



Perils of Translation in a Conflict Situation: Lessons from Kashmir

RASHMI LUTHRA
University of Michigan–Dearborn, USA

The continuing tension between the necessity and impossibility of translation is explored within the context of the Kashmiri movement for self-determination. In this situation of conflict, the central term *azadi* is intensely contested, with different parties to the conflict inflecting the term with their own politically motivated interpretations. In addition, the act of translation itself becomes politicized, with the Indian government, the Indian mainstream press, and minorities within Kashmir insisting that Kashmiris reveal the “real” meaning of *azadi* and Kashmiri protestors refusing to pin down its meaning, using its polyvalence as part of the movement repertoire. In this fraught situation, engaged translation by progressive intellectuals is necessary to move beyond mutually exclusive interpretations of *azadi* so that new futures for Kashmir can be imagined.

Keywords: azadi, Kashmir, social movement, independence, translation, conflict

“Hum Kya Chahate? Azadi!” (What do we want? Azadi!)
 “Jaan se pyari—Azadi!” (More precious than life—Azadi!)
 “Cheen ke Lenge—Azadi!” (We’ll snatch it for ourselves—Azadi!)
 “Hamara Hak Hai—Azadi!” (It is our right—Azadi!)
 “Khushboo wali—Azadi!” (The fragrant one—Azadi!)
 “Aayi, Aayi—Azadi!” (Here she comes! Azadi!)¹

Rashmi Luthra: rluthra@umich.edu

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¹ The translation of the slogans from Urdu to English is my own. I have created a composite of slogans I have culled from numerous YouTube videos, but especially one titled “Kashmir Azadi Song” (2012), and from Sanjay Kak’s documentary *Jashn-E-Azadi* (Hussain & Kak, 2007). This is a short selection from what tends to be a long string of associations with the word *azadi* that are created during demonstrations and processions, usually reaching a high pitch or crescendo. Many of these associations repeat themselves across protest actions, but new ones are added along the way. I have purposely not translated the word *azadi* to show how difficult it has been to pin down its meaning in the Kashmiri context, to show its dynamic and protean quality.

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The streets of the Kashmiri valley resonate with calls for *azadi* during protests that have gained intensity and momentum especially since a mass uprising in 2008. At a literal level, *azadi* translates to “freedom” or “independence.” Within the particular context of Kashmir, the word *azadi* has thickened with layers of meaning, becoming a vessel for the expression of at least 25 years of struggle and by some readings 65 years of struggle or more. Consequently, *azadi* has become a focal point of translation and interpretation in the Kashmir conflict, with various constituencies working to unravel its content, and intermediaries attempting to create bridges between the disparate narratives. Here I examine the multilayered interpretations of *azadi*, paying particular attention to the seemingly incommensurable interpretations of *azadi* by Kashmiri activists, on the one hand, and by the Indian mainstream media as carriers of the Indian administrative ideology, on the other hand. I also examine interpretations of *azadi* by activists outside Kashmir concerned to understand and communicate Kashmiri perspectives on *azadi*.² It became clear as I began examining interpretations of *azadi* that not only were the interpretations themselves constituted by and constitutive of ideological constructs, but the very act of translation itself became the grounds for political contestation, with parties in the conflict either insisting upon or withholding the meaning of *azadi* as part of the larger struggle.

Understanding the difficulties of translation in the Kashmiri context is a vital piece in the larger puzzle of how India is to be a nation and how South Asia is to be a region at the global crossroads. The movement for *azadi* in Kashmir is part of a larger phenomenon of new social movements in India and South Asia straining for freedom or autonomy from their respective states and centered on a quest for regional, religious, and ethnic identity. The Tamil movement in Sri Lanka is a case in point, as are Sikkim, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Assam in India. These violent insurgencies belie the normative discourse of India as a democracy, laying bare the contradictions of maintaining the veneer of democracy through the use of massive force and the denial of basic freedoms (Kak, 2011b; Oommen, 2010; Roy, 2011). Within the context of Kashmir, this contradiction becomes particularly acute, with the Indian imagination being held captive to the idea that Kashmir’s *azadi* represents its own failure as a secular democracy (Kaul, 2011a; Varshney, 2011).

Kashmir, while being important in its own right, also holds a key position in South Asia, with claims being made upon it by India, Pakistan, and China. The status of the Kashmir conflict has implications for peaceful coexistence in South Asia, and between South Asia and China. Peaceful

² My focus in the article is on these three broadly defined positions or political locations, but I am well aware that no one set of elaborations of *azadi* constitutes a pure space or a transparent construction. Kashmir has a complex layering of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities, with shifting identifications in different contexts and at different times. Each group at any given point in time interprets and constructs *azadi* through its own politically motivated lens. Although a large proportion of Kashmiris, particularly in the valley, do aspire to independence, significant smaller proportions espouse a merger with Pakistan or a more complete merger with India. Even when just the Muslim activists in the valley are taken into account, the meanings of *azadi* have mutated, responding to the political currents within Kashmir, the actions and responses of the Indian government vis-à-vis Kashmir, and the larger political currents in South Asia, especially the shifting relationship between India and Pakistan (Behera, 2011; Bose, 2003).

coexistence in the region is, in turn, significant for the long-term prospects of war and peace globally, not least because of the nuclear capabilities of the countries involved. Kashmir is the question that remained unsettled when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned at the time of its own *azadi* from British rule—an aspect of history that haunts the region, the world beyond, and, most of all, the Kashmiri people.

