



HINDU NATIONALISM &
KASHMIR – Another
“Palestine in the Making”?

Historical Background

- 1846-1947: Kashmir existed as an **autonomous princely state of Jammu and Kashmir** (J&K) under the British Indian Empire

This legacy created a strong unified **territorial identity**:

- most people across the Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh regions regard the former Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir as “**an intrinsic part of their identity**” (**Bose**) that “cut across regional, social and political divides” and represents “a legacy of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that brought these regions and communities under one roof in the mid-nineteenth century and existed until 1947”
 - 65% of residents identified primarily with the state (J&K) rather than with India as a nation (only 16%) in 2018 surveys
 - the **Modi government’s erasure of the state in 2019** was “calculated to degrade the sense of self of most of the liquidated state’s people” representing **a deliberate attack on an identity formation** that had persisted for over 170 years since the princely state’s establishment in 1846
- not merely an administrative arrangement, but the historical foundation for a **distinct Kashmiri political identity** that has endured across different political systems and continues to influence contemporary resistance to integration policies

- 1947: Partition of India – Kashmir becomes **disputed territory** between India and Pakistan (and China)
- October 1947: Princely state acceded to India, leading to first India-Pakistan war (1947-48)
- January 1949: **Ceasefire Line** established, later renamed **Line of Control** (LoC; 1972)

Constitutional Framework (1947-2019)

- **Article 370:** Granted **special autonomous status** to Jammu & Kashmir within Indian Union
- **Article 35A** (added 1954): **Restricted land ownership and government jobs to permanent residents**
- 1954–1965: **Autonomy gradually eroded** through integrative measures imposed by New Delhi
- by mid–1960s: Special autonomy largely “**hollowed out**” but symbolically continued

Demographics and Regions

- **Total population: ~20 million** (14 million under Indian control, 6 million under Pakistani control)
- Indian J&K composition: **68% Muslim, 28% Hindu, 2% Sikh, 1% Buddhist** (2011 census)
- **Three regions:** Kashmir Valley (~8 million), Jammu region (~6 million), Ladakh (~300,000)

Major Conflicts and Uprisings

- **1947-48, 1965, 1971: Three India-Pakistan wars involving Kashmir**
- 1999: Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan in Ladakh sector
- 1990: Kashmir Valley insurgency began – tens of thousands killed
- 2010, 2016-17: Major civilian uprisings and “stone-pelting” protests in the Kashmir Valley

