'generated an invaluable archive of oral history himself through interviews with surviving contemporaries on all sides of the divide' and its assessments as 'carefully weighed' and 'balanced', he disputes the authorial position as neutral between Indian and Pakistani claims:

Whitehead is somewhat circumspect on this score and chooses to place the official British attitude as that of neutrals. ... he does not quite explore that British officialdom may have played in encouraging the Pakistani venture. ... his book does not seem to be informed by ... detailed revelations of how British officers manipulated the situation to serve their own national interests; or, how British officers in the Indian and Pakistani army coordinated their efforts to check

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<sup>36</sup> *DNA*, Mumbai, 6 January 2008

<sup>37</sup> *Frontline*, Chennai, 25/15, July 2009

<sup>38</sup> *Biblio*, New Delhi, January-February 2008. British policy towards Kashmir in the late 1940s is discussed in Rakesh Ankit, '1948: the crucial year in the history of Jammu and Kashmir', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45/11, 2010, pp.49-58.

Indian forces from recapturing that sliver of land that is today called Azad [that is, Pakistan-administered] Kashmir.

*A Mission in Kashmir* explicitly avoided seeking to disentangle the detailed diplomacy surrounding and underlying the early stages of Kashmir dispute, which has been the subject of a great deal of contested scholarship. Manoj Joshi's argument, however, is arresting. On a couple of occasions in the aftermath of the book's publication, leading scholars of South Asia commented informally that only someone other than an Indian or Pakistani (or by implication a Kashmiri) would have been able to have access to the range of testimony achieved. That is a sad but probably accurate reflection on the persistent politicisation of the study of Kashmir's modern history. Yet when Britain is held by some parties to the conflict to be at least partly culpable for the failure to resolve Kashmir's future status as the British Raj ended in August 1947, it is perhaps understandable, if unwarranted, that a British national whose familiarity with Kashmir sprang from working for a British government funded news organisation is seen as pulling punches over Britain's involvement in the inception of the Kashmir conflict.

## 6. Subsequent writing on Kashmir's modern history

In seeking the opinion of a leading scholar of Kashmir about work conducted since *A Mission in Kashmir*'s publication into related themes, she advised: 'Unfortunately, there is so little writing on Kashmir in the 1940s, especially since the publication of your book. ... There is simply no other work that deals with the actual experiences of people on the ground in Kashmir in and around 1947 apart from your book that I can think of.'<sup>39</sup>

The most substantial recent writing about the origins of the Kashmir conflict is by the Australian scholar Christopher Snedden<sup>40</sup>. In the first section of his book *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir* ('azad' means 'free', and Azad Kashmir is the name given to part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir now under Pakistan's administration), Snedden seeks to develop 'a new perspective about who started the dispute about the international status of Jammu and Kashmir'. He argues that an uprising in Poonch in the west of Jammu province in the summer of 1947 was the start of the armed revolt against Kashmir's maharaja, predating and encouraging the tribal invasion. He sees this as demonstrating that the armed campaign against the maharaja, and indirectly against Kashmir's prospective accession to India, was instigated by citizens of the princely state, and not by outsiders. This challenges the Indian account that the invading force of Pukhtoon 'raiders' from Pakistan started the fighting.

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<sup>39</sup> Personal email communication from Chitrlekha Zutshi, 30 September 2012, cited with Dr Zutshi's permission.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Snedden, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*, London: Hurst, 2012

While Snedden's argument is not entirely original, and is based on no new source material, its emphasis on the actions of the people of Jammu province in 1947 is a useful corrective to established accounts of the origins of the Kashmir conflict. The Poonch revolt has, however, been discussed in some detail elsewhere – indeed it features in my own writing<sup>41</sup> – and while it certainly erupted ahead of the tribal invasion, it was nothing like so potent a military threat. While the insurgents in western Jammu province quickly gained control over rural areas, they failed to take Poonch town, never threatened the city of Jammu and were of little consequence as far as control over the heartland of the princely state, the Kashmir valley, was concerned. Snedden's book does not occasion a fundamental rethink of the origins of the Kashmir conflict and so is not as revisionist as he suggests. Another argument that he addresses is more successfully made – pointing out the 'inherent disunity' of Jammu and Kashmir which made it close to impossible for the princely state to remain undivided through the processes unleashed by India's Partition.

Another book largely about Kashmir in 1947 offers much detailed argument, but much less in the way of fresh interpretation. Shabir Choudhry, a founder member of the secular nationalist and pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, seeks to demonstrate that legally Kashmir became an independent sovereign state with the end of British paramountcy over princely states on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. He also repeats a much-stated argument that the viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, intervened to

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<sup>41</sup> 'The initial tribal rising against the maharaja was indigenous and owed very little to tribal involvement. ... An insurgency against the maharaja took root [in Poonch] towards the end of August 1947 ...' – Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, pp.46ff



ensure that the Radcliffe boundary commission awarded most of Muslim-majority Gurdaspur to India rather than Pakistan, so strengthening India's claim to Kashmir.<sup>42</sup> Neither case is convincing. The book focuses almost entirely on politics and diplomacy, and doesn't discuss the tribal army's invasion in October 1947 and the Kashmiri response to it.

The absence of any rigorous biography of the key Kashmir figures of the 1940s has constrained a full understanding of the personal alliances and rivalries which were such an important factor in the 1947 accession drama. This was mitigated in part by the publication in 2008 of Ajit Bhattacharjea's study of Sheikh Abdullah, by far the most commanding Kashmiri political figure of the last century.<sup>43</sup> Bhattacharjea, one of India's most respected journalists, met Sheikh Abdullah both in his prime and towards the end of his life and he offers a balanced and authoritative account, though marred by a muted discussion of his political motivation, and the conspicuous absence of any consideration of personality and personal life. Akbar Jehan, Abdullah's politically influential wife, is mentioned only three times in the book's index. This is in part because Bhattacharjea had only limited access to important archives – he laments in his introduction that he 'continued to be denied permission to see the crucial correspondence between Nehru and the Sheikh'<sup>44</sup> – and apparently no access

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<sup>42</sup> Shabir Choudhry, *Kashmir and the Partition of India: the politicians and the personalities involved in the partition of India, and legal position of Jammu and Kashmir state on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2011. Dr Choudhry's profile is available on his blog - <http://www.blogger.com/profile/03902532450183466577> (accessed 10 February 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: tragic hero of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Roli, 2008

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.viii

to any Abdullah family papers. Sheikh Abdullah still awaits the biography he deserves, and that historians of Kashmir require.

Sheikh Abdullah's granddaughter is the author of one of the more interesting recent works about Kashmir. Nyla Ali Khan is an academic in the United States. Her study of the gender aspect of the Kashmir conflict is enriched by interviews with participants in Kashmiri politics and civil society, and is the first recent book length study of the subject.<sup>45</sup> The book is dedicated to the author's grandparents – enough, in a Kashmiri context, to raise issues about political impartiality – and is diminished by an at times deeply emotive style of writing. While the focus of Nyla Ali Khan's work is contemporary Kashmir, her book contains a useful consideration of attitudes to gender in the National Conference (Sheikh Abdullah's political party) in the 1940s – including an account of the militia raised in 1947 to protect Srinagar, and in particular of its women's wing.

The representation of Kashmir in literature and popular culture, and the means by which it came to be a 'territory of desire' in competing nationalist discourses, is the theme of a particularly innovative study by Ananya Jahanara Kabir.<sup>46</sup> This discusses cultural expressions of and about Kashmir ranging from the poem 'Country without a Post Office' by the Kashmiri writer Agha Shahid Ali to the Bollywood action movie 'Mission Kashmir', both in different ways examining Kashmiri national identity.

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<sup>45</sup> Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women and Violence: between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2009

<sup>46</sup> Ananya Jahanara Kabir. *Territory of Desire: representing the valley of Kashmir*, Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2009

The Conservative Member of Parliament Kwasi Kwarteng selects Kashmir as one of six post-Imperial areas of tension or conflict which he examines as aspects of an 'improvised' and so flawed approach to the accrual and administration of Britain's Empire.<sup>47</sup> He offers a well informed account of the career and eccentricities of Kashmir's last maharaja, and while he is less convincing about Britain's culpability for the enduring Kashmir crisis and has little new to say about the events of 1947, he offers a shrewd account of those months and their broader significance:

By the end of 1947, both Pakistan and India felt that it made sense for the Kashmiris themselves to decide to which country they should belong. The fact that no plebiscite ever took place to resolve the Kashmir dispute belies some of the wilder claims that democracy was the British Raj's unique legacy to the Indian subcontinent; the Kashmir dispute was a direct consequence of princely rule, and no democratic resolution to the conflict has ever been sought.<sup>48</sup>

A further sign of the vitality of Kashmir studies has been the publication of a volume of seventeen academic papers about aspects of Kashmiri literature, culture, religious practice and history involving scholars from around the world, including two who teach at the University of Kashmir as well as academics at Indian, American, British, German, Dutch and Swiss universities (though not from Pakistani institutions).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's legacies in the modern world*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.129

<sup>49</sup> Aparna Rao (ed.), *The Valley of Kashmir: the making and unmaking of a composite culture?*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2008

Looking more broadly at recent academic literature, the most arresting development in Kashmir studies has been the suggestion by Chitralkha Zutshi that Kashmir can usefully be theorised as a borderland<sup>50</sup>, a concept developed in the context of North American history and now more widely applied. She suggests that Kashmir's position on the edge of several Empires (Mughal, Afghan, Sikh, Russian, British), and the cultural and commercial currents that have arisen from that along with the formally or informally negotiated political accommodations, has promoted a syncretic identity typical of borderlands. In recent decades, Zutshi argues, the introduction of more rigid borders and ceasefire lines has constrained that sense of Kashmir as 'a middle ground':

So one can argue that it is in fact Kashmir's geographical location that has allowed it to participate in several different cultural milieus at once and it is precisely because it is now partitioned between several states that no longer allow for an interchange of ideas, goods and people that it is at the centre of an acute political crisis. As a result, greater cross-border exchanges, legitimized by the political entities on all sides, are a crucial element of any foreseeable settlement to this seemingly intractable problem.<sup>51</sup>

Once again, a key concern of expert writing on Kashmir is the continuing territorial dispute, and the human agony and cultural disruption that has accompanied it for more than sixty years.

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<sup>50</sup> Chitralkha Zutshi, 'Rethinking Kashmir's History from a Borderlands Perspective', *History Compass*, 8/7, 2010, pp.594-608

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.605

The concept of Kashmir as a borderland has also been used by the Canadian scholar Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, who offers ‘an anthropological analysis of the social production of jihad among refugees who occupy a transnational space in the borderlands between Pakistan and India’.<sup>52</sup> Her extensive fieldwork has been conducted largely among Kashmiri communities in Pakistan (including Azad Kashmir), and is informed by her understanding of the commencement and development of the dispute over Kashmir. Her own description of the early stages of what Kashmiris style as ‘the Kashmir problem’ is based largely on secondary sources, though her brief account of the massacre of Muslims in Jammu in late 1947 draws on a wider range of source material. She makes the distinction between Partition refugees, whose move was seen as irrevocable, and Kashmiri refugees, who were and are notionally expected to return and resume ownership of their property. Robinson emphasises the large numbers displaced by the conflict – in 1949 almost a fifth of those who had been subjects of the princely state had been displaced. Many of those from Jammu province moved across the international border into Pakistan while many from Kashmir province remained within the bounds of the princely state but found themselves on the other side of the ceasefire line, in many ways a more impermeable border.