The unsettled status of Kashmir has permitted the inscription of multiple nationalisms upon it—including Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri nationalisms—with the discourse of *azadi* being caught in the pincers of these nationalisms, constraining the space for its elaboration in directions that would provide a model of liberation and inclusion for the region and the world (Khan, 2012; Pande, 2011; Varshney, 2011; Zutshi, 2004). As will be discussed in this article, both the official Indian media and activist renditions of *azadi* have hardened into mutually exclusive discourses, narrowing the confines of the debate in a way wholly deleterious to finding a solution. However, some measure of hope is provided by writers and artists who attempt to chip away at the official narratives and create space for alternative interpretations of *azadi*. I therefore devote some space here to these alternative discourses as the site from which resistance narratives are being crafted.

While recognizing the specificity of the Kashmiri movement for *azadi*, this exploration is also informed by the larger concern of the crisis of translation in resistance movements or in situations of conflict. Using a narrative approach, Mona Baker (2006) demonstrates through a multitude of examples how various interpretational and translational strategies such as selective appropriation and frame manipulation are used to bolster and entrench mutually exclusive political and ideological stances of actors situated in oppositional positions within conflicts such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Russian–Chechen conflict, among others. Baker is keenly aware that, even though all parties in the conflict engage in interpretational strategies to entrench their own positions, the unequal possession of power makes it possible for dominant countries and institutions to instill their narratives with greater impact and force.

Ayyad (2012) hones in on the transnational tussle between Israelis and Palestinians on the meanings of the Roadmap Plan drafted in 2003 as one of several peace initiatives proposed to solve the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Translation is used as a tool in the Israeli and Arab press to advocate for each nation’s own exclusive position (Ayyad, 2012). Florencia Enghel (2014) in her dissertation, although not addressing translation *per se*, points to the difficulties of using development communication through the use of video letters to create reconciliation in the postconflict situation of the former Yugoslavia. Her study points to the ambiguous potential of communication, being shaped by contextual and institutional considerations. The present study of translational difficulties in the Kashmir situation can therefore be situated within a larger body of work elucidating the lack of guarantees in translation, with incommensurability, incomprehension, and misunderstanding constituting the process as much—if not more than—eventual understanding (Sakai, 1997; Striphos, 2006). The instability and uncertain outcomes of translation are exacerbated in a conflict situation where the will to communicate cannot be taken for granted.

A Note on Methods

My emphasis here, within the limits of space constraints, has been to select and examine a few key moments in the discursive elaboration of the *azadi* construct by key players in the conflict and by progressive intellectuals concerned to create bridges between what appear to be incommensurable positions on *azadi*. I am acutely conscious of the fact that this is not an exhaustive treatment of the media or literary renditions of *azadi*, and I make no pretense to try to represent an authentic Kashmiri voice on the term *azadi*. Rather, I have tried to discover and unpack discourses on *azadi* by key players and mediators where I found it to congeal thickly around the term *azadi* itself within the Kashmir conflict. I relied in my search on YouTube videos, Indian news coverage, compilations of activist essays and literature, activist blogs, and the activist documentary *Jashn-E-Azadi* (Hussain & Kak, 2007). In examining these artifacts, I used van Dijk's (1993) insights on critical discursive analysis and Stuart Hall's (1975) insights on textual analysis in trying to place each elaboration of *azadi* within the ideological context or ground from which it stems, trying to locate its ideological underpinnings. I have tried as well to locate the relationship between different elaborations of the term *azadi*. In the same vein, I have attempted to understand the elaboration of the term or concept *azadi* as part of politically motivated projects, as accomplishing ends within larger political goals and aspirations.

Background to the Kashmir Conflict

While it is recognized that there are multiple histories of the conflict itself, each with its own ideological underpinnings, I provide here a brief account of the conflict in Kashmir as background for the more focused discussions on the translations of *azadi*.³

Jammu and Kashmir as an integrated entity (princely state) came into being through the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, with the British granting the areas of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh to the Hindu Dogra ruler Gulab Singh. The period of Dogra rule is widely considered to be one of severe economic exploitation and political repression of the majority Muslim population of the region. In 1947, at the time of independence from British rule and the partition between India and Pakistan, the British policy was to allow the princely states to choose between accession to India and accession to Pakistan.⁴ Although

³Although the language politics in Kashmir is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth pointing out that the movement rhetoric is in Urdu rather than in Kashmiri—thus the central place of the term *azadi* in the movement discourse. As Bhat (2011) points out, Urdu became the language to raise political consciousness in the general population at least as early as the 1930s. It is also the language commonly understood between various regions in Kashmir. Further, it is associated with the Islamic religious bent of the movement.

