

## DEMOCRACY'S FAILING LIGHT

WHILE WE'RE still arguing about whether there's life after death, can we add another question to the cart? Is there life after democracy? What sort of life will it be? By *democracy* I don't mean democracy as an ideal or an aspiration. I mean the working model: Western liberal democracy, and its variants, such as they are.

So, is there life after democracy?

Attempts to answer this question often turn into a comparison of different systems of governance, and end with a somewhat prickly, combative defence of democracy. It's flawed, we say. It isn't perfect, but it's better than everything else that's on offer. Inevitably, someone in the room will say: 'Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia . . . is that what you would prefer?'

Whether democracy should be the utopia that all 'developing' societies aspire to is a separate question altogether. (I think it should. The early, idealistic phase can be quite heady.) The question about life after democracy is addressed to those of us who already live in democracies, or in countries that pretend to be democracies. It isn't meant to suggest that we lapse into older, discredited models of totalitarian or authoritarian governance. It's meant to suggest that the system of representative democracy—too much representation, too little democracy—needs some structural adjustment.

It might seem a little inappropriate for someone to be criticizing democracy to an audience which includes writers from countries whose people have never known democracy, or whose totalitarian regimes have denied people basic fundamental rights for decades. But all of us know that just like global capital political systems are interconnected too. More often than not it is the great democratic nations— masquerading as the gatekeepers of morality and the saviors of humanity— that support, fund and reinforce military dictatorships and totalitarian regimes. We know that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives and whole cities were bombed to rubble, were waged in the name of Democracy. We also know that countries that call themselves democracies administer many of the military occupations in the world –I refer here to Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and to Kashmir.

So the question here, really, is what have we done to democracy? What have we turned it into? What happens once democracy has been used up? When it has been hollowed out and

emptied of meaning? What happens when each of its institutions has metastasized into something dangerous? What happens now that democracy and the Free Market have fused into a single predatory organism with a thin, constricted imagination that revolves almost entirely around the idea of maximizing profit? Is it possible to reverse this process? Can something that has mutated go back to being what it used to be?

What we need today, for the sake of the survival of this planet, is long-term vision. Can governments whose very survival depends on immediate, extractive, short-term gain provide this? Could it be that democracy, the sacred answer to our short-term hopes and prayers, the protector of our individual freedoms and nurturer of our avaricious dreams, will turn out to be the endgame for the human race? Could it be that democracy is such a hit with modern humans precisely because it mirrors our greatest folly—our nearsightedness? Our inability to live entirely in the present (like most animals do) combined with our inability to see very far into the future makes us strange in-between creatures, neither beast nor prophet. Our amazing intelligence seems to have outstripped our instinct for survival. We plunder the earth hoping that accumulating material surplus will make up for the profound, unfathomable thing that we have lost.

I have lived all my life in India – a country that markets itself as the world’s biggest, democracy (other adjectives like ‘greatest’ and ‘oldest’ have already been taken). So, if you will forgive me, it is from this vantage point that I will critique democracy today.

A few weeks ago the Indian government announced its plans to raise 26,000 paramilitary troops to mount a military operation against Maoist ‘terrorists’ in the dense, mineral rich forests of Central India. For decades now the Indian Army has been deployed in States like Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Kashmir where people have been fighting for independence. But for the government to openly announce the militarization of India’s heartland is an official acknowledgement of civil war.

The Operation —which incidentally, is what wars are called these days—is scheduled to begin in October, when the monsoon rains come to an end and the rivers are less angry and the terrain more accessible. The people who live in these forests, including the Maoists who see themselves as waging war against the Indian state, are tribal people, the poorest people in the country. They have lived on these lands for centuries with no schools, no hospitals, no roads, no running water. Their crime is an old one —they live on the land that is rich with iron-ore, bauxite, uranium and tin, all of it desperately desired by major mining corporations, among them Tata, Vedanta, Essar and Sterlite. The Prime Minister has declared that his government is duty bound to exploit India’s mineral wealth to fuel India’s economic boom. He has called the Maoists the ‘single largest internal security threat to India.’ In the corporate

press words like ‘stamp-out’ and ‘exterminate’ are commonly used in discussions about what ought to be done to them. When the security forces enter the forests, nobody knows how they are going to distinguish between Maoists, Maoist sympathizers and ordinary people.

It is significant that India is one of the countries that blocked a European move in the UN asking for an international probe into war crimes that may have been committed by the government of Sri Lanka in its recent offensive against the Tamil Tigers.<sup>16</sup> Governments in this part of the world have taken note of Israel’s Gaza blueprint as a good way of dealing with ‘terrorism’: keep the media out and close in for the kill. That way they don’t have to worry too much about who’s a ‘terrorist’ and who isn’t. There may be a little flurry of international outrage, but it goes away pretty quickly.

An unacknowledged, low-grade civil war has been under way for a few years now. Hundreds of thousands of people have had their villages destroyed, their food stocks burned. Many have migrated to cities where they work as manual laborers on starvation wages. The rest are hiding in the forests, surviving on grass and wild fruit, many are slowly starving.

But now preparation for the formal war in which ground forces will be assisted by helicopter gunships and satellite mapping, has begun. Brigade headquarters are being set up in Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh. The forest is being barricaded and cordoned off. Restrictions on journalists have been put in place. A slew of laws that criminalize every kind of dissent including peaceful dissent have been passed. Scores are being arrested and imprisoned without bail.