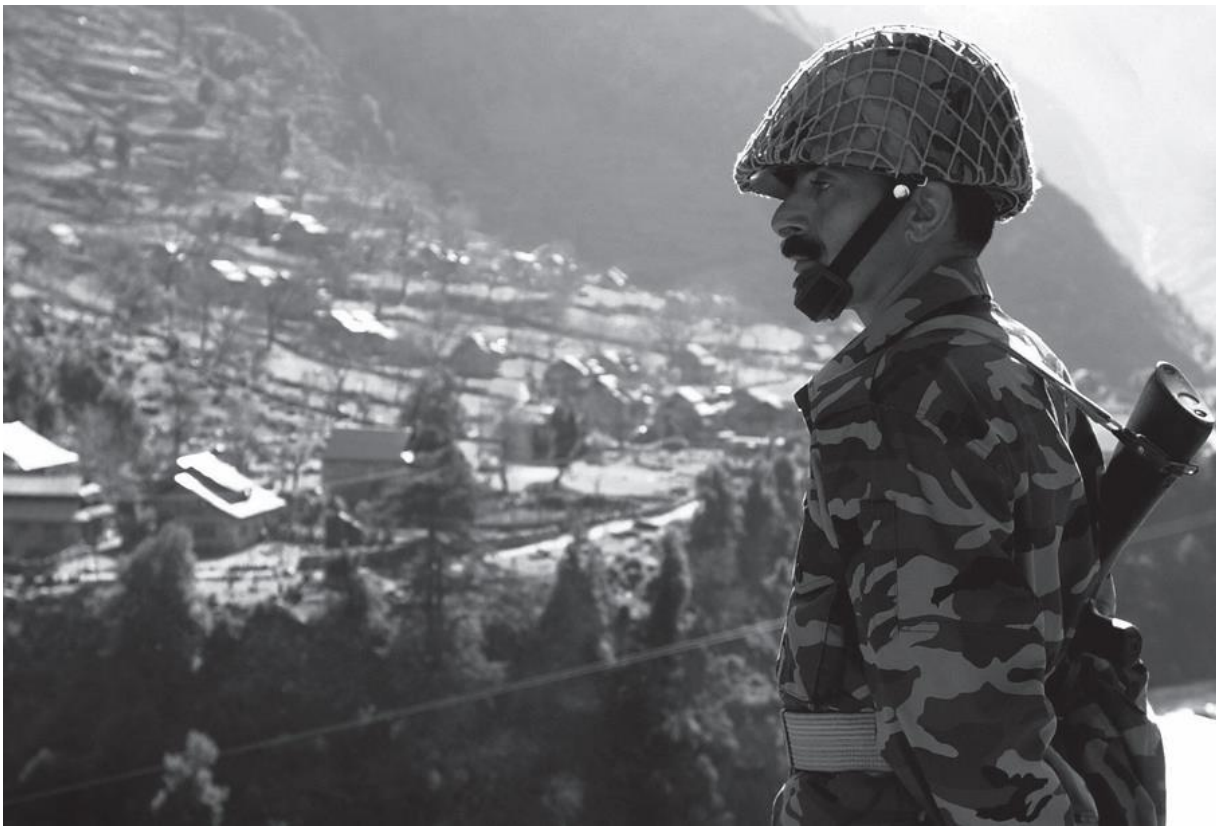


Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) guerrillas, fighting for an independent state, in Srinagar, the Kashmir Valley's capital (August 1991). JKLF launched the insurgency that began in Indian Kashmir from 1989 and dominated the insurrection until 1993, during its most popular phase.



Indian soldiers firing artillery during the **Kargil War** (June **1999**).

The Kargil War was a fierce conflict fought between India and Pakistan from May to July of 1999 along a barren, mountainous stretch of the Line of Control (LoC) between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir, mostly in the Kargil district of Indian Kashmir's Ladakh region.



A Pakistani soldier on the Line of Control in the Neelum Valley (2004). The 742-kilometre LoC originated in January 1949, at the end of the first Kashmir war between India and Pakistan, as the Ceasefire Line (CFL) dividing the Indian and Pakistani parts of Jammu and Kashmir. It was renamed 'Line of Control' by an intergovernmental agreement in 1972, after the third India-Pakistan war. **The LoC is probably the world's most militarised frontier.**



Pakistani soldiers at 18,655 feet, of the Siachen glacier (2005). The glacier lies in the far north of Jammu and Kashmir, beyond the northernmost point of the demarcated LoC and at the trijunction of (Indian) Ladakh, (Pakistani) Gilgit-Baltistan and China's Xinjiang province. Mostly controlled by Indian troops since 1984, it is **the world's highest-altitude battlefield.**

Modi Government and Hindu Nationalist Agenda (2014-2019)

- 2014: **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** wins parliamentary majority under **Narendra Modi**
- May 2019: Modi re-elected, appoints **Amit Shah** as Home Minister
- **Hindu nationalist ideology: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** goal to transform India into “**Hindu Rashtra**” (Hindu State)
- **Long-standing BJP/RSS demand to revoke Article 370 as “Muslim appeasement”**

The August 5, 2019 Transformation

- Constitutional changes: **Article 370 and 35A revoked through presidential order**
- **Statehood abolished:** J&K state liquidated – **unprecedented downgrading in Indian history**
- Bifurcation: Territory split into **two Union Territories:**
 - UT of Jammu and Kashmir (98% of population)
 - UT of Ladakh (300,000 people)