⁴ As can be seen, the submergence of Kashmiri processes of nationalism to the Indian and Pakistani processes of nationalism in 1947 created at the very outset deep contradictions that are unresolved to this day. While Kashmir is considered to be India's *atoot ang* ("integral part"), it is also considered to be Pakistan's *shah rag* ("jugular vein"). India and Pakistan have fought over Kashmir in 1949, 1965, and 1999. They began preparations for war over Kashmir in 2002. Since 1989 Kashmiris have done most of the fighting and dying, but in the mid-1990s, the conflict in Kashmir had gained a distinctly pan-Islamist

independence was offered as a third option, it was considered a nominal option. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the decision was complicated by a number of factors. It was a Muslim majority state with a Hindu ruler. It was (and still is) at the border between the then newly created nations India and Pakistan. A sizable Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist minority population (23%) had clear leanings toward India. Yet there was more contiguous territory with Pakistan and robust economic ties with neighboring areas in Pakistan. The most powerful political party in the state, the National Conference, along with its very popular leader, Sheikh Abdullah, had strong ties to the Indian National Congress party.

To complicate matters even further, while the Hindu ruler Hari Singh was dragging his feet on the question of accession, in October 1947 Pashtun tribesmen from the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan began an offensive in Kashmir. Under duress, Maharaja Hari Singh asked the government of India for assistance, which was given conditional upon the Maharaja signing an Instrument of Accession to India. Kashmiris were given public reassurances that once order was restored they would have the opportunity to ratify the accession through a plebiscite. This reassurance was repeated on several occasions in the ensuing years by the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. It was also the stance taken by the United Nations in 1948. To this day, no plebiscite has been held, creating distrust and bitterness among Kashmiris. The Indian government has maintained that it is Pakistan's refusal to vacate the territory it seized by 1949, known as Azad Kashmir and constituting one-third of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, that is responsible for the failure to hold a plebiscite. In defense of its stance, the Indian government points to United Nations verbiage making Pakistani withdrawal of forces a condition of holding a plebiscite (Ali, 2011; Bose, 2003).

Although this can be seen as the root of the conflict within Kashmir, various factors have exacerbated the situation over time and have contributed greatly to the sense of alienation and anger among the Kashmiri population. The failure by the Indian government to respect Indian-controlled Kashmir's autonomy enshrined in the Indian constitution, the failure of the Indian government to foster and respect democratic processes in Kashmir by manipulating elections, the attempts by the Indian administration to consolidate control of Kashmir by passing resolutions declaring Kashmir to be an integral part of India—all contributed to the birth of an active armed resistance to Indian rule from 1989 to the early 2000s, partly aided by Pakistan. This led to the massive buildup of Indian troops in Kashmir to the point of it becoming the most militarized zone in the world, with the roughly 700,000 military, paramilitary, and police forces equating to 1 Indian security person for every 15 Kashmiris. By the early 2000s, the armed resistance had been suppressed by Indian forces. Yet the heavy Indian militarization has continued, resulting in pervasive human rights abuses. The political and military repression, combined with a lack of redress, has given birth since the early 2000s to a principally nonviolent, mass-based movement, manifesting most visibly in the summers of 2008, 2009, and 2010, when the streets filled with youth hurling stones at the Indian security forces to demand azadi, and Indian security forces responded

flavor, with fighters coming in from Pakistan and elsewhere. Since the early 2000s, enthusiasm for a merger with Pakistan has waned, and the movement has taken on a much more indigenous mass-based character. However, the shifting relationship between India and Pakistan, both military and diplomatic, still provides an important part of the context for the Kashmir conflict (Ali, 2011; Bose, 2003; Kak, 2011).

with severe repression, including the killing of hundreds of youths each summer (Ali, 2011; Bose, 2003; Kak, 2011b).⁵

What Do We Want? Azadi!

When "Azadi" is chanted in unison by a crowd of Kashmiris led by a member of the community, endless associations can be strung with it, each creating a new layer to the already existing thickness of significations. As can be seen from the selection of slogans at the beginning of this article, azadi is a reason for great sacrifice (more precious than life), a right, a seductress (the fragrant one). But more than anything else, from the vantage point of Kashmiris in the valley, it is the sum of collective aspiration and desire, and it is irreducible, nonnegotiable. As can be seen by an English translation of slogans at a separatist rally in Srinagar as far back as 1991, protestors make it clear that azadi cannot be traded for roads, economic relief, or other crumbs thrown by the Indian government. They chant in unison, "No roads! Azadi! No Relief, Azadi!" (*Slogans on the Street*, n.d.). In azadi is coalesced years of yearning for self-determination, overlain with decades of repression. The most often recurring and passionate slogan by far is "Hum Kya Chahte? Azadi!—What do we want? Azadi!" It is the shared desire, the collective aspiration of Kashmiris in the valley, particularly but not exclusively Kashmiri Muslims. It is the bottom line.