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<sup>52</sup> Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior: refugee families and the making of Kashmiri jihadists*, Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2013, p1.

Robinson's account of her decision to pursue anthropology as a career is particularly arresting. In 1995-6, she worked in Indian Kashmir on a humanitarian mission - but, she adds:

I decided to complete my training as an anthropologist rather than become a professional humanitarian worker because my observations in the detention centers [in Indian Kashmir] convinced me that peacemaking in the Kashmir region would eventually have to grapple with the ways that experiences of violence have been incorporated into the political cultures of the regions that are a part of the Kashmir Dispute.<sup>53</sup>

Although not a historian, Robinson is particularly adept in examining how the past has shaped Kashmiri culture and attitudes to militancy.

The phases of the Kashmir conflict have influenced the rhythm of public discussion of Kashmir, above all in India. In the last few years, an organised insurgency has largely given way to mass street protests, what many Kashmiri activists term an 'intifada', which has provoked an at times brutal response from police and the Indian military. While the Indian security apparatus would argue that this represents the eclipse of Pakistan-based militant groups, among Indian intellectuals the emergence of mass demonstrations, and the sight of stone throwing crowds of young Kashmiris confronting heavily armed security forces, has prompted a reassessment of the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.xvii

generally held view that Kashmiri rebelliousness was simply the creation of a malevolent Pakistan.

The novelist and activist Arundhati Roy has been the most high profile of Indian advocates of allowing Kashmiris the right to determine their own future. In recent years, other prominent Indian voices have also echoed this view. The influential columnist Swaminathan Aiyar, writing in the *Times of India* in 2008, contrasted the (almost) India-wide celebration of independence day with protests on that same day in Kashmir against what was perceived there as 'Indian colonialism in the Valley'. He asserted that 'India seeks to integrate with Kashmir, not rule it colonially. Yet, the parallels between British rule in India and Indian rule in Kashmir have become too close for my comfort.'<sup>54</sup> A small number of senior journalists and public intellectuals chimed in, and wrote of the futility of holding by force a territory where the populace appeared to want to break away from Indian rule. This allowed space for a wider debate, which has also found expression in several books intended for a general readership consisting of articles – research, reportage, polemic – which have encouraged a more critical look at India's policy towards Kashmir and a greater appreciation of Kashmiri history and culture.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> 'Independence Day for Kashmir', *Times of India*, 17 August 2008  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/opinion/sa-aiyar/swaminomics/Independence-Day-for-Kashmir/articleshow/3372132.cms> (accessed 29 December 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Notably Ira Pande (ed), *A Tangled Web: Jammu and Kashmir*, New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2011; Sanjay Kak (ed), *Until my Freedom has Come: the new intifada in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2011; and Tariq Ali et al, *Kashmir: the case for freedom*, London: Verso, 2011.

Alongside these new expressions of informed interest in Kashmir, encouraging this process and also nurtured by it, have been the first writings by Kashmiri Muslims about the last twenty years of the conflict to reach a significant global audience. The reportage of Basharat Peer and the fiction of Mirza Waheed have arguably done more to alert international attention to the continuing instability in Kashmir and the grave violations of human rights than any number of acts of violence.<sup>56</sup> By the quality and humanity of their writing, they have helped to establish a sense of the complexity of Kashmir issue.

The established nationalist narratives about Kashmir are slowly being challenged and chipped away. Yet the geopolitical faultline Sister Emilia and her fellow missionaries in Baramulla saw taking shape around them in October and November 1947 remains unbreached. The nature of the conflict has changed greatly over the intervening decades, but it has never gone away – and is unlikely to until there is a broader understanding of the underlying issues, including how the conflict began.

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<sup>56</sup> Basharat Peer, *Curfewed Night*, New Delhi: Random House, 2008; Mirza Waheed, *The Collaborator*, New Delhi; Viking Penguin, 2011. Both books were also published in Europe and North America.



## Conclusion

The particular achievement of *A Mission in Kashmir* has been to establish an account of the origins of the conflict which weaves in the personal, including the Kashmiri experience of that time, with an account of a moment of political crisis and military confrontation. It uses the voices of those often excluded from historical narrative to develop a more complete account of a complex historical moment. It challenges the established Indian narrative of the crisis by confounding the official account of Kashmir's accession, demonstrating an initial undertow of support for the Pakistani tribal army, and documenting the new Indian government's insistence that it would only rule Kashmir with the consent of its people; it contradicts the official Pakistani account by rehearsing the evidence of the complicity of sections of the country's military and political leadership in the tribal army's advance into Kashmir, establishing the extent of the indiscipline of this force and the actions taken to redress that, and providing an account of the active volunteer mobilisation in Srinagar to keep the invaders at bay; it disputes what might be described as the Kashmiri nationalist approach to the events of 1947, and in particular the princely state's accession to India, by demonstrating the vigour with which Sheikh Abdullah and his supporters, who were opponents of princely rule, endorsed the decision to accede to India. My work also looks on the effective end of princely rule in the Kashmir valley not simply as India's acquisition of the state, but as a moment of profound change involving a mass political mobilisation, when for the first time in almost four centuries a Kashmiri Muslim achieved political authority in Srinagar.

The use of neutral language, absence of political partiality, and care taken to embrace the voices, accounts and perspectives of all who had a stake in Kashmir's future has achieved the signal success that *A Mission in Kashmir* has not been repudiated by any significant body of opinion. This doesn't mean that there is now an agreed narrative on how the Kashmir conflict first took hold, but it is a step towards that goal. Neither journalists nor historians should set out with the aim of being peace makers, and their writing should not be shaped by a desire to promote any particular political or diplomatic outcome, but I hope a more informed discussion of how Kashmir succumbed to conflict in 1947 might in some measure help more purposeful discussion towards a settlement.

## **Appendix: Personal bibliography relating to India's partition and to Kashmir in 1947**

### **BOOKS**

*A Mission in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 2007; translated into Tamil (by B.R. Mahadevan) as *Kashmir: Mudhal Yudham*, Chennai: New Horizon, 2011

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOOKS**

'Refugees from Partition' in Parasuraman S. and Unnikrishnan P.V. (eds), *India Disasters Report: towards a policy initiative*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.273-5

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### **ARTICLES AND REVIEWS IN ACADEMIC JOURNALS**

'Women at the Borders', *History Workshop Journal*, 47, 1999, pp.308-12 [review essay discussing Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: voices from the partition of India* and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: women in India's partition*]

‘History On the Line: Bapsi Sidhwa and Urvashi Butalia discuss the Partition of India’, *History Workshop Journal*, 50, 2000, pp.230-8 [transcript of a moderated discussion with introduction]

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[review essay discussing Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: roots of conflict, paths to peace*, Prem Shankar Jha, *The Origins of a Dispute: Kashmir 1947*, Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, rights and the history of Kashmir*, and Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, regional identity and the making of Kashmir*]

‘The People’s Militia: Communists and Kashmiri nationalism in the 1940s’, *Twentieth Century Communism: a journal of international history*, 2, 2010, pp.141-68

‘Entrails of Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 75, 2013, pp.247-51 [review essay discussing Richard Gott, *Britain’s Empire: resistance, repression and revolt*, Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain’s dirty wars and the end of Empire* and Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s legacies in the modern world*]

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‘Bates and Baramulla’, *Biblio* [Delhi], November-December 2001 [review of a new edition of H.E. Bates, *The Scarlet Sword*]

‘When Conflict came to Kashmir’, *BBC History Magazine*, August 2003, pp.60-61

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[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6926057.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6926057.stm) (accessed 30 December 2012)

‘How the Kashmir crisis began’, BBC News website, 26 October 2007,  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/7057694.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7057694.stm) (accessed 30 December 2012)

‘Hovey Lecture 2008’, <http://www.mjfellows.org/news/hovey2008.html> (accessed 2 January 2013) – abridged version of the Hovey lecture at the University of Michigan on the origins of the Kashmir conflict

## RADIO DOCUMENTARIES

'India: a people partitioned', five half-hour radio documentaries broadcast on the BBC World Service in 1997, the final programme deals in part with Kashmir. The series was repeated in 2000, and the final programme was substantially revised. The audio of all six programmes is available on my personal website -

<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/india-a-people-partitioned.html>

'An Incident in Kashmir', a half-hour radio documentary broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2003. The audio is available on my personal website -

<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/documentaries-and-features.html>

## PERSONAL WEBSITE

My personal website contains the following pages (in addition to the audio referred to above) relating to Kashmir in 1947:

- the full text of *A Mission in Kashmir* <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/full-text-a-mission-in-kashmir.html>
- a page about the publication and reception of *A Mission in Kashmir*  
<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/a-mission-in-kashmir.html>
- a page of images of Kashmir in 1947 <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/kashmir-47-images.html>

- a page about the representation in fiction of events in Kashmir in 1947  
<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/kashmir-47-in-fiction.html>
- a full transcript of Father Shanks's manuscript account of the attack on the Baramulla mission hospital <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/father-shankss-kashmir-diary.html>
- a first person account by Krishna Misri, written in 2013, about political events in Kashmir in 1947 and her own enrolment in the Women's Self-Defence Corps  
<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/krishna-misri-1947-a-year-of-change.html>
- a list of interviews conducted relating to Partition and to Kashmir in 1947  
<http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/partition-voices.html>

Word count: 9,970 words excluding footnotes and bibliography

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[ENDS]



## The People's Militia: Communists and Kashmiri nationalism in the 1940s

Andrew Whitehead

'The people's movement of Kashmir', declared the British communist Rajani Palme Dutt in the summer of 1946, 'is the strongest and most militant of any Indian State ... Its leader, Sheikh Abdulla [sic], impressed me as one of the most honest, courageous and able political leaders I had the pleasure of seeing in India.'<sup>1</sup>

This was warm praise from the austere Palme Dutt. His week-long stay in the Kashmiri capital, Srinagar, in July 1946 came at the end of a five month visit to India which was intended largely to guide and instruct the Communist Party of India (CPI).<sup>2</sup> It arose from a personal invitation from Sheikh Abdullah, the leader of the National Conference, the main nationalist party in princely-ruled Kashmir. By the time Dutt reached the Kashmir Valley, Abdullah had been arrested for leading a mass protest campaign against the maharaja. The same issue of Dutt's *Labour Monthly* that published the account of his trip to Kashmir also carried Sheikh Abdullah's speech in his own defence at a trial in which he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for making seditious speeches.<sup>3</sup>

Dutt, the British-born son of a Bengali doctor, was a doctrinaire exponent of orthodoxy within the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).<sup>4</sup> In the British party, he was more feared than loved; in the Indian party, his stock was much higher. Palme Dutt's *India To-Day*, a huge book first published in 1940 at which time the author had never set foot in India, was enormously influential there. Dutt acted as mentor to the younger party, and the CPI leadership would have taken careful note of his comment that Kashmir was 'the political storm-centre of the Indian fight for freedom'. In his *Labour Monthly* article, Dutt made much of the resemblance of the National Conference's<sup>5</sup> emblem, a red flag with plough, to the red flag with hammer and sickle which flew over the bonnet of his car on the arduous road journey from Rawalpindi to Srinagar. In the Kashmiri capital, under the thrall of what he described as a 'reign of terror' established by the maharaja, he attended Sheikh Abdullah's trial:

the sympathy even among the soldiers and armed guards for

Abdulla was visible. When Abdulla entered the court, the entire court with the exception of the judge stood up in his honour – which was more than they had done for the judge. He saw me as he entered and moved away from his guards to shake me by the hand, and we exchanged greetings and I was able publicly to express to him the admiration and support felt for his stand. The proceedings were held up till we had completed these greetings.