Implementation and Control

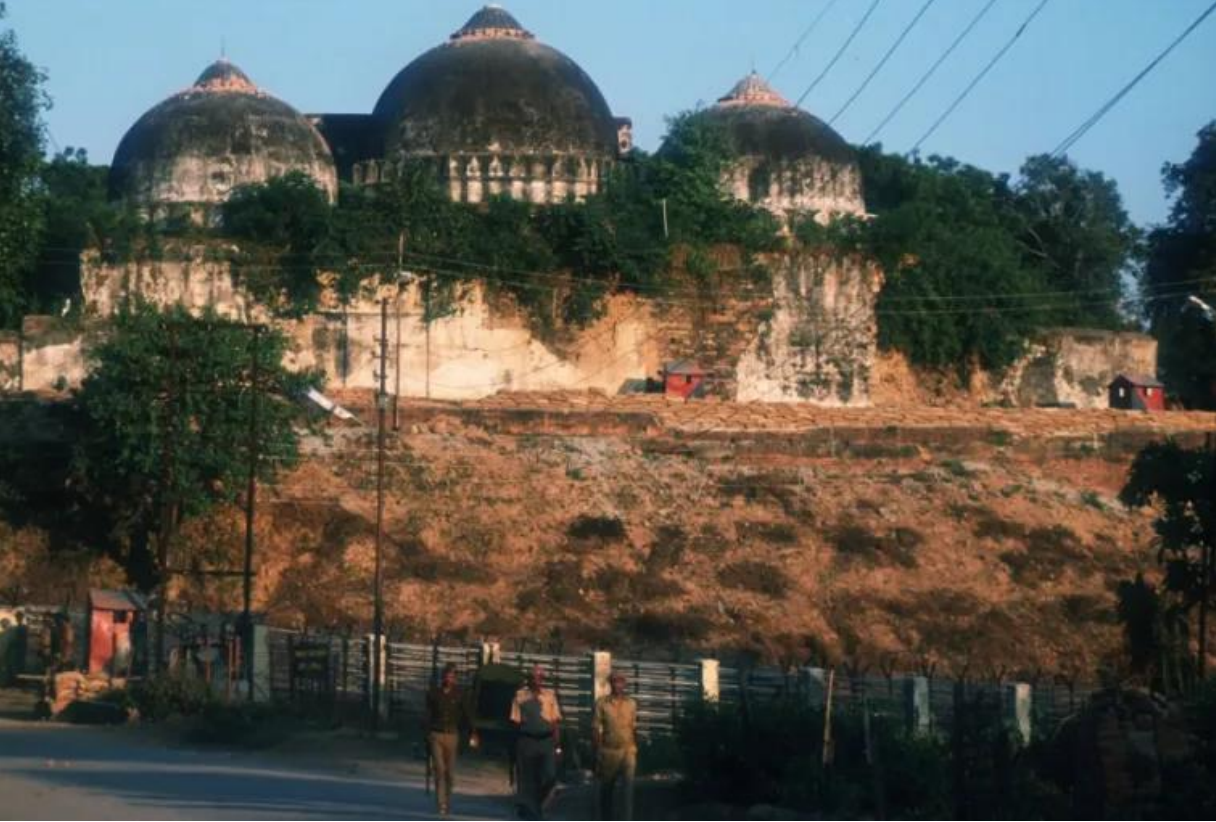
- **Direct rule:** Both UTs placed under New Delhi's direct administration
 - **Centralization and Institutional destruction:** Complete control from New Delhi without local intermediaries
 - Demographic engineering: Remove barriers to outside settlement and investment
 - “New Kashmir” vision: Economic development through business investment and **tourism**
- **Limited self-governance:** J&K UT promised elected assembly [only held in 2024: strong mandate for pro-autonomy parties (even though elections as merely symbolic acts are regularly boycotted by pro-autonomy groups) the BJP was unable to win a single seat in Kashmir]
- Ladakh: No elected assembly, fully administered by appointed officials
- **Draconian lockdowns:** Severe restrictions imposed to prevent protests

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindutva ideology

- BJP (with 18 crore or more members by far the world's largest political party)
- **“Akhand Bharat” – the undivided Hindu sacred land** that encompasses modern-day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Tibet [cf. irredentist notions of “Greater India”, and also Greater Israel (*Eretz Yisrael HaShlema*)]
 - **divinely ordained homeland** in which **Muslims**, above all, are cast **as foreign interlopers** to be removed or subjugated
 - not just a political project but a divine inheritance that transcends secular (international) law
- the concept of **“punyabhoomi”** (holy land), India is not merely the **“matribhoomi”** (motherland) or **“pitribhoomi”** (fatherland) of Hindus, but their sacred holy land:
 - “For though Hindustan to them [i.e., Mohammedans and Christians] is Fatherland as to any other Hindu, yet it is not to them a Holyland too. Their Holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil.” [principal Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923)]
- this **theological othering** of Muslims (and Christians) as inherently foreign, regardless of how many generations their families have lived in India, provides the religious justification for their dispossession, expulsion and even physical annihilation

The Israeli model

- in 2019, India's consul-general in New York, Sandeep Chakravorty, made the theological-political connection explicit by calling to follow the Israeli model of building settlements to take Kashmiri Pandits back:
 - “[W]e already have a model in the world, I don’t know why we don’t follow it. It has happened in the Middle East. If the Israeli people can do it, we can also do it.”
- no diplomatic inadvertence but doctrinal alignment – both projects as the restoration of divine order disrupted by Muslim invasion and “occupation”
 - a “rightful return” to lands from which they were unjustly expelled by Muslim “invaders”, cf. also Benjamin Netanyahu’s claim that Palestinians have “no connection to the land” compared to the “nearly four thousand year connection that the Jewish people have with the land” (at the joint session of the US Congress on July 25, 2024)
- no coincidence or exception – both regimes openly collaborate as brothers in arms and invoke their divine mandates