Yet even for Kashmiri Muslims in the valley, just as azadi captures everything the struggle is about, it is not any one thing, as my refusal to translate the word *azadi* at the beginning of the article connotes. Its meaning is in fact forever deferred as it is chanted, shouted, and hurled on the physical and virtual streets. As Mohamed Junaid (2011), an anthropologist who grew up in Kashmir, says, at a formal political level, azadi has been articulated as independence from India, "a freedom from its illegitimate sovereignty over our lives," a "voluntary separation from a forced union" (p. 284). But what that independence or separation entails is rarely, if ever, spelled out. Sanjay Kak (2011b) describes it as the "obstinate, often inchoate, but in the end, very political desire for Azadi—freedom" (p.x). The call for azadi is therefore crystal clear and opaque at the same time. It is crystal clear that India is seen as an occupying force, and the majority of Kashmiris in the valley want an end to Indian occupation. It is clear that Kashmiris have not been given a chance to determine their own destiny, and they want finally to be able to do so. As corroborated by the poll done by Chatham House in May 2010, a large majority of Kashmiris in the valley want independence from both India and Pakistan (Bradnock, 2010). In other words, as a negative term, azadi connotes a desire to end the Indian occupation. As a positive term, azadi harkens toward the possibility of self-determination, toward the creation of a space to elaborate and bring into being a shared future for Kashmiris.

On the tongue of protestors, azadi congeals into a tightly wound expression of discontent and an indestructible thirst for freedom; in the hands of a Kashmiri creative writer, azadi is conveyed emotively as an existential cry for justice, but also as a cry that is unintelligible to the outsized Indian security forces and the Indian government behind them. In Arif Ayaz Parrey's short story "A Victorious Campaign," the

⁵ In the summer of 2010 alone, at least 112 Kashmiris, many of them youths, were shot and killed by the Indian security forces (Kak, 2011).

central character is Azad, a *mott*. As Parrey explains, this “translates into many words: mystic, mad, stubborn, etc.” (2011b, p. 179). A creature of Kashmir’s Sufi mystic tradition, Azad can be read as the Kashmiri spirit, or the Kashmiri spirit of freedom. He had “abandoned the realm of thoughtfulness in favor of mindless freedom” (p. 179). Devoid of worldliness, Azad is nonetheless revered by everyone in the village for his insight into matters of deep importance, including matters political such as their collective destiny. During one traditional Kashmiri feast (*wazwaan saal*) organized for him by his fellow villagers, they asked him when they would get azadi. With his usual uncanny ability to cut through the fog of deceit and illusion and get to the heart of the matter in enigmatic speech, Azad pronounced, “Water slowly brings down the mountain. The world has a world to see yet” (p. 181). In this statement, he is able to assure his beloved Kashmiri kith that, despite various disappointments and setbacks and despite the disproportionate apparent power on the side of the Indian government machinery, their steady resistance will eventually bring down the oppressive structure. At that point, a whole new society will begin to take shape.

When the Indian “mintary” (a colloquialism for military) sets up a camp just outside the village, they begin to heap various indignities upon the people, such as forcing them to go through the camp to accomplish mundane tasks, harassing them as they pass through the camp, and cutting down the precious walnut trees for their own benefit. Azad, unperturbed by these actions, continues in his usual manner to climb the village hill before sunrise, banging loudly on the iron gate of the camp to be able to do so. When confronted about the practice, he replies that he goes up the hill to wash light. The soldiers abuse him for what they consider to be an absurd response. Once again unperturbed, Azad continues to arrive at dawn. For his obstinacy he is subjected to torture. While the villagers’ response to Azad’s enigmatic messages is to “search their own souls for answers” (Parrey, 2011b, p. 180), the mintary “did not understand—did not want to understand, did not need to understand.” Why couldn’t Azad just speak in plain words, in a currency the mintary might understand? When asked this by the village headman, Azad replies, “Knowledge is the currency of the tribe of oppressors. Understand more, even at the cost of knowing less” (p. 183). By speaking obliquely, Azad is able to provide insight to those with a will to understand while refusing to provide fodder to those with a will to power.

While recovering from torture, Azad learns that soldiers have shot four boys dead. He directs a young girl to get him some nettle, and, caressing it, says, “Nettle, nettle, path-eater(s),” resulting in strange events in the military camp such as trees falling on bunkers and barracks, leading the military to abandon the village. The officer tries to explain the events by reaching for far-fetched scientific explanations, but “the people of the village are in no mood to listen” (Parrey, 2011b, p. 185). Once the “fragrance of Azad” has been released, anything becomes possible, and long-held assumptions about power and helplessness, madness and civilization, are turned on their head.

The story eloquently conveys what Parrey says in prose elsewhere—that

The protests in Kashmir in connection with the demand for the right of self-determination are . . . as natural and predictable as the cycle of day and night. Memory, history, democracy and humanity—all lead a Kashmiri to the logic of this demand. (Parrey, 2011a, p. 240)

While the cry of azadi might have become a ritual the protestors use to push back against brutal oppression, the spirit of azadi cannot be reduced to one fixed meaning. It embodies the principle of self-determination, which in itself carries multiple potential rather than clear answers.

What Do You Really Mean by Azadi?

The role of interlocutor is taken by the Indian government and its emissaries. What, they demand from Kashmiris in the valley, do you really mean by azadi? The very act of insisting on making transparent the meaning of azadi is a thoroughly political act, carrying with it the clear implication that Kashmiris in the valley cannot be taken at their word, that behind the surface call for azadi lie hidden and possibly treacherous unarticulated meanings of azadi.