A few days later, Dutt button-holed Jawaharlal Nehru, a friend and ally of Abdullah, to advise him against ‘letting down the Kashmir fight’. By the end of the following year, Nehru had become the first prime minister of independent India and Sheikh Abdullah was in power in what had become Indian Kashmir.

Rajani Palme Dutt’s ringing endorsement of Sheikh Abdullah and the movement against autocracy in Kashmir both reflected and gave impetus to Indian communist activity in this out-of-the-way valley in the Himalayan foothills. Communists helped to shape Sheikh Abdullah’s radical campaign against princely rule. In turn, Palme Dutt, it has been suggested, saw in the mass action in Kashmir a potential model for left campaigns, midway between insurrectionism and the restraint advocated by Nehru’s Indian National Congress.<sup>6</sup> Yet in the year following Dutt’s visit to Srinagar, communists in Kashmir took the lead in organising a popular armed force. Hundreds of young Kashmiris enrolled in the militia, and some saw active service while helping to repulse an invasion by pro-Pakistan irregular forces. The militia bore such leftist imprints as political officers, a women’s wing, and a linked cultural front staging popular dramas and organising propaganda.

The establishment of a volunteer force was a remarkable innovation in a part of India where there was no martial tradition. The involvement of women in the militia was even more of a breach with convention in such a conservative region, with little space for women in public life. For Indian communists, too, this was new territory. The party had little history of armed activity, and was sharply critical during the Second World War of Subhas Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army, a force raised outside Indian soil which fought alongside Japanese troops. The militia in Kashmir was a revolutionary force – part of a political mobilisation which saw a new political order take shape there. Sheikh Abdullah’s advent to power marked the end of more than a century of princely rule, and he became the first Kashmiri Muslim to hold the reins of power for well over three hundred years. The volunteer force, however, was not a challenge to the newly independent Indian state; rather it was established to support Kashmir’s accession to India and was equipped and trained by the Indian army. It was a defence force, intended to safeguard the Kashmiri capital from a very real threat of occupation and ransacking

by armed Pakistani tribesmen, rather than a propagator of insurgency. When after a few weeks the immediate danger to Srinagar abated, so too did the temper of militia activity. The women's section disbanded, and the men's militia was eventually incorporated into the Indian armed forces.

Kashmir had not been a focus of communist activity prior to the mid-1940s, and it largely disappeared from the party's horizons within months of Sheikh Abdullah's political takeover. When at the close of 1947 the CPI moved towards a policy of promoting a popular uprising in southern India, this amounted to a repudiation of the policy pursued in Kashmir. The communist approach to Kashmiri nationalism in the mid-1940s harked back to the Popular Front period – a practice of working within progressive parties which had mass support. Although communists in Kashmir made no secret of their political allegiances, they did not seek to organise as a separate party. Their influence within the National Conference was considerable, and endured into the early years of Sheikh Abdullah's period in office. As well as their leadership of the militia, communists also shaped an exceptionally radical political programme with the 'New Kashmir' manifesto of 1944. The land reform measures outlined in the manifesto were eventually implemented, and are widely seen as one of the most radical and successful measures of political and social empowerment in South Asia. This article looks at the means by which communists gained influence within the Kashmiri nationalist movement, the nature of the militia which it helped to establish, and the reasons for the failure to develop a mass-based communist movement.

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The mountain valley of Kashmir was 'great game' territory, part of that inaccessible region of Asia where China, Tibet, Russia and the British Raj all met. The principality of Jammu and Kashmir took shape from the mid-1840s. A century later it was the biggest by area, and second biggest by population, of all India's princely states. The ruling family were Dogri-speaking Hindus from Jammu – in other words, outsiders in the eyes of many Kashmiris – who managed to agglomerate, though never quite bind together, a huge area stretching north from the Punjab plains, through valleys in the Himalayan foothills, to some of the high mountain ranges. The Kashmir Valley was the heartland of their fiefdom, though it accounted for well under half of the princely state's total population and less than a tenth of the land area. It was the centre of the Kashmiri language and culture and of a tolerant Sufi-influenced form of Islam, the religion of more than ninety per cent of the Valley's population. The maharajas were, by and

large, wealthy, sporting Anglophiles. They presided over an autocracy where the Muslim majority was disadvantaged, facing heavy taxes and other feudal-style impositions and with little prospect of education or advancement.<sup>7</sup>

The opening of the Jhelum valley road in 1890 for the first time allowed access to Srinagar by wheeled transport and started to chip away at Kashmir's political and intellectual isolation. From the 1920s, increasing numbers of civil servants and army officers descended on Srinagar during the summer to escape the blistering heat of the plains. There was travel in the other direction too. The offspring of Kashmir's tiny Muslim middle class started to secure an education in Punjab or further afield. From the beginning of the 1930s, popular politics began to take root in the Kashmir Valley, and achieved some concessions from autocratic princely rule. Newspapers and public gatherings for political purposes were permitted from 1932. From the start, the example of the Russian Revolution loomed large in the thinking of Kashmir's small group of politically minded youngsters. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the son of a shawl maker, was the most prominent Kashmiri political leader from the early 1930s until his death in 1982.<sup>8</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah was a graduate of Lahore and Aligarh universities and a charismatic leader and orator who rejoiced in the title Sher-e-Kashmir: the lion of Kashmir. The initial political mobilisation, in the face of often severe repression, was largely communal. Sheikh Abdullah's party was initially known as the Muslim Conference, but in 1939 it was renamed the National Conference, marking an important turn from a community-based identity to aspiring to represent all Kashmiris. The party made an open appeal for support from the Kashmir Valley's small but influential Hindu and Sikh minorities. From the late 1930s, Sheikh Abdullah developed a strong bond with two of South Asia's commanding nationalist leaders: Jawaharlal Nehru, who was himself of Kashmiri Hindu ancestry, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known as the 'Frontier Gandhi', who like Abdullah was an inspirational, secular-minded leader in an overwhelmingly Muslim region. This was an alliance of progressive nationalists, who courted popular support and were willing to tackle feudal privilege. Mohammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League and its allies, the political forces which secured the creation in 1947 of the explicitly Muslim nation of Pakistan, had significant support in the Kashmir Valley, but never managed to rival Sheikh Abdullah's mass appeal.

There was another factor encouraging and sustaining Sheikh Abdullah's turn to a more socialist-minded style of politics. Left-leaning

intellectuals from Lahore began to congregate in Srinagar. Some came during the summer; others settled there. As the temper of politics in Kashmir quickened, so did their interest and involvement. In 1941, Sheikh Abdullah himself performed the nikah or Muslim marriage ceremony in Srinagar of his friend, the renowned progressive poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and a London communist, Alys George. Her sister Christobel was already married to a prominent Punjabi marxist, M.D. Taseer, who became the principal of Kashmir's most prestigious college of higher education. Her memoir of the Valley includes a group photograph of a remarkable constellation of coming leftist literary talent, among them Faiz and the novelist Mulk Raj Anand, taken in Kashmir in 1938.<sup>9</sup> Most were close to the CPI and several came to be active in the Progressive Writers' Association or the Indian People's Theatre Association, organisations of enormous influence in Indian literature and cinema. The actor and writer Balraj Sahni, a party member, was also an influential figure, and the family home in Srinagar was another gathering place of left cultural figures. 'Since I had come from Bombay, where the Central Office of the Communist Party was,' Sahni wrote, 'the Srinagar comrades used to treat me with a deference, which was out of all proportion.'<sup>10</sup>

Another communist couple began to travel up from Lahore and came to be key players in Kashmiri politics. B.P.L. Bedi was a Punjabi Sikh who as a student at Oxford had met a woman from Derbyshire, Freda Houlston. 'Barely a week after finishing Final Schools', she reminisced, 'we were married in the dark and poky little Oxford Registry Office.'<sup>11</sup> She wore a sari as her wedding dress, and in the autumn of 1934, the Bedis and their four-month-old baby moved to India. They were a striking couple, politically committed and socially outgoing, and to this day warmly remembered by the few survivors of their once large circle of friends. 'In the summer months', reminisced Christobel Bilkees Taseer, 'the Leftists from different parts of India would also be there [in Kashmir], mixing with and influencing the National Conference workers. One particularly popular couple were the Bedis ... Both husband and wife were dedicated Marxists.'<sup>12</sup> 'Baba' Bedi was gregarious and forceful – 'very funny character, very happy go lucky type ... he had a big smile on his face'.<sup>13</sup> Freda was courageous, clever and her beauty was much commented upon. In the words of her younger son, the film star Kabir Bedi, 'she was blue eyed, white skinned and fighting the British'.<sup>14</sup> They became close friends of Sheikh Abdullah and part of his immediate political circle.

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Organised CPI activity in the Kashmir Valley appears to date from the late 1930s. Prem Nath Bazaz, who was both a historian of and a

participant in Kashmir politics in this era, recorded that two 'Moscow-trained' workers from Lahore spent several weeks in Srinagar in 1937 but achieved little. In the early 1940s, several small socialist-minded discussion groups were set up by students in Kashmir.<sup>15</sup> In this more propitious climate, the CPI made another attempt to recruit. 'In September 1942, Fazal Elahi Qurban, the well known Communist from Lahore organized an anti fascist school in a house boat in Srinagar', according to an Indian intelligence report, 'and the party's influence was slowly being extended.'<sup>16</sup> Pran Nath Jalali, a schoolboy at the time, attended the sessions: 'I ran away from my home to join the first study circle, they called it, which was held in Dal Lake. It was in a boat. We had the first schooling on communist ideology in that doonga [boat].'<sup>17</sup>

Jalali had expected to be taught how to make bombs, but instead learned about topics ranging from evolution to the French Revolution. He recalled about fourteen participants in the classes, most of them students.<sup>18</sup> Among those attending were two future chief ministers of Indian Kashmir and key lieutenants of Sheikh Abdullah. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's association with the communist movement was brief. G.M. Sadiq's links were much more long lasting.<sup>19</sup> Small numbers of communists became active particularly within the students, youth and labour wings of the National Conference. 'They did not raise their hand that here we are, communists', Pran Nath Jalali recalled. 'Except that everybody knew. Even Sheikh sahib [Sheikh Abdullah] knew ... There was no ban as such. But we were conscious not to run Sheikh sahib on the wrong side because he was very sensitive about any parallel political activity.'