- destruction of the **Babri Masjid** (a 16th-century **mosque** in Ayodhya) in 1992 and its **replacement with the Ram Temple in 2024** represents the physical manifestation of this theology – the “liberation” of Hindu sacred space from Muslim “occupiers”
- Modi’s speech at the temple inauguration, after a prana pratishtha (consecration) ceremony, made this civilizational claim explicit, declaring the event as **the inauguration of “Ram Rajya”** (Reign of Ram) and **the end of centuries of “humiliation” under Islamic rule**

Weaponized archaeology

- even before the deliberate destruction of hundreds of culturally or historically significant buildings during the war on Gaza since October 2023, Israel's use of archaeology as a pretextual tool for dispossession, demolition, and the erasure of Palestinian and Arab heritage is well-documented
- legitimizing settlement expansion and undermining Palestinian claims to the land by physically removing or obscuring evidence of their historical presence



The City of David archaeological site, run by the Israeli settler organization the Elad Foundation, in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem

Settlement policies

- the theological parallel extends to settlement policies
- Israel's Nation-State Law [Article 1(c) of Israel's Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, enacted on July 19, 2018]:
 - “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people”
- India's new domicile laws enabling non-Kashmiris to claim residency rights
 - the Indian government has already accepted 25,000 residency applications from outsiders, mostly in the Jammu region – implementing what Hindu nationalists (e.g., OplIndia, Organiser RSS, and other Hindutva-aligned mouthpieces) like to call the “**demographic rebalance**” or “**demographic correction**” project to drastically reduce Kashmir's Muslim majority population
- in Israel, maintaining Jewish demographic majority has long taken on obsessive forms, shaping its policies like Ariel Sharon's 2005 Gaza disengagement plan
 - ethno-religious demographic anxiety informs Israeli territorial and political strategies
 - faced with a rapidly growing Palestinian population in Gaza, which threatened to undermine Israel's Jewish majority in territories under its control, Sharon framed withdrawal as a strategic necessity to preserve **Israel's dual identity as both Jewish and democratic**

Narrative control

- Modi's 2019 abrogation of Article 370 mirrors Israel's 2018 Nation-State Law
 - both legally codifying ethno-religious supremacy as constitutional principle
- in addition, both regimes understand that physical occupation must be accompanied by **narrative control**
 - India's Bollywood now produces films like *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and *Article 370* (2024) that reframe Kashmiri resistance as nothing but Islamic terrorism threatening Hindu sacred space, just as Israeli media routinely portrays (the prospect of) Palestinian statehood as an existential threat to the Jewish homeland and to Israeli security. These films follow a similar script to the Israeli series *Fauda*, about undercover Israeli agents in the West Bank, which also became a hit in India and even inspired an Indian adaptation. Unsurprisingly, when acclaimed Israeli filmmaker Nadav Lapid condemned *The Kashmir Files* as “propaganda” and “vulgar”, he received condemnation not just from Hindu nationalists but from the Israeli ambassador himself
- shared theological-political project and shared sensitivities between the two governments regarding their narratives

Brothers in arms

- the **India-Israel defence relationship** is the material infrastructure upon which both theological projects operate
- Israel is India's second-largest weapons supplier, with India accounting for 43 percent of total Israeli arms sales as of 2020
- Israeli Heron drones fly over Kashmir's mountains, just as they patrol Gaza's coast
- the Barak 8 missile system, a joint India-Israel development worth over \$3 billion, serves simultaneously as weapons platform, diplomatic shield, and sacred protection technology
- 2014 agreement between Israel and India: cooperation on "public and homeland security", countless Indian officers, special forces, pilots, and commandoes visit Israel for training
- in both cases, military occupation is sacralized as "counter-terrorism" against those who would defile holy space
- the Indian military deploys over half a million soldiers in Kashmir – more than the combined U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan at their peak

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- as the International People's Tribunal documented, **extrajudicial killings in Kashmir** are not aberrations but “**part of the occupation process**, considered ‘acts of service’, and lead to promotion and financial reward”.
- when Israeli human rights advocate Eitay Mack petitioned Israel's Supreme Court to stop training Indian police officers who “blind, murder, rape, torture and hide civilians in Kashmir”, the court rejected the request “without detracting from the importance of the issue of human rights violations in Kashmir.”