An IBN India episode of *Face the Nation* hosted by Sagarika Ghosh during the 2010 summer protests gives a sense of the face-off between Kashmiris, on the one hand, using azadi as a lever to create breathing space and as an authentic expression of felt oppression and the Indian polity, on the other hand, insisting on Kashmiris spilling the actual meaning of azadi.

The episode's structure pits two Kashmiri Muslim students against two Kashmiri pandit (Hindu) students, the latter whose families are exiled from Kashmir. The host, Sagarika Ghosh, shoots questions to all participants with a direct, assertive posture, going back and forth between the Muslim and Hindu students. The episode is introduced by Ghosh saying, "Kashmir stone pelters have thrown Kashmir into turmoil," giving early indication that the general onus to explain oneself will be disproportionately upon the Kashmiri Muslim students. A pointed exchange on the meaning of azadi will be pertinent to the discussion here ("Kashmiri Students Debate," 2010).

Kashmiri Muslim student: We are demanding azadi, demanding that we want to be heard, and this is what we want, and this is why we are here.

Host: No, you want azadi or you want to be heard?

Kashmiri Muslim student: Both, at the same time. When people will—

Host (interrupting): What does azadi mean? What does azadi for a young person like you mean? Why don't you want to be part of India's, of India's story?

Kashmiri Muslim student: Well, this is a question that should be discussed. There should be a platform where all of us can sit together and discuss.

Later in the show, the talk turns again to the demand for azadi. Following from a Hindu Kashmiri student saying that there are different stakeholders in the problem, the host turns to the Muslim Kashmiri students.

Host: Most of the non-Muslim population in Kashmir does not want azadi, they do not want autonomy, so doesn't that mean that your demand for azadi, your demand for autonomy, your demand for anti-India has to be a little tempered, because this is a homeland not only of yours, but this is their homeland too.

Kashmiri Muslim student: This is what we're asking, hold a plebiscite.

The short exchanges are telling. Echoing the Indian nationalist narrative, the host demands to know what azadi means. Echoing the sentiment within the valley, the Kashmiri Muslim student refuses to pin down the meaning. The host then proceeds to provide her own interpretations, equating azadi with a rejection of India ("anti-India," "Don't you want to be part of India's story?"), with subterfuge ("No, you want azadi or you want to be heard?"), or with autonomy. It is notable that every equation the host makes with azadi remains within the Indian nationalist mold, where azadi is always already read as a rejection of India and where autonomy is the only meaning of azadi that is permitted within the Indian nationalist imagination. Any other possible meaning within the Kashmiri palette, such as self-determination, separation from India, independence, opting for Pakistan, is always already inadmissible from the Indian nationalist standpoint.

The refusal to take azadi at face value is echoed in different aspects of the Indian mainstream media, including the printed press.⁶ In an examination of 183 stories from key Indian newspapers, azadi was referred to as a "lament," (Padgoankar, 2012), a "talisman" (Jerath & Pandit, 2010), a "cry" (Desai, 2010), a "harangue" (Pandit, 2010), as the "inevitable rallying slogan for every popular movement in Kashmir" (Puri, 2010), and as a "groundswell" (Wani, 2010), trivializing the Kashmiri political struggle for independence. If acknowledged as a "demand," it was a demand seen as coming from separatist leaders or parties ventriloquizing through the protestors ("Is Radha Voicing Govt Line," 2010; Jaleel, 2010; Singh, 2010; Wani, 2010). Also, when acknowledged as a demand, the term *azadi* was always in quotation marks, sometimes referred to as "so-called azadi" (Pandit, 2014; Singh, 2010), putting into question its legitimacy. It was also considered "impossible" (Express News Service, 2010; Singh, 2010), "impractical" (Indian Express, 2010), and "misguided" ("Chidambaram Defends Government," 2013; Habibullah, 2010; "J&K Violence," 2010). It was construed as being either an empty slogan or a cryptic slogan hiding secessionist intent. In none of the stories was it acknowledged as a legitimate demand or as an idea worthy of consideration.

In the Indian nationalist context, Kashmir is seen as an integral part of India, its *atoot ang*, a part of the Indian body proper the breaking away of which would amount to an amputation (Chatterji, 2011; Parrey, 2011a; Rai, 2011; Roy, 2011). Parrey (2011a) astutely points out that when India's "Kashmir experts" ask "Oh, but what do the Kashmiris *really* want" (p. 242) they do so against the background of the knowledge of India's own deceits, failed promises, political manipulations, repressions,

⁶ I used the keywords *azadi* and *Kashmir* in a LexisNexis to search for stories from June 2010 to April 2015 in the Indian newspapers *Indian Express*, *Times of India*, and *Hindustan Times*. The search yielded 183 news stories. This was by no means intended to be an exhaustive news analysis. Rather, the intent was to place the earlier analysis of the broadcast news item within a slightly broader context of how the term *azadi* is broached in the Indian media.

and brutalities in Kashmir. In the context of such knowledge, this is not the innocent question it appears to be. It is, rather, a sign of the "politics of delegitimization" that would have us see Kashmiris as infantile, as a people incapable of feeling their own pain or deciding their own future. The Indian mainstream media has tried every possible avenue of delegitimization of the struggle for azadi, painting it as a proxy for other interests—such as Pakistani interests, the interests of fanatical Islam, the interests of separatists, or the interests of certain mainstream political parties in Kashmir (Parrey, 2011a).