A disproportionate number of these pioneer Kashmiri communists were, like Jalali, Pandits – that is, high caste Kashmiri speaking Hindus, a community which at that time made up less than a tenth of the Valley's population. One Pandit communist, Niranjan Nath Raina, achieved prominence both within the National Conference in Srinagar and in the local trade union movement. 'I admired him because he had great intellect ... he was a man of calibre', recalled Mohan Lal Misri; 'he was the number one communist' in the recollection of Mahmooda Ahmed Ali Shah.<sup>20</sup> Raina 'had been indoctrinated with the philosophy of communism while studying in the Allahabad University', recorded Prem Nath Bazaz. 'On his return to his homeland he became the staunchest propagandist of the creed. Through his efforts, the party gained dozens of adherents among the intelligentsia of the Pandits.'<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Kashmiri communism was a secular movement which sought to embrace all communities, with secularism at the root of its political purpose.

The most powerful evidence of communist influence within the National Conference came with the party's adoption in September 1944 of the 'Naya Kashmir' (New Kashmir) policy document. According to some of those involved, communist allies of Sheikh Abdullah had urged the National Conference to develop a policy platform. 'In order to get it in a concrete shape', one veteran commented many decades later, 'the National Conference party invited from its members their opinions, articles, suggestions and view-points, all in writing. When a bulk of such material was collected, it was sifted and all good things accepted, compiled and given a proper shape. It was then prepared into a well arranged document with the help of a communist leader, B.L.P. [sic] Bedi who ... mixed his own ideological substance with the material.'<sup>22</sup> Most accounts agree that Bedi was responsible for the greater part of the forty-four-page manifesto, perhaps in collaboration with prominent CPI members in Lahore. Jalali's recollection is that apart from the introduction, there wasn't much writing to do, because the manifesto was 'almost a carbon copy' of documents issued in Soviet Central Asia.<sup>23</sup>

The 'New Kashmir' manifesto has been authoritatively described as 'the most important political document in modern Kashmir's history'.<sup>24</sup> In the introduction, Sheikh Abdullah advocated democracy and responsible government for Kashmir and a planned economy, and made clear where he looked for inspiration:

In our times, Soviet Russia has demonstrated before our eyes, not merely theoretical but in her actual day to day life and development, that real freedom takes birth only from economic emancipation. The inspiring picture of the regeneration of all the different nationalities and peoples of the U.S.S.R., and their welding 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.

There was certainly no shortage of rhetoric. The preamble to what was in effect a draft constitution asserted the determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir 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 resurgence of the peoples of the East ... to make this our country a darzling [sic] gem upon the snowy bosom of Asia'.<sup>25</sup> The socialist tone was emphasised by the front cover, red in hue, with a Marianne-style depiction of a woman, her head covered,

holding the National Conference red flag.

The body of the document was much more earnest, incorporating charters for workers, peasants and women. It advocated equal rights, irrespective of race, religion, nationality or birth. Freedom of speech, press and assembly were to be guaranteed. There was particular emphasis on rights for women, which extended to equal wages and paid leave during pregnancy. The main features of the National Economic Plan were the 'abolition of landlordism' and 'land to the tiller', radical measures in any country but exceptionally so in an underdeveloped and partly feudal principality. All key industries were to be 'managed and owned by the Democratic State of Jammu and Kashmir'. The draft constitution proposed universal suffrage for those aged eighteen and over, though the powers of the National Assembly were to be subject 'to the general control of H.H. the Maharaja Bahadur'. This tolerance of a constitutional monarchy, a deference sharply at odds with the democratic tone of the programme, was further reflected in the decision of the National Conference to present their policy document in person to the maharaja.

'One thing that is difficult to understand is that the programme was not produced in a high tide of mass upsurge', wrote the Kashmiri communist, N.N. Raina. 'On the contrary political activity in 1943-44 had fallen to its lowest ebb ... There was an air of unreality about the whole operation.' Yet the 'New Kashmir' programme, Raina argued, pointed the way for the National Conference and allowed it to establish a mass base, and also found a wider audience for communist ideas. 'By the summer of 1945 the number of copies of *People's War*, [a] weekly run by the C.P.I. sold every week [in Kashmir] reached 270', he wrote. 'This was in addition to about 100 permanent subscribers ... A few tens were communists by conviction and were National Conference office bearers at various levels.'<sup>26</sup>

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While 'New Kashmir' countenanced the continuance of princely rule in some form, the memorandum the National Conference submitted to a British cabinet mission to India in early 1946 took a more militant tone. In this, the party took strong exception to the terms of the treaty a century earlier, under which a local warlord acquired the Kashmir Valley. It was the treaty which had established Dogra princely rule over the Valley – and the National Conference now demanded what amounted to its annulment: 'We wish to declare that no sale deed however sacrosanct can condemn more than four million men and women to servitude of an autocrat when will to live under



this rule is no longer there', Sheikh Abdullah declared in a telegram sent to the cabinet mission while they were in Srinagar. 'People of Kashmir are determined to mould their own destiny and we appeal to Mission to recognise justice and strength of our cause.'<sup>27</sup>

'Quit Kashmir' was a slogan that resounded around the Valley in the spring of 1946. It was an echo of the Congress's 'Quit India' campaign of a few years earlier. The target of Kashmir's mass agitation, though, was not the British but their own maharaja. The 'Quit Kashmir' movement seems more formidable in retrospect than it did at the time, and provided no immediate threat to princely rule. Yet it strengthened Sheikh Abdullah's political primacy in the Valley, caught the mood which was increasingly hostile to the maharaja and his family, and wrong-footed rival parties.<sup>28</sup> It was arguably the biggest organised political mobilisation the Kashmir Valley had seen – and was the movement that won the attention and applause of Rajani Palme Dutt. The concept of the sovereignty of the people which had been part-expressed in the 'New Kashmir' document was more powerfully achieved on the streets. The maharaja responded to the threat to his rule with repression. Hundreds of National Conference activists were rounded up, and on 20 May 1946, Sheikh Abdullah himself was arrested.

In the face of mass arrests, the communist network helped sustain the larger National Conference as an underground political force. Several leaders of the National Conference, including Sheikh Abdullah's principal lieutenant Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and the leftist G.M. Sadiq, managed to sidestep arrest and reach Lahore. From there, they sought to organise protests and publish party literature. Ghulam Mohiuddin Kara (or Qarra) – a founder member of the National Conference who recounted that in 1942 he had been 'won over to the Communist cause through the Bedis'<sup>29</sup> – went underground. Kara has been described by a writer not generally sympathetic to the National Conference as the hero of the moment. 'The Government strained every nerve and spent large sums of money to get him arrested but in vain ... He did not hide just to prevent his imprisonment but sustained the Movement in Srinagar.'<sup>30</sup> The American photo-journalist Margaret Bourke-White met Kara at the Bedis' home when she visited Kashmir at the close of 1947 and heard stories, legends perhaps, of his underground heroism, and of his affectionate nickname of 'Bulbul-i-Kashmir', the nightingale of Kashmir.<sup>31</sup>

Women filled some of the vacuum left by the arrest or flight of male leaders, acting as couriers and also seeking to maintain morale and a sense of purpose. Freda Bedi memorably dressed as a local Muslim woman to enable her to conduct an 'underground messenger

service' for the nationalists.<sup>32</sup> Kashmiri women gained a prominence and confidence that they had never before attained or sought. 'When [the] male leadership was put behind the bars or driven underground', wrote Krishna Misri, herself a young political activist in Kashmir in the 1940s, 'the women leaders took charge and gave a new direction to the struggle ... However, the leaders addressed no controversial woman-specific issues for they did not want to come across as social rebels.'<sup>33</sup> The leading women activists in Srinagar included the pro-communist Mahmooda Ali Shah, who had graduated from Lahore and was later a pioneer of women's education in Kashmir, as well as Begum Zainab and Sheikh Abdullah's wife, Begum Akbar Jehan.

The Indian communist weekly *People's War* paid little attention to Kashmir, even when the National Conference adopted a socialist policy platform. Its successor *People's Age* made good the omission, championing the 'Quit Kashmir' campaign and lionising Sheikh Abdullah. The CPI's young and popular leader P.C. Joshi described Sheikh Abdullah as 'the wisest and tallest among the State people's leaders'.<sup>34</sup> In August 1947, the paper carried a photograph of a 'giant meeting at Hazratbal [outside Srinagar] ... addressed by four underground National Conference workers'. But when the following month, a *People's Age* correspondent reported on a stay of several weeks in Kashmir, the tone was distinctly critical: 'The movement at present is nearly wholly disorganised and among the rank and file workers there is great dissatisfaction and confusion. There is even a danger of disintegration.'<sup>35</sup>

By then the Raj had ended and British India had been partitioned. Nehru had become the first prime minister of independent India, while Jinnah was governor-general of the new nation of Pakistan. Both were preoccupied by the profound loss of life, communal violence, and mass migration that accompanied a hastily executed partition. In the initial post-Raj weeks, the Kashmir Valley was largely unaffected by communal unrest, but there was great confusion about which nation the state would join. In formal terms, the decision rested with the maharaja. He was torn between Pakistan's greater indulgence of princely rulers and the ties of religion which bound him (but only a minority of his citizens) more closely to India.<sup>36</sup> The maharaja dithered and played for time, and Abdullah and many of his supporters were still in jail as India and Pakistan celebrated independence in mid-August 1947.

Sheikh Abdullah was eventually released on 29 September. The rejoicing crowds that paraded through Srinagar were testament to his popularity and political authority. Within days, Abdullah began to make a case for what can only be regarded as a political militia – a

startling novelty in Kashmir which had no militia tradition, and indeed where no Valley Kashmiris had been allowed to serve in the maharaja's army. Addressing a public meeting, Abdullah called for volunteers to come forward to establish a 'peace brigade'. Referring to reports of a possible incursion into Kashmir, he advocated 'a volunteer corps to maintain peace and protect "our hearth and homes", irrespective of creed and community'.<sup>37</sup> Whether or not the idea originated with communists, they took on themselves the urgent task of organising the volunteer force.

Two weeks after Sheikh Abdullah called for the establishment of a peace brigade, the invasion of Kashmir he had warned of began. A 'lashkar' or tribal army, ill-disciplined but well armed and numbering several thousand fighters, descended from the tribal agencies bordering Afghanistan. They were pursuing a jihad or holy war – and as well as championing Islam, they were also seeking to claim the Kashmir Valley for Pakistan and (for many the most immediate preoccupation) to seek booty. The extent of Pakistan's complicity in this raid has been hotly debated and disputed. It is clear that the provincial government in Pakistan's North-West frontier aided and encouraged the invasion, as did some in Pakistan's national government and in the army. Aided by Muslim mutineers within the maharaja's forces, the invaders progressed rapidly, capturing Muzaffarabad, advancing along the Jhelum river, and taking the Valley's second town, Baramulla. There the 'lashkar' looted and raped, and caused an international outcry by ransacking a Catholic convent and mission hospital where three Europeans were among those killed. Although the targets were often non-Muslims, the attackers were indiscriminate in their violence and so lost much of the goodwill they might have enjoyed as self-proclaimed liberators from Hindu princely rule.