Kashmir-Palestine solidarity

- these parallels/developments have not gone unnoticed in Kashmir, and Kashmir-Palestine solidarity is not a recent phenomenon, but a **historical connection rooted in shared experiences** of dispossession and resistance against colonial powers
- symbolic resonance of Palestine for Kashmiris
 - countless examples, e.g., **Nakba Day solidarity sit-ins** at Kashmir University (commemoration also marks anti-India protests in campuses)
 - **‘Kashmir: Palestine in the Making’** by renowned legal expert Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain



- since the Indian army banned slogans related to Kashmir's independence, **'Free Palestine'** has become a prominent substitute for **'Free Kashmir'**
- **Palestine** a “proxy language of resistance”
- during the 2021 Israel-Hamas conflict, thousands of Kashmiri youth protested in support of Palestine and a **famous mural** by local graffiti artist **Mudasir Gul** in Srinagar declared **“We are Palestine”** (He was forced to deface his own work and arrested)



Outlook: Another Gaza Strip?

- May 2025, deadly attack on tourists in Pahalgam – an incident that suddenly thrust Kashmir into international focus – prompted India to launch ‘**Operation Sindoor**’ against targets in Pakistan, pushing the nuclear-armed neighbours closer to war than at any point since 1971
- Modi’s government had promised a “terror-free” Kashmir as “a heaven for tourists” saw its narrative punctured
- the response was predictable: **mass arrests of over 1,500 Kashmiris, demolition of homes** of suspected militants’ families, and **military escalation**
- each cycle – attack, crackdown, escalation, temporary de-escalation – serves the theological narrative and justifies permanent occupation
- outlook for Kashmiris is bleak and increasingly desperate as Anuradha Bhasin from Jammu, the executive editor of the Kashmir Times, said:
 - “If the BJP has its way, Kashmir will be well on the road to becoming **another Gaza Strip.**”

- trajectory of Kashmir is “chaotic and violent”
- fear that Modi would completely transform India into a **Hindutva version of Israel, a far-right and ethno-nationalist Hindu nationalism that tolerates little dissent and few Muslims** seems confirmed
- in late 2019, the Indian government introduced the **Citizenship Amendment Act**, a law for members of the Hindu, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan to claim citizenship in India
 - **Muslims were deliberately excluded**
 - as in Israel, citizenship has become inextricably linked to religion

This raises the **question**:

Given the increasing marginalisation of Muslims through policies like the CAA and the growing dominance of Hindutva ideology, to what extent does state-driven exclusion fuel automatic radicalisation among Muslim populations in Kashmir — the “**attraction of the jihad**” (**Salman Rushdie**)?



India and Israel hailing the “dawn of a new era” in their relations after signing key deals in defence, agriculture and aviation sectors

“**Modi** makes a habit of cultivating **fellow hard-right leaders and is especially close to Israel’s Binyamin Netanyahu**. But he failed to get Trump to endorse his Kashmir policy. **The only international support his government received on Kashmir was from the far right in Europe**. In late October 2019, a delegation of twenty-seven members of the European parliament (MEPs) flew into New Delhi and posed in a group photo with the prime minister. Twenty-three were then flown to **Srinagar, the locked-down capital of the Kashmir Valley, its neighbourhoods barricaded with concertina wire and its streets patrolled by tens of thousands of security forces** (four developed cold feet and dropped out once a controversy over the visit erupted in the media). In Srinagar, the visitors were put up in a luxury hotel and taken for a boat ride on the city’s picturesque Dal Lake. Of the twenty-three MEPs, **six each were from France’s National Rally (formerly the National Front) and Poland’s Law and Justice Party, four were from the United Kingdom’s Brexit Party, two from the Alliance for Germany (AfD) party and one from Belgium’s Vlaams Blok – all far-right parties.**”



“Meanwhile, however, a rather different drama was also unfolding in relative obscurity along the LoC in the spring of 2005. From 2002 to 2004 the Indian Army had worked on a war footing to build a **sophisticated fencing system** covering 734 kilometres of the 742-kilometre LoC, most of which traverses hilly or mountainous terrain. The LoC fence consists of ‘two or three rows of concertina wire three metres or ten feet high, **electrified and connected to a network of motion sensors, thermal imaging devices and alarms acquired from the United States and Israel**’ (**Israel was of course engaged at the same time in building its security/separation barrier with the West Bank, as the second Palestinian intifada of 2000-05 raged**).”