What these efforts share is the lack of any intersection with the meanings of azadi denoted or connoted by the Kashmiris struggling for self-determination. These efforts also reveal a lack of political will to understand that, especially since 1989, the call for azadi is built upon the memory of terrible and widespread brutality and repression by the Indian state. More than 70,000 people have been killed by the military and police, more than 8,000 have been disappeared, and 250,000 have been displaced out of a population of about 7 million. Depression, drug abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder are rampant, and the suicide rate is abnormally high. Nearly everyone has been touched by memories of violence and subjugation (Chatterji, 2011; Kak, 2011b; Nessman, 2011; Roy, 2011). As Parrey (2011a) also points out, the cry, the thirst, the burning desire for azadi, is a logical culmination of Kashmir's history.⁷ It is, in the words of Kaul (2011b), a "gut-wrenching, existential cry" (p. 206). In this context, the demand to tell us what azadi *really* means can justifiably be seen as a form of denial. Behind the insistence to reveal what azadi really means is also, as Parrey (2011a) points out, a deep fear of "what independent Kashmir *might become*" (p. 247) on the part of the majority of Indians, but also on the part of minorities within Kashmir. However, as both Parrey (2011a) and Roy (2011) point out, to hold Kashmir captive to these fears is to repeat the actions of Great Britain in the face of India's own demand for azadi in its independence struggle.

Translating Azadi

Between the Indian state and its emissaries threatened by the cry of azadi and the Kashmiris in the streets embodying its angst and promise and offering great sacrifice at its feet lie intermediaries working to bridge what appears to be an unbridgeable divide. These translators use poetry, short stories, documentary, essays, comic strips, rap, blogs, and other means to gently poke at azadi, to coax its many meanings, to unfurl the hopes that lie within as well as to address and allay the fears it evokes. Kashmiris in the diaspora (including some who have been exiled) as well as progressive members of the Indian intelligentsia have been among these translators. They work from a space not subsumed by either the Indian nationalist logic or the Kashmiri ethnonationalist or religious nationalist logics. They work to translate the existential cry of Kashmiris for Indians and the international community, and they attempt to keep the meanings of azadi as wide open as possible for Kashmiris themselves. In this they offer some hope.

⁷ Zutshi (2004) points out that there is nothing necessary about the contours that the Kashmiri movement for independence has taken. It has resulted from complex interactions between economic and social formations and political responses to these. In that sense, the movement can be seen as a logical culmination of these combined aspects without taking culpability away from political actors such as the Indian state.

Fears and misgivings regarding what azadi might look like are harbored by Kashmiri pandits as well as other religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities who would be a minority population in an independent Kashmir, but also by Indians and Western observers. These various interlocutors, each from their own interests and vantage points, wish to know whether azadi entails an Islamic state or an Islamist society, many of them withholding support or ignoring or challenging the movement for azadi based on this fear among others. While activists and their supporters on the streets refuse to pin down the meaning of azadi, translators among the intelligentsia work to address some of the fears and to elaborate the notion of azadi.

Anthropologist Mohamed Junaid (2011), who grew up in Kashmir, writes "A Letter to Fellow Kashmiris" from New York, acknowledging the formal meaning of azadi as independence from India and freedom from its "illegitimate sovereignty" (p. 284; also Junaid, 2010), but also urging Kashmiris to embrace azadi as "a living principle" (Junaid, 2011, p. 285) encompassing "freedom, democracy and dignity as its inseparable core" (p. 283). In such a vision of azadi, there would be a continuous unfolding of a new society based on respect for other nations, respect for minorities, and respect for nature. While certainly drawing from the "ethical core of Islam" (pp. 281–282), Junaid argues for a society that remains inclusive and open to others' traditions and that understands Islam itself as a contested, living tradition. Azadi here opens out to new possibilities, going beyond the threat it represents to Indians and Kashmiri pandits and beyond the immediate existential cry to be free of Indian occupation. Here azadi takes on new hues, built selectively upon Kashmir's history of negotiations between regional, religious, ethnic, and national identities (Zutshi, 2004). This kind of patient and reflexive elaboration of azadi also exposes the myopias of the Indian establishment that create easy equations between a future Kashmir that would be Islamic and one that would be Islamist, one that would provide dignity for the Muslim population and one that would be exclusivist. Junaid reminds us that there is nothing necessary about these associations. Azadi's horizon can stretch beyond these associations in a situation that allows for the unhindered elaboration and imaginings of Kashmiri futures.