The fall of Baramulla and word of the atrocities committed there caused alarm in Srinagar, just thirty-five miles away on a good and flat road. The maharaja, prompted by the Indian government, fled at night in a long cavalcade of cars across a mountain pass to the city of Jammu. Many Kashmiris saw this as an act of cowardice. Once in Jammu, Maharaja Hari Singh signed the instrument of accession by which his state became part of India. Sheikh Abdullah was quick to endorse Kashmir's union with India, but he recognised that the most urgent task was to repulse the invaders. With the collapse of the state's army and of much of the maharaja's administration, Srinagar was undefended. The Indian government began an ambitious airlift to provide some defence for the Kashmiri capital, but Srinagar's airstrip was so basic it was impossible to land more than three or four hundred troops a day.

On the day the airlift began, Nehru wrote a private letter endorsing the volunteer force Sheikh Abdullah had envisaged. 'We shall be sending you more arms for distribution to the civil population', he told an Indian officer sent as his personal emissary to Srinagar. 'Chosen young men, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, should be given rifles and if possible given some simple training. We must do all this on a non-communal basis inviting everyone to joining in defence but taking care of one major factor – to trust none who might give trouble ... These armed volunteers can well undertake the defence of, and the duty of keeping order in Srinagar and other towns in the Valley ... This would leave our troops for more active work.'<sup>38</sup>

The following day, newspapers reported 'hundreds of "National Conference" volunteers' in the streets. Two days later, 'several scores of them appeared armed for the first time with standard .303 rifles which a spokesman said they had obtained from "friendly sources"'.<sup>39</sup> Sheikh Abdullah reminisced that 'Hindus and Muslims alike were prepared to guard their national honour, having heard about the atrocities inflicted on the innocents by the tribal people ... Girls also joined with the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh boys, and all were strictly ordered to guard the non-Muslim households.'<sup>40</sup> N.N. Raina, a prominent Kashmiri communist, gave a sense of the excitement as young Kashmiris enrolled in the militia:

Within a few hours the whole atmosphere in the Valley changed. Young and old started marching, and offering for guard duties on bridges and in bazaars, banks, telephone and telegraph exchanges ... The exhibition ground was used for training and lodging of volunteers, many of whom were from the Srinagar factories, schools and colleges. Gole Bagh was used for training lady volunteers.<sup>41</sup>

He recounted that military veterans and others with relevant experience were brought in to train the volunteers, and cars and motorbikes were requisitioned for their transport.

Although Sheikh Abdullah had been named by the maharaja as emergency administrator rather than head of government, he quickly took the reins of power. The presence on the streets of a volunteer force loyal to him was tangible proof that the old princely order had gone. The militia's task was to protect the Kashmiri capital from the Pakistani invaders, and in so doing it buttressed Kashmir's accession to India. Militia members patrolled the streets of Srinagar, and sought to defend the main points of entry to the city. A journalist who travelled round Srinagar by jeep reported: 'Every inlet to the city had its posse of volunteers, some of whom were armed with guns, others with

swords and sticks.’<sup>42</sup> In due course, some militia members accompanied Indian troops, serving as guides and translators and occasionally as combatants. Several members of the militia were killed in the fighting. A few volunteers chose to work undercover in areas that had been captured by the tribesmen. Among these was Maqbool Sherwani, ‘an adventurer and a bit showy’ in the judgement of his colleague Pran Nath Jalali, who was shot by tribesmen in Baramulla and came to be regarded as a martyred hero of pro-India Kashmiri nationalism.<sup>43</sup>

While there were many non-communists active in the militia and a few in leading positions within it, the predominance of communists and their sympathisers indicates the influence of the left within the National Conference. The leftist G.M. Sadiq was often described as the pioneer and leader of the militia. His sister, Begum Zainab, was the guiding force behind the women’s corps. The military commander was Said Ahmed Shah, a Muslim also known by the Hindu-style name Sham-ji. Colleagues recall him as largely non-political in outlook. Rajbans Khanna, a young communist intellectual from Lahore and friend of the Sahnis, took a directing role – and in due course married one of the women’s militia, Usha Kashyap. The teenage communist Pran Nath Jalali was the militia’s political officer, a post which bore an echo, by design or otherwise, of the leftist International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War a decade earlier. He had the task of promoting literacy and political awareness.

Indian army officers provided a modicum of training, as well as some basic equipment. Photographs survive of groups of young Kashmiri men drilling and parading, and taking part in rifle practice. A children’s wing was formed, the Bal Sena, and a group of enthusiastic youngsters was photographed drilling with wooden rifles in the centre of Srinagar. The women’s militia was not intended for active service. It was a self-defence corps, intended to give Kashmiri women of all communities the chance to defend their homes and honour should Srinagar be occupied. ‘For them it was a matter of life and death’, one National Conference leader recalled, ‘because women and wealth were the most coveted targets of the invaders.’<sup>44</sup> The women drilled (and on one occasion, were inspected with weapons on display by Nehru) and some learnt how to fire .303 rifles and throw grenades. ‘When my instructor shot the first fire, we were so scared we ran away’, recalled Krishna Misri, who was fifteen years old when she enrolled in the women’s militia.<sup>45</sup> The members also helped with relief work for the thousands of refugees created by the advent of the tribal army and the ensuing panic.

National Conference leaders suggested that as many as 10,000

young Kashmiris enlisted in the militia. This was probably an exaggeration, but many hundreds certainly joined up in what was initially known as the Bachau Fauj (Protection Force). While they contributed to the repulse of the raiders, their military role was not crucial. Their part in maintaining morale and in confirming Sheikh Abdullah's political ascendancy was more emphatic. The tribesmen advanced to the outskirts of Srinagar. The capital was without power, fuel and newspapers and supplies of food and cooking oil were limited. But the attackers had not expected to face the might of the Indian army, supported from the air, and within two weeks of the beginning of the airlift Indian troops had secured Srinagar and repulsed the tribal forces to the edges of the Kashmir Valley. The maharaja was still the nominal ruler of Kashmir, but his state forces were almost nonexistent and his authority in the Valley was minimal.

The success of the militia, both in attracting public support and in bolstering the National Conference's public standing, appears to have emboldened communists to act more openly. They argued that the volunteer force, which was largely restricted to Srinagar, should be extended across the state and given an explicit political purpose. 'Our people should feel convinced that they are not fighting merely for the continuance of the old oppressive order but their own freedom', stated an open letter from the communist group in the National Conference written at the end of October 1947, when the Kashmiri capital was still imperilled by the invaders. 'On the basis of this consciousness we should be able to build a patriotic People's Militia which can launch political as well as military offensives to defeat the politico-military offensive of the enemy. We should be able to organise a network of Village Defence Committees, and thousands of Village Militia Units in every corner of the state.'<sup>46</sup>

The communist press echoed the demand for an effective militia and gloried in its reported successes. At the same time as the communists delivered their open message, the *People's Age* declared that Kashmir's 'freedom fight' could not rely simply on the Indian army. It would require 'the mobilization and active participation of the entire following of the National Conference, of the entire common people of Kashmir and Jammu. It will be necessary to arm the entire mass with whatever weapons one can get, to organise a popular guerilla warfare against the raiders.'<sup>47</sup> This call to arms was a new direction for the CPI, which for much of the Second World War supported the allied war effort and was thus opposed to the most formidable of Indian wartime irregular forces, the Japan-aligned Indian National Army. It was, however, not a call for an insurgency against the Indian state, but for a militia which operated in the name of a non-communist party and alongside the Indian army.

The following week, the communist weekly reported on the mobilisation and activities of the Bachao Fauj, which it said, with boundless optimism, numbered 25,000 volunteers. Later in the month, the *People's Age* gave over its front-page to a series of photographs of the militia under the headline: 'Kashmiris Resist'. An accompanying article recounted that 'these kids who rouse their whole mohalla [district] with the spirit of resistance, come every day to the headquarters demanding jobs to do, and, of course, rifles to fight the enemy with'. It also published a letter from Srinagar (apparently written by Usha Kashyap, though her name was not given) giving a sense of the political energy in the air: 'I am writing this letter to you from the Paladium [sic] Cinema which is our headquarters now', she wrote, supposedly to relatives in Bombay. 'Down below at the crossing, thousands of Kashmiris are always mounting guard with their rifles. The whole city is mad with joy ... Today four of us girls will be taught the use of rifles. Tomorrow we may be sent to the ... front as field-nurses.'<sup>48</sup>

The next issue reported the pushing back of the invaders and the taking by the Indian army of the key town of Baramulla – which meant the lifting of the danger to the Kashmiri capital. The following week, the *People's Age* devoted two pages to photographs of women members of the militia: 'For the first time on the soil of India is there being built an army of women, trained to use the rifle and other modern weapons of war', the paper declared with rhetorical flourish, though it was certainly justified in pointing out the striking innovation of arming and training women volunteers, all the more remarkable in a conservative, mainly Muslim princely state. 'The women in Kashmir are the first in India to build an army of women trained to use the rifle. By their example they have made Indian history, filled our chests with pride, raised our country's banner higher among the great nations of the world.'<sup>49</sup> The prominence in the women's self-defence corps of communist sympathisers, among them Mahmooda Ali Shah, Begum Zainab and Sajida Malik, again underlines the role of the left in leading and directing this citizen's militia.<sup>50</sup>

Alongside the armed militia, a Cultural Front was instituted, with again communists in leading positions – largely to conduct propaganda against the tribal raiders and in favour of Sheikh Abdullah and his radical policy programme. Simple dramas, what would later be called agitprop pieces, were hastily devised and performed: 'We used to go to the front and play the local themes', recalled Usha Kashyap; 'how these raiders, they've come to only kill Hindus, they were doing all sorts, molesting women and all that. And those plays used to be a big, big hit ... And my name turned into, instead of Usha, Ayesha, Muslim name. And they loved me.'<sup>51</sup>

‘In Battle-Scarred Kashmir A People’s Theatre Is Born’ read a headline in the *People’s Age*.<sup>52</sup> The article reported that the first two dramas had been written and ‘are being rapidly rehearsed’, both dwelling on the heroism of the militia volunteers. One told the story of Maqbool Sherwani, the motorcycling militia man who had been shot dead by the raiders in Baramulla. The other was entitled ‘Sara’, portrayed as a ‘true story’ of a young Kashmiri woman who offered to cook for the raiders when they entered her village but instead informed on them:

And in a short while, the volunteers of the National Militia were on the spot. They stormed the house, captured the raiders before they knew what to do. The Chief of the raiders tried to take advantage of the confusion to make good his escape from the back of the house. But Sara had her eyes on him. Hardly had he gone a few yards when she shot him with her own revolver.

Usha Kashyap played the lead role in the drama, which had been written by ‘a young Kashmiri writer’.

In a later issue of the *People’s Age*, Usha Kashyap wrote that the renowned writer K.A. Abbas attended an early performance of ‘Sara’ in Srinagar. Abbas was not a Kashmiri, but recorded in his autobiography how he was determined to join other progressive cultural figures in Srinagar and, with Nehru’s help, got a place on a plane while the emergency was at its height. At Srinagar’s airstrip, Abbas was met by a young Kashmiri Pandit, D.P. Dhar – a communist worker, according to the *People’s Age* – who later became a political figure of great influence in Delhi. Abbas recalled Dhar as ‘a handsome young Kashmiri’ who ‘carried a rifle slung over his shoulder ... who seemed to be doing a dozen things – from training Kashmiri boatmen and farmers into a militia to keep track of the infiltrators who were still prowling about the valley, and looking after the intellectuals who were coming in every day’.

Abbas recalled that an array of leftist writers and artists had assembled in Srinagar. ‘The atmosphere reminded one of Spain and the International Brigade where, it was said, writers had come to live their books, and poets had come to die for their poetry!’<sup>53</sup> The International Brigaders in Spain were of course outsiders who fought in solidarity with the Spanish struggle against fascism and Abbas and many others were similarly displaying solidarity with a cause with which they identified strongly but which was not entirely their own. India had not won its independence on the battlefield, but the battle for Kashmir just weeks after independence day became a rallying



point for young progressive nationalists. It also became a focus for their creative work in later months and years. Mulk Raj Anand and K.S. Duggal, among others, wrote about the Kashmiri nationalist struggle. Leftist actors and filmmakers worked together to produce in 1949 'Kashmir Toofan Mei' (Storm Over Kashmir), a documentary film about the tribal raid and the popular response to it. K.A. Abbas and Balraj Sahni both played key roles in determining how Kashmir came to be depicted in Indian cinema and culture.<sup>54</sup>

The presence of artistic talent also shaped the visual depiction of the Kashmir movement. Madanjeet Singh, a photographer and painter, was among those who headed to Kashmir, in spite of his looming final exams at Delhi Polytechnic. He had been invited 'to build the National Cultural front in Srinagar to strengthen Kashmir's secular culture and help in resisting the invaders'. He recalled that D.P. Dhar and B.P.L. Bedi were the main patrons of the Cultural Front, and found that several Kashmiri poets and writers – notably the 'coolie poet' Aasi – were also actively engaged in the movement.<sup>55</sup> Some of Madanjeet's photographs of the militia appeared in the communist *People's Age*. When a few months later the Kashmir Bureau of Information put out a well illustrated propaganda pamphlet entitled *Kashmir Defends Democracy*, it was graced by a striking cover designed by Sobha Singh, then a young progressive and much later in life renowned for his portraits of the Sikh gurus. This combined a photograph of the women's defence corps with a dramatic outline in red of a Kashmiri woman lying and taking aim with a rifle (a portrayal of a Kashmiri Muslim milkwoman known as Zuni). In design and iconography, as well as in political message, it was a bold progressive statement.<sup>56</sup>

The guiding role within the militia of communists and their supporters, however, attracted the attention of their rivals. To judge by the account of N.N. Raina, the authorities in Delhi took fright at the extent of communist influence. Early in 1948, Raina asserted, Sheikh Abdullah's deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, took control of the militia 'virtually through a coup ... and put it under commanders supplied by the Indian Army. Communists were made uncomfortable by various provocations.'<sup>57</sup> Certainly, in the course of 1948, the militia's independence was curtailed and it never became the people's militia that the left had envisaged.

The Popular Front style of politics pursued by communists in Kashmir also fell victim to an abrupt change of line by the Communist Party of India. In December 1947, the central committee turned sharply to the left, denounced as 'opportunism' the policy of seeking to work alongside Congress and influence the Nehru government,

and called for struggle against the 'national bourgeois leadership'. Two months later, at its second congress, the CPI removed P.C. Joshi and installed a hardliner, B.T. Ranadive, as party leader. In a key speech, the party's policy of supporting Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference was condemned. The new emphasis was on revolutionary struggle, and particularly on supporting the rural uprising in Telengana in another princely state, Hyderabad.<sup>58</sup> The building of influence within progressive non-communist parties was rejected.

In his early years in power, however, Sheikh Abdullah established a reputation for radicalism. One of his first acts was to rename Srinagar's main square as Lal Chowk (Red Square).<sup>59</sup> The echo of Moscow was unmistakable – and the name has endured to this day. A much more substantial achievement was the execution in the early 1950s of the most far-reaching land reform in modern India, seeing through the most ambitious of the policy proposals in the 'New Kashmir' manifesto. About half of the state's arable land was taken away from large and medium-size landlords within the initial two years of the scheme, creating hundreds of thousands of peasant proprietors. The main beneficiaries were poor Muslim villagers in the Kashmir Valley. Land redistribution secured Sheikh Abdullah's power base for a generation and is seen as his enduring political success.

More generally, Sheikh Abdullah was more successful as a political mobiliser than as a statesman or administrator. There had been little in the way of representative institutions in princely Kashmir, and while Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference used the rhetoric of democracy they were not by instinct pluralist in their outlook. Once settled in power, Sheikh Abdullah became something of an autocrat and his critics complained of intolerance and repression. Among the communists who initially surrounded Sheikh Abdullah, B.P.L. Bedi was given a post in charge of propaganda, but after a while there was a parting of the ways. Ghulam Mohiuddin Kara, the hero of the Quit Kashmir movement, broke more decisively and set up his own political party. Pran Nath Jalali found that his growing disillusionment with Sheikh Abdullah's administration, and concern about corruption and abuse of power, was compounded by the indifference of the CPI national leadership. He came to Delhi to talk to communist leaders but found that they were 'busy with their own revolution those days ... I came to the conclusion they were not interested in building up a movement [in Kashmir], and the type of movement they wanted, I wasn't interested.'<sup>60</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah's personalised style of governance, and the change of outlook by the CPI, together greatly weakened the influence of

communists. At the same time, his radicalism and authoritarianism, and the legacy of his close association with communists, aroused deep misgivings among those inimical to the Soviet Union. Josef Korbel came to South Asia in 1948 as the Czechoslovak member of the five nation UN Commission for India and Pakistan. When a few years later he wrote *Danger in Kashmir*, the peril he had in mind was the sort of Soviet-style communism which had taken root in his home country. He regarded Sheikh Abdullah as ‘an opportunist and, worse, a dictator’, and expressed the fear ‘that Kashmir might eventually become a hub of Communist activities in Southern Asia’.<sup>61</sup>

A similar argument was expressed by local critics of Sheikh Abdullah. In 1952, a pamphlet entitled *Rise of Communism in Kashmir* rehearsed how the left was using Sheikh Abdullah as a ‘cat paw’ as they prepared to capture power.<sup>62</sup> The following year Sheikh Abdullah was removed from office as Kashmir’s prime minister, largely because India’s national government came to regard him as unreliable on the issue of the permanence of the state’s accession to India. Concerns about communist influence continued to reverberate. An opposition group asserted that G.M. Sadiq, the most high profile communist sympathiser, had great influence in the new state government and that there were several other communist ministers. ‘[If] no immediate steps are taken to nip the evil’, it warned, ‘Kashmir may be lost to Communism.’<sup>63</sup>

In 1955, the Soviet leaders Khrushchev and Bulganin travelled to Srinagar during a visit to India. It was a public demonstration of Soviet support for Kashmir’s still disputed union with India – the ‘Russians are the first great power to have definitely and clearly gone on record as accepting the accession of Kashmir to India as final’, Kashmir’s constitutional head of state told Nehru.<sup>64</sup> In the following decade, G.M. Sadiq served as chief minister, still pro-Soviet by faction and inclination, but successful above all because he was Delhi’s candidate. The steady erosion of Kashmir’s autonomy, and Delhi’s persistent interference and rigging of elections, prepared the way for the separatist insurgency that erupted in 1989. Some Kashmiris sought independence, others wanted to become part of Islamic Pakistan – but disaffection with Indian rule was evident across the Valley. Over the following two decades, at least 40,000 people, more than one in a hundred of the Valley’s adult population, died in the conflict between Pakistan-backed militants and Indian security forces.

Over that time, communists have had little visible presence in Kashmir. Many of the youthful communists who enrolled in the volunteer militia remained loyal to the ideology all their lives. Yet at the time of writing (in the summer of 2009), the Communist Party

of India (Marxist) has a solitary member of the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly. Sheikh Abdullah's grandson is chief minister of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, at the helm of the National Conference and governing in alliance with Congress. But the strand of militant, pro-India secular nationalism that the Kashmiri communists of the 1940s espoused now has limited resonance. The shifting sands of Kashmiri politics, however, should not be allowed to obscure the substantial role of communists in giving a radical complexion to Kashmiri nationalism in the crucial decade of the 1940s, securing popular support towards ending princely rule and taking up arms in defence of a secular, democratic Kashmir.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Travel Notes No. 5', *Labour Monthly*, 28/10, October 1946, pp319-26. The 'Indian States' refers to the princely states which had not been fully incorporated into British India. I am grateful to Ajit Bhattacharjea, Sumantra Bose, Suchetana Chattopadhyay and Matthew Worley for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, pp240-4.

<sup>3</sup> Sheikh Abdulla [sic], 'Not Guilty', *Labour Monthly*, 28/10, October 1946, pp311-14.

<sup>4</sup> Dutt's life and career is detailed in John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Dutt persistently referred to Sheikh Abdullah's party as the People's Conference – apparently confusing the National Conference with another body in which Sheikh Abdullah was prominent, the All-India States People's Conference, which sought to represent the subjects of princely India and was aligned with the Indian National Congress.

<sup>6</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller, pp241, 244.

<sup>7</sup> Of the many modern histories of Kashmir, among the best is Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003. An engagingly polemical version is Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, London: Verso, 2002, pp217-52.

<sup>8</sup> Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Roli, 2008, pp29, 42-3, 48.

<sup>9</sup> C. Bilquees Taseer, *The Kashmir of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah*, Lahore: Ferozsons, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Balraj Sahni, *Balraj Sahni: an autobiography*, Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1979, p143.

<sup>11</sup> Freda Bedi, *Behind the Mud Walls*, Lahore: Unity Publishers, [1947], p1.

<sup>12</sup> Taseer, *The Kashmir of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah*, p38.

<sup>13</sup> Pran Nath Jalali interview, Delhi, 11 April 2007. Audio recordings and transcripts of interviews have been deposited in the archive of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London (accession OA3).

<sup>14</sup> Kabir Bedi, personal communication, April 2007. Freda Bedi later became a senior Buddhist woman religious. B.P.L. Bedi also turned to religion in later life, in his case to the faith he was born into, Sikhism.

<sup>15</sup> Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, Cultural and Political*, Srinagar: Gulshan, 2003 (first published c1953), p421. Accounts of these small groups can be found in Asifa Jan, *Naya Kashmir: An Appraisal*, Srinagar: Zeba, 2006; N.N. Raina, *Kashmir Politics and Imperialist Manoeuvres, 1846-1980*, New Delhi: Patriot, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Sandeep Bamzai, *Bonfire of Kashmiriyat: Deconstructing the Accession*, New Delhi: Rupa, 2006, p106. The author makes extensive use of official documents in his family's possession assembled by his grandfather, K.N. Bamzai, a Kashmiri Hindu who was a close confidante of Nehru.