Traversing a different path as a translator, writer, and long-time activist, Arundhati Roy (2011) speaks and writes on Kashmir as an Indian, contributing the critical insight that "India needs 'azadi' from Kashmir just as much—if not more—than Kashmir needs 'azadi' from India" (p. 71). She argues that holding onto Kashmir by massive force implicates all Indians in a morally reprehensible act, making a mockery of Indian democracy. She astutely points out that to insist on knowing what azadi will entail, what it really means, is to take a colonial stance vis-à-vis Kashmir, mirroring the colonial stance of the British toward India on the question of India's azadi from Great Britain. She is deeply saddened by the lack of acknowledgement among Indians of the systematic denial of azadi to Kashmiris at every possible level. For her act of translation, Roy was charged with sedition by the Indian government. She broached the meaning of azadi in a serious vein, entertaining the possibility that Kashmir was never an integral part of India, and this was construed as being anti-India. Because she dared to suggest that azadi can be understood as outside the framework of the Indian state, she was considered a traitor. In the absence of the will to find a political solution, and within the Indian nationalist mold, there is no place for such translation. Within this nationalist mold, Kashmir is always already an integral part of India, and any meaning of azadi outside of this framework is inadmissible. In this context, to ask what azadi really means is purposeful obfuscation. Translation requires a semantic transaction involving the will to offer

understanding and the will to understand. In the absence of the will to understand, translation itself becomes construed as treachery.

The poisoned terrain of translation has not stopped intellectuals from attempting to reach the Indian population directly, bypassing the narrow and skewed discourse of a sponsored press (Anjum & Varma, 2011; *Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra*, 2011; Joseph, 2000). Using the potent medium of film, Sanjay Kak attempts to translate the Kashmiri aspiration for *azadi* in his documentary *Jashn-E-Azadi* ("How We Celebrate Freedom"; Hussain & Kak, 2007) and through his edited collection *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* (Kak, 2011a). Kak (2011b) reminds us that *azadi* is a dynamic term and that "the form of the resistance is fluid, and can easily swing back to the place where it has come from" (p. 42), that is, it can revert back from being a nonviolent mass-based movement to being an armed militancy. In fact, the refusal of Indians and the Indian government to understand the import of *azadi*, to attend to its deep content, could itself impel *azadi* to take on more sinister meanings.

The caption on the cover of the *Jashn-E-Azadi* DVD harkens to the irony of *azadi* in the Kashmiri context: "It's 15th August, India's Independence day, and the Indian flag ritually goes up in Srinagar." Kashmiris celebrate Indian Independence Day with cries of "Ay jabiron ay zalimon, Kashmir hamara chhod do (O oppressors, O wicked ones, get out of our Kashmir!)" (Roy, 2011, pp. 66–67). India's freedom represents in the Kashmiri imagination their unsettled status and their own oppression. The documentary poignantly conveys the lack of translation between the Kashmiri and Indian understandings of *azadi*. Throughout the film, the heartfelt Kashmiri cry of *azadi* and the soil of oppression upon which it grows are juxtaposed with the many mechanisms the Indian government uses to muffle and choke the cry, mechanisms of occupation that Roy has aptly and ironically called "brilliant" (*Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra*, 2011). As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the central administration tries at every turn to impose the hegemonic Indian understanding of *azadi* based on earlier anticolonial struggles while attempting to efface the specificity of the current Kashmiri struggle. At a more subtle level, we are given a view of how everyday life has been contorted by militarization and politicization. It becomes clear that while ordinary Kashmiris are subjected daily to the Indian establishment's oppressions and inducements, they are also tugged at by militant organizations and separatist leaders. In the midst of these various political pulls and pushes, they try to nurture and shape their own organically based movement for *azadi*.

A few scenes into the film, we see the first such juxtaposition. As the narrator intones "The next sixty years [after Indian independence] saw that hope [for true *azadi*] turn into discontent with India then to mass resistance and eventually to armed struggle," we see through barbed wire Indian soldiers saluting the Indian flag in Srinagar's Lal Chowk [Red Square] as the Indian national anthem plays in the background. The camera cuts from the scene of Indian soldiers conducting the ritual of Indian Independence Day in an empty square to the scene of an elderly man looking for his son's grave in a martyr's graveyard. As he looks for the grave to show the filmmaker, the camera cuts to the scene of women weeping and chanting in unison at a martyr's funeral, "Today on your death the sky weeps." Men are seen carrying the martyr's body in procession. As they lower the body into a grave, they shout in unison, "Constitution of India—we reject! Institutions of the Indian state—burn them, burn them!" The camera cuts back to the quiet scene of the father coming upon his son's gravestone and explaining to the filmmaker that one forgets the site because one cannot come often. He also explains that his son was a

divisional commander of one of the militant groups at the height of the militant struggle in the mid-1990s and that he was martyred in 1996. As the camera cuts between the three scenes, an almost surreal sense is created of the rituals of occupation as a reality parallel to the rituals of protest, with the occupiers untouched by mass anger or the individual loss represented by the father and the protestors "in no mood to listen" to the machinations and prevarications of the occupying force. What emerges is a picture of "two mutually exclusive ideological narratives—one backed by the coercive authority of the Indian state, and the other backed by the popular authority of the Kashmiri people" (Anjum & Varma, 2011, p. 59).