<sup>17</sup> Pran Nath Jalali interview, Delhi, 30 March 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Jan, *Naya Kashmir*, pp73-4.

<sup>19</sup> According to his son, Sadiq came into contact with communist intellectuals while a student in Lahore in the 1930s and was one of the points of contact with Punjabi communists during the repression of the mid-1940s. Rafiq Sadiq interview in the *Kashmir Sentinel*, February 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Mohan Lal Misri interview, Faridabad, 12 June 2007; Mahmooda Ahmed Ali Shah interview, Srinagar, 18 June 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Prem Nath Bazaz, p422.

<sup>22</sup> Maulana Masoodi quoted in Jan, *Naya Kashmir*, p78.

<sup>23</sup> Pran Nath Jalali interview, Delhi, 30 March 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Bose, *Kashmir*, p25.

<sup>25</sup> *New Kashmir*, New Delhi: Kashmir Bureau of Information, n.d., pp7, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Raina, *Kashmir Politics*, pp121, 125.

<sup>27</sup> *Kashmir On Trial*, Lahore: Lion Press, 1947, p224.

<sup>28</sup> The Quit Kashmir campaign has been described by one historian as 'something of a flop', largely because major disturbances were confined to four towns: Srinagar, Anantnag, Pampur and Sopore – see Ian Copland, 'The Abdullah Factor: Kashmiri Muslims and the crisis of 1947', in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 218-54. This seems a harsh judgement.

<sup>29</sup> Taseer, *The Kashmir of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah*, pp174-9.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore: Ferozsons, vol 1, 1977, p686.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom: A Report on the New India*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949, p200.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p201.

- <sup>33</sup> Krishna Misri, 'Kashmiri Women Down the Ages: A Gender Perspective', *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, 6/34, 2002, pp3-27.
- <sup>34</sup> *People's Age*, 13 April 1947.
- <sup>35</sup> *People's Age*, 7 September 1947.
- <sup>36</sup> For contrasting accounts of the origins of the Kashmir crisis in 1947, see Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2007; Alastair Lamb, *Incomplete Partition: The Genesis of the Kashmir Dispute, 1947-48*, Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1997; and Prem Shankar Jha, *Kashmir 1947: The Origins of a Dispute*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- <sup>37</sup> *Times of India*, 9 October 1947.
- <sup>38</sup> Nehru to Hiralal Atal, 27 October 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2/4, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986, pp283-6.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 28, 29 and 31 October 1947.
- <sup>40</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Flames of the Chinar: An Autobiography*, New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 1993, pp93-4.
- <sup>41</sup> Raina, *Kashmir Politics*, p152
- <sup>42</sup> *Statesman*, 8 November 1947.
- <sup>43</sup> For an early telling of the Maqbool Sherwani story, see Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom*, pp210-11. His death was the inspiration for a novel by Mulk Raj Anand, *Death of a Hero: Epitaph for Maqbool Sherwani*, first published in 1963. The mythologising of his life is discussed in Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, pp212-7.
- <sup>44</sup> Mir Qasim, *My Life and Times*, Bombay, 1992, p37.
- <sup>45</sup> Krishna Misri (nee Zardoo) interview, Faridabad, 26 May 2007.
- <sup>46</sup> Raina, *Kashmir Politics*, p156.
- <sup>47</sup> *People's Age*, 2 November 1947.
- <sup>48</sup> *People's Age*, 23 November 1947.
- <sup>49</sup> *People's Age*, 7 December 1947.
- <sup>50</sup> The women's self-defence corps is discussed briefly in Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2009, pp118-23.
- <sup>51</sup> Usha Khanna (nee Kashyap), telephone interview, 31 August 2008.
- <sup>52</sup> *People's Age*, 21 December 1947.
- <sup>53</sup> Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1977, pp304-6.
- <sup>54</sup> I am grateful to Meenu Gaur for her expert observations about the progressive cultural movement and Kashmir, which is discussed in her coming University of London doctoral thesis.
- <sup>55</sup> Madanjeet Singh, *The Sasia Story*, Lalitpur, Nepal: UNESCO/Himalmedia, 2006, pp48-54. There are also photographs of the Cultural Front and its productions in Usha R. Khanna, *The Making of Samovar*, Worli, India: Spenta Multimedia, [n.d.], pp8, 11.
- <sup>56</sup> *Kashmir Defends Democracy*, Delhi: Kashmir Bureau of Information,

[c1948].

<sup>57</sup> Raina, *Kashmir Politics*, p160

<sup>58</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp265-74.

<sup>59</sup> *Times of India*, 8 November 1947; *Hindustan Times*, 12 November 1947.

<sup>60</sup> Jalali interview, 30 March 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, pp97, 198, 207. The book was first published in 1954.

<sup>62</sup> *Rise of Communism in Kashmir*, Delhi: Kashmir Democratic Union, 1952, pp31-2. The author, who was probably either Prem Nath Bazaz or an associate, suggested that there was a sharp rift in Kashmiri communism along religious lines, with rival factions lead by N.N. Raina and G.M. Kara.

<sup>63</sup> Jagan Nath Sathu, *Red Menace in Kashmir*, Delhi: Kashmir Democratic Union, [c1954].

<sup>64</sup> Karan Singh to Nehru, 11 December 1955, in Jawaid Alam (editor), *Jammu and Kashmir 1949-64: Select Correspondence Between Jawaharlal Nehru and Karan Singh*, New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2006, pp182-3.

Andrew Whitehead, 'Kashmir's Conflicting Identities' [review essay, *History Workshop Journal*, 58, 2004, pp.335-40

## Kashmir's Conflicting Identities *by Andrew Whitehead*

**Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace***, Harvard University Press, 2003; 306 pp., hbk, \$25.95. ISBN 0-674-01173-2.

**Prem Shankar Jha, *The Origins of a Dispute: Kashmir 1947***, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003; 221 pp., hbk, Rs 395. ISBN 0-19566-486-8.

**Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir***, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004; 335 pp., hbk, Rs 695. ISBN 81-7824-065-3.

**Chitralkha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir***, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003; 359 pp., hbk, Rs 695. ISBN 81-7824-060-2.

The University of Kashmir, on the outskirts of Srinagar, boasts a bewitchingly beautiful location. It's sandwiched between the city's two main lakes, and looks out towards the milky-white cupola of the Hazratbal shrine, and beyond to the Himalayan foothills which have both protected the Kashmir valley over the ages and made its location at the intersection of south Asia, central Asia and Tibet such a keenly-sought prize. When I asked one of the leading historians at the University – he didn't want his name published – when Kashmir was last ruled by Kashmiris, he replied succinctly and decisively: '1586'. Since then the Kashmir valley has been under the control, successively, of Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs, Dogras, and, since 1947, of the Indian government in Delhi. Kashmir's story is not quite that simple. The Mughals lavished enormous affection and resources on Kashmir. The Dogra princes, although outsiders, made Srinagar a capital of at least equal stature to their native city of Jammu. And for most of the post-Raj era, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has had a Kashmiri Muslim as Chief Minister, at the head of an elected government. Yet there is a broader truth. Kashmiris bear an acute sense of grievance that for centuries they feel they have had little agency over their own fate. That sentiment goes a long way towards explaining why Kashmir's separatist insurgency has proved so tenacious.

The bitter dispute between India and Pakistan over control of Kashmir dates back to the 1947 independence settlement. Both had a claim to Kashmir. To telescope a complex issue into a single sentence, Kashmir's Maharaja, a Hindu ruling a largely Muslim populace, signed up with India, as he was entitled to, so ignoring Pakistan's argument based on religion, cultural affinity, geography and commerce. He made no attempt to consult his subjects. Within weeks of the British pull-out, there was heavy fighting in Kashmir. Within months, there was open war between India and Pakistan. A ceasefire was agreed, and with it a de facto partition of the former



princely state. But no final resolution has ever been achieved. The issue sprang back into prominence at the end of the 1980s, with the beginning of an anti-India insurgency which was local in inception, but was quickly championed and co-opted by Pakistan. The row has frustrated all attempts at friendship between the two countries, fuelled a nuclear arms race, buttressed the role of army and intelligence service in Pakistan's public life and impeded India's ambitions to emerge as a key Asian power. It has also, just by the way, brought misery to the five-million people of the Kashmir valley.

There's an enormous literature about Kashmir, much of it deeply partisan, densely written and ill researched. The corpus of informed and tolerably unbiased historical writing about Kashmir is slender.<sup>1</sup> That makes the volumes reviewed here all the more welcome. Together, they appear to augur a new, and enormously more promising, chapter in Kashmir studies. Almost a coming of age. None of these books would have been written but for the fifteen years of violence in the Kashmir valley, commencing in 1989, which has accounted for, by the most conservative of estimates, at least 35,000 lives. All, in different degrees, rise above the clamour of nationalist rhetoric to seek a more nuanced and sensitive account of how the Kashmir valley became embroiled in such turbulence.

Sumantra Bose, a comparative political scientist at the LSE, has written what is likely to become the best regarded introduction to the Kashmir issue. The greater part of the book is a sure-footed account of Kashmir's contemporary history. It's not based on in-depth research into primary sources, but is rather an engagingly written and perceptively judged synthesis of earlier writing, enlivened by the citing of news reports, of first-hand testimony from visits to the valley and neighbouring areas, and a familiarity with Kashmiri poetry and culture which is deployed to good effect.

Bose argues that the Partition settlement of 1947 may be the origin of the Kashmir crisis, but it is not the cause of the continuing conflict. That is to be found in the failure of democratic institutions to take root in Indian Kashmir, in large part because of Delhi's repeated loss of nerve in dealing with its only Muslimmajority state. 'Kashmir was intended to be the centrepiece of India's bouquet of democratic diversity', Bose argues. 'Instead, it became the thorn in the bouquet . . . the rupture has very largely been caused by consistently anti-democratic, authoritarian policies of successive New Delhi governments towards IJK [Indian Jammu and Kashmir].'

If there was a moment of rupture, it came with the deeply flawed state elections in Indian Kashmir in 1987. 'This was the moment when the [Kashmir] Valley and some of its contiguous areas lost all residual confidence in India's political system.' Bose puts forward three periods in the separatist insurgency which ensued. There was the intifada phase of the first five years of the insurrection, when the armed separatist movement clearly enjoyed enormous local support. Then came two or three years of atrophy and demoralization, as the massive Indian security-force presence, and Delhi's success in taking advantage of divisions within Kashmiri

society, took the advantage away from the armed militants. And since 1998, there has been the 'fidayeen' phase, 'marked by the renewal of insurgency with a radical Islamist ideological color and the ascendancy of Pakistan-based militant groups using fidayeen (suicide-squad) tactics against Indian forces'.

All this is well argued and presented. The book went to print well before the latest thaw in India-Pakistan relations and a fresh start towards negotiations on Kashmir, which became fully apparent at the start of 2004. Persistent American pressure on Pakistan's President Musharraf, already deeply affected by determined assassination attempts apparently carried out by onetime Islamist allies, along with India's desire to uncouple itself from the dispute with Pakistan, leap free of the Kashmir imbroglio, and punch its full weight as a global economic and diplomatic power, offered a real prospect of progress. The problem remains that India, which is in the stronger negotiating position, has no intention of relinquishing or diluting its sovereignty over the Kashmir valley. And Pakistan, for which the Kashmir issue has become intricately bound up with national identity, can hardly walk away from the issue it's been fighting on for more than half-a-century. There is no road map for peace in Kashmir because there is no glimmer of a consensus about the final destination.

Sumantra Bose, in the last third of his book, proposes how to seek to reconcile this most basic of disputes, two nations fighting for control of the same patch of territory. (Many Kashmiris would say a plague on both your houses, and opt for independence, but know they will never get the chance.) He is against a plebiscite, or repartition, or any redrawing of boundaries, because none of these offer any prospect of a neat solution, and some – he fears – could polarize opinion and bring the prospect of 'a short countdown to all-out civil war'. He proposes moves towards peace based very loosely on the Northern Ireland peace process, with the acknowledgement of the 'equal legitimacy' of different political traditions, and three parallel strands of dialogue – between India and Pakistan, between Delhi and Srinagar, and between the two halves of divided Kashmir.

There are all sorts of problems with this, apart from the fact that the Northern Ireland peace process, although successful in dousing down the violence, is otherwise not in robust health. The bold moves towards a political settlement in Northern Ireland were a product of the shared determination of the British and Irish governments to work in concert to achieve a solution. Time and again, British and Irish Prime Ministers stood, quite literally, shoulder to shoulder in Belfast to save the peace process. It's not easy to imagine Indian and Pakistani leaders acting together in Kashmir in anything like the same way. There are two basic problems in Kashmir – both countries fail to understand the strength of the other's claim to the territory, and both fail to appreciate why the compromise solution they favour (in India's case, turning the ceasefire line into an international border, in Pakistan's, a limited repartition to give it those areas with a clear Muslim majority) is unacceptable to their adversary.

Prem Shankar Jha is a member of the Indian elite – a political insider and former

editor of the most establishment-minded of the country's English newspapers, the *Hindustan Times* – who has shown courage in breaking ranks on Kashmir and drawing attention to human-rights abuses and to Delhi's political shortsightedness. His book, a revised edition of a title that first appeared in 1996, examines the diplomatic and political origins of the Kashmir crisis. It is old history, based on extensive archive research but unredeemed by any reflection of the lived experience of the early stages of the dispute, of the hopes and aspirations of the people of Kashmir, or of the political and social dimensions of their alienation from India. It is, all the same, revisionist history. The established Indian account about Kashmir's accession, largely taken on trust by scholars (indeed, none of the other books reviewed question or challenge the Indian orthodoxy) is that the Maharaja signed up to join India on 26 October 1947, as Pakistan-backed Muslim tribesmen advanced on his capital, thus legitimizing the airlift of Indian troops which began at first light the next morning. The trouble is there's strong evidence that the senior official of India's States ministry, V. P. Menon, who secured the Maharaja's signature, never got to see him on the 26th, because he arrived at Delhi airport too late in the day to take off for Jammu.<sup>2</sup> He did reach Jammu the following day. But if the Maharaja signed after India's Sikh Regiment started landing at the Kashmir valley's only airstrip, while this might be of limited constitutional and juridical import, it means that India's claim on Kashmir has been based, in some degree, on a lie.

Prem Shankar Jha accepts that Menon did not meet the Maharaja in his Jammu palace on 26 October, but suggests instead that he had succeeded in securing the all-important signature the previous day, just before the Maharaja fled south from Srinagar. V. P. Menon, Jha suggests, deliberately concealed this fact from the Cabinet's Defence Committee. The reason for such subterfuge? Nehru was unwilling to accept Kashmir's accession unless accompanied by the introduction of responsible government, while Menon's patron, India's home minister and deputy Prime Minister Sardar Patel, showed no such scruples. So – Jha argues – Menon didn't want Nehru to know that the Maharaja had signed the accession document until he was also able to present the Maharaja's consent for a prominent role in the state government for his nemesis (and Nehru's friend and ally) Sheikh Abdullah, the 'Lion of Kashmir' and the commanding Kashmiri Muslim politician of his era.

In support of this inherently unlikely argument, Prem Shankar Jha presents a cornucopia of evidence. He has found, and publishes here, the full minutes of the crucial meetings of India's Defence Committee. He chronicles convincingly the differing approaches of Nehru and Patel towards Kashmir and its princely ruler. His supposed killer fact is the testimony of Field-Marshal Sam Manekshaw, who as a young officer accompanied V. P. Menon on his trip to Srinagar – though his account is so confused and contradictory it adds little clarity to the controversy. Among counter arguments is the very simple one that the page of the Instrument of Accession bearing the Maharaja's signature is dated 26 October, and it is enormously more likely that it was back-dated by a day rather than post-dated.<sup>3</sup> All-in-all, while Jha may perhaps be right, his argument has the feel of facts being pushed, pulled and squeezed to fit his case, rather than a hypothesis developing from the

evidence he has accumulated.

The books by Chitralkha Zutshi and Mridu Rai have an enormous amount in common. Both authors have immersed themselves in rarely consulted archives in Jammu and Srinagar. Both titles are based on doctoral theses submitted to American universities. Both have been published by a new and impressive Indian imprint, Permanent Black, and will in due course also be published by leading university presses in the US. Both contain warm acknowledgements to, and bear the intellectual imprint of, the First Couple of South Asian studies in the US, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal. And both are concerned about locating Kashmiri political and national identity in the decades and centuries prior to 1947, and about challenging particularly the Indian shorthand on the social and political underpinning of Kashmir's place in the Indian Union.

Central to both Zutshi and Rai is a discussion of the much vaunted term, *Kashmiriyat*, an expression of a composite culture in which being Kashmiri was a much more central identity than religious allegiance. It is *Kashmiriyat*, so any visitor to Srinagar is likely to be told, which explains the old tradition of religious tolerance, almost of syncretism, and the historical absence of tension between Kashmiri Muslims and the small but prominent (and now departed) Kashmiri-speaking Hindu minority – until, that is, India and Pakistan started to meddle. 'Kashmiri nationalism's memory of the past', Chitralkha Zutshi asserts, 'is refracted through rosetinted glasses, in which Kashmir appears as a unique region where religious communities lived in harmony since time immemorial and difference in religion did not translate into acrimonious conflict until external intervention.' She tackles this legend head on. Far from the Mughals heralding the end of Kashmir's independence, she identifies the long period of Mughal rule as the era in which Kashmiri poets first began to articulate a sense of regional belonging. She describes how Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri-speaking upper-caste Hindus) turned to emphasizing religious identity in the mid nineteenth century, and how Kashmiri Muslims followed suit with the first stirrings of political mobilization from the 1930s.

Mridu Rai's primary concern, slightly narrower, is the way in which the Dogra Maharajas who became rulers of Kashmir in 1846 (a princely state that was 'cobbled together', she says) used the Hindu religion to buttress their authority and establish their legitimacy, and the extent to which Kashmiri Muslims – including such secular leaders as Sheikh Abdullah who are seen as the political embodiment of *Kashmiriyat* – also used religion to mobilize mass support. She chronicles the arbitrary rule of the Dogra princes, their use of Kashmiri Pandits and later of Punjabi Hindus as their agents, and the slow development (neither newspapers nor public meetings for political purposes were permitted until 1932) of political awareness among the impoverished and ill-educated Kashmiri Muslim majority, in which clerical issues and religious identity was crucially important. Her most intriguing observation is relegated to a footnote – she reports coming across no reference to the term '*Kashmiriyat*' prior to 1947. It is not simply unhistorical, but in part an invention arising from political convenience.

Both monographs break new ground in delving into the complexities of religious, class and political identities in Jammu and Kashmir prior to 1947. They also have strong political underpinnings – not pro-India nor pro-Pakistan, (though both would probably regard themselves as pro-Kashmir on humanitarian as much as political grounds), but seeking to correct decades of myth-making and misinformation. Mridu Rai has the more overtly political message. India, she suggests, has been little better than the Dogra Maharajas in providing political empowerment to Kashmir. ‘What is surprising is that the erasure of Kashmiris from the enterprise of governing them survived the establishment of a “national” government in India after independence in 1947.’ Some of her asides are questionable: how can she assert that ‘at the moment of the partition of India most Kashmiri Muslims voted clearly (and the vast majority continue to do so today) against the Pakistan option’? what is the evidence to support her assertion that the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front is ‘probably still the group enjoying widest support in Kashmir’? But it is difficult to challenge her conclusion that ‘the clamour by Kashmiri Muslims is for a legitimate government. It is the helplessness in which they were placed first by their Dogra rulers and then by Indian politicians . . . that has provoked a militant response’.

Chitralkha Zutshi expresses the same general sentiment in more carefully modulated prose. ‘Had the Indian and Pakistani nation-states been more willing to accommodate Kashmir’s regional aspirations, instead of transforming it into a symbol of the contest between their competing nationalist visions, it is likely that Kashmir would have remained quiescent in the postcolonial period. . . . Clearly, political solutions to the “Kashmir problem” will be aborted until nationalist narratives – Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri – that are primarily responsible for its intractability, are dismantled.’ It is encouraging that these enormously well informed and reflective contributions to Kashmir’s history have appeared just as there seems to be a greater willingness on all sides to move away from rhetoric, and to examine the complexities of Kashmiri politics and identity. Historians can’t solve conflicts, but at least they can chip away at some of the accepted narratives that obstruct a broader understanding of the issue, and by so doing make a settlement that little bit easier.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Conspicuous among histories of Kashmir are several titles by Alastair Lamb, copiously researched but marred by an anti-Indian perspective, and by Victoria Schofield. In the United States, both Sumit Ganguly and Robert G. Wirsing have written scholarly volumes about the development of the Kashmir dispute. The Indian accounts of most interest have been written by journalists – M. J. Akbar, Ajit Bhattacharjee and Manoj Joshi – while the most authoritative account from Pakistan is by the historian Hasan Zaheer. It is perhaps symptomatic of Kashmiris’ sense of powerlessness that no history by a Kashmiri Muslim has achieved a wide audience – the most notable such study to appear in English is an enormous two-volume work by Muhammad Yusuf Saraf.

<sup>2</sup> The argument against the Instrument of Accession having been signed on 26 October is rehearsed by Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unfinished War* (London and New York, 2000), pp. 55–8, and by Alastair Lamb, *Incomplete Partition: the Genesis of the Kashmir Dispute, 1947–1948* (Hertingfordbury, 1997), pp. 156–60.

<sup>3</sup> The whereabouts of the original Instrument of Accession is not at all clear. A facsimile of the page of the document bearing the Maharaja's signature appeared as a frontispiece in *Sardar Patel's Correspondence: vol. 1, New Light on Kashmir*, ed. Durga Das, Ahmedabad, 1971.

[ENDS]