The film has many such juxtapositions of the pomposity, obliviousness, or indifference of the Indian government, on the one hand, and the loss and suffering of Kashmiri people, on the other. For example, early in the film is a scene from 2004, with Indian tourists enjoying themselves in Kashmir, posing in Kashmiri dress, sledding, and generally enjoying what the Indian government termed "normalcy" after the militancy was curbed by the military. At one point, a group of men exclaim that Kashmir is "heaven on earth," the "big dad of Switzerland," and that "these stupid people have ruined it." The camera then cuts to a scene of unmarked graves in North Kashmir, also from 2004. The caretakers at the site recount that most of the bodies are the result of "encounters" with the police and 27 bodies came in 2003. They say that at first they were disturbed, but now "our hearts have turned to stone." They also describe the terrible condition of some of the bodies, some with their heads severed. These are the "stupid" people of whom the tourists had spoken in the previous scene, Kashmiris who persist in struggle rather than accepting subjugation. When, in the narrator's words, "Kashmir's ledger of loss" is juxtaposed against the tourists' expression of displeasure that Kashmiris are ruining their playground, the discourse of Kashmir as a territory for others is exposed for the abomination it is. Azadi becomes palpable as an existential cry that, by the narrator's account, has existed through "five hundred years of foreign rule" and yet is forever deferred, always "elusive," always "in the future."

Throughout the film, Kak shows us the face of the Indian occupation as Kashmiris have come to see it, and he allows us to feel the fracturing of society as a result of the occupation. About halfway through the film, the narrator reminds us that the militancy had been contained by the early 2000s and that "less than a thousand armed militants remain in the fight but nearly 700,000 Indian soldiers still wage that war . . . that's one soldier for every 15 Kashmiri citizens." We see at different points in the film what this means for daily life in Kashmir: bodies showing up at graveyards with unmarked graves, houses being burned down at will by soldiers, young men being whisked away and tortured, martyrs being mourned, nine-year-olds experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, and everywhere the presence of soldiers, bunkers, army jeeps, barbed wire—the ubiquitous barbed wire. Such an environment undoubtedly vitiates the possibility of translation or dialogue and most certainly poisons the public sphere and civil society. In turn, this defers forever the dream of azadi.

Kashmiri novelist Nitasha Kaul (2011b) says eloquently what *Jashn-E-Azadi* paints visually.

The demand of the Kashmiri people is "Azadi." *Freedom*. Freedom to be themselves, to choose their national destiny. *We are not Indians. We are Kashmiris. We have a history, a language, a culture that demands recognition.*

Instead of recognizing this gut-wrenching, existential cry of the Kashmiri people, the Indian state sends in more guns, more troops, more rolls of barbed wire, more bribes, more bullets. (p. 206)

Kak and Kaul have both received backlash for their efforts, just as Roy has. Hussain and Kak's *Jashn-E-Azadi* has been censored a number of times (Engelhard, 2012). Kaul recounts how she has been cursed by other Kashmiri pandits for expressing her views, and how she is considered a traitor by non-Kashmiri Indians for calling herself "Kashmiri" instead of Indian. Translation in a situation of conflict carries unusual risk, yet the conversation started by the translators is most crucial in precisely such situations. Kak has pointed out that it is precisely the real conversation about Kashmir that his film and other such works make possible that is feared by all those in India who have been preventing a genuine debate about Kashmir. The reaction to translation, then, allows us to see its concurrent necessity and impossibility.

As Zutshi (2004) eloquently points out in her historically grounded analysis of the dynamic trajectory of Kashmiri identity, multiple and shifting understandings of azadi by Kashmiris have been drowned out by Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri nationalist rhetoric, conflating the regional, religious, and national aspects of the aspiration for azadi. Part of the task of the translators, such as Zutshi herself, has been to rescue an understanding of azadi from these overarching nationalist narratives, attempting to create space for alternative stories. Zutshi (2014) points to the importance of the "Kashmiri narrative public," as one such space. She defines the Kashmiri narrative public as "a dense network of stories, ideas and genres that interacted and circulated in several languages and in multiple media" in which Kashmir is understood as "a place rather than a political territory with defined borders" (pp. 295–296).

These stories remind us that Kashmir "sits astride and connects multiple regions of the world, and it has drawn amply from each of them" (Zutshi, 2014, p. 316) and therefore carry seeds of an inclusive future for Kashmir and the region. The activist and Indian nationalist enunciations of azadi taken up here risk congealing around the sterile concepts of nation and state that have thus far lead to dead ends. What is needed, as Pande (2011) says, is an exploration by Kashmiris of the creative potential of the concept of azadi as a gateway to "mass participatory dialogue on the nature of democracy in South Asia" (p. 89). It may not be the azadi spoken through loudspeakers but the azadi hesitantly broached through performance, short stories, and poetry that holds the key for a liberatory Kashmiri future. In a terrain poisoned by multiple political manipulations and mutual distrust, it is perhaps not the most obvious meanings of azadi that carry the most potential, but rather the murmurings of the *mott* Azad from Parrey's story (2011b) or the haunting poems that punctuate Hussain and Kak's *Jashn-E-Azadi* as a subtext. I end with one such poem from the documentary as a tribute to the Kashmiri people's struggle.

Freedom's terrible thirst, flooding Kashmir,
is bringing love to its tormented glass.
Stranger, who will inherit the last night of the past?
Of what shall I not sing, and sing?

—Agha Shahid Ali, Kashmiri poet

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