The October war, if it takes place, if we don’t manage to stop it, will mark the converging, the marriage, if you like, of two separate kinds of wars that have been raging in India for decades now - the war on ‘terror’ that the Indian army has waged against people of Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur and the war to corner and control natural resources, a process that is otherwise known as ‘Progress’.

In January 2008, on the first anniversary of the assassination, of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, I was invited to give a lecture in Istanbul. Dink was shot down on the street outside his office for daring to raise a subject that is forbidden in Turkey—the 1915 genocide of Armenians in which more than one million people were killed. My lecture was about the history of genocide and genocide denial, and the old, almost organic relationship between ‘progress’ and genocide.

I have always been struck by the fact that the political party in Turkey that carried out the Armenian genocide was called the Committee for Union and Progress. Union and Progress,

or, in today's idiom, Nationalism and Development—those unimpeachable twin towers of modern, Free Market Democracy – have had a long, common history. When European countries were 'progressing', being 'enlightened', industrializing and developing limited but new forms of democracy and citizens' rights at home, they were simultaneously exterminating people in their millions in their colonies. In the early years of colonialism, openly slaughtering natives in the name of civilizing them was quite acceptable. But as the discourse on civil rights and democracy grew stronger and more sophisticated, a new form of dual morality took shape. It gave rise to a new phenomenon. Genocide Denial.

Now, when genocide politics meets the Free Market, official recognition—or denial, or more recently, the manufacture of imaginary holocausts and genocides is a multinational business enterprise. It rarely has anything to do with historical fact or forensic evidence. Morality certainly does not enter the picture. It is an aggressive process of high-end bargaining that belongs more to the World Trade Organization than to the United Nations. The currency is geopolitics, the fluctuating market for natural resources, that curious thing called futures trading, and plain old economic and military might.

In other words, genocides are often denied for the same set of reasons genocides are prosecuted. Economic determinism marinated in racial/ethnic/religious/national discrimination. Crudely, the lowering or raising of the price of a barrel of oil (or a ton of uranium), permission granted for a military base, or the opening up of a country's economy could be the decisive factor when governments adjudicate on whether a genocide did or did not occur. Or indeed whether genocide will or will not occur. And if it does, whether it will or will not be reported, and if it is, then what slant that reportage will take. For example, the death of two million in the Congo goes virtually unreported. Why? And was the death of a million Iraqis under the sanctions regime, prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, *genocide* (which is what UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq Denis Halliday called it) or was it "worth it," as Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, claimed? It depends on who makes the rules. The US President? Or an Iraqi mother who has lost her child?

The history of genocide tells us that it's not an aberration, an anomaly, a glitch in the human system. It's a habit as old, as persistent, as much part of the human condition as love and art and agriculture. □Most of the genocidal killing from the fifteenth century onwards has been an integral part of Europe's search for what the German geographer and zoologist Friedrich Ratzel famously called *lebensraum*, living space. Lebensraum was a word he coined to describe what he thought of as dominant human species' natural impulse to expand their territory in their search for not just space, but sustenance. The idea of *lebensraum* was set out in precise terms in 1901, but Europe had already begun her quest for lebensraum four

hundred years earlier, when Columbus landed in America.

Sven Lindqvist, author of *Exterminate All the Brutes*, argues that it was Hitler's quest for lebensraum—in a world that had already been carved up by other European countries—that led the Nazis to push through Eastern Europe and on toward Russia. The Jews of Eastern Europe and western Russia stood in the way of Hitler's colonial ambitions. Therefore, like the native peoples of Africa and America and Asia, they had to be enslaved or liquidated. So, Lindqvist says, the Nazis' racist dehumanization of Jews cannot be dismissed as a paroxysm of insane evil. Once again, it is a product of the familiar mix: economic determinism well marinated in age-old racism—very much in keeping with European tradition of the time.

Armed with this reading of history, is it reasonable to worry about whether a country like India that is poised on the threshold of “progress” is also poised on the threshold of genocide? Could the India being celebrated all over the world as a miracle of progress and democracy is actually in the process of colonizing itself and is poised on the verge of committing genocide? The mere suggestion might sound outlandish and at this point of time, the use of the word genocide surely unwarranted. However, if we look to the future, and if the Tsars of Development believe in their own publicity, if they believe that There Is No Alternative to their chosen model for Progress, then they will inevitably have to kill, and kill in large numbers, in order to get their way.

If you look at a map of India's forests, its mineral wealth, and the homelands of the Adivasi people, you'll see that they're stacked up over each other. So in reality, those who we call poor are the truly wealthy. As the globalized corporate economy strengthens its grip on our lives and our imaginations, its beneficiaries have united and seceded into outer space. From there they look down at the forests and river valleys where the poor live and see superfluous people sitting on precious resources. They are puzzled. They wonder: What's *our* water doing in their rivers, what's *our* bauxite doing in their mountains? What's *our* iron-ore doing in their forests? The Nazis had a phrase for superfluous people —*überzähligen Essern*, superfluous eaters.

“The struggle for lebensraum,” Friedrich Ratzel said, after closely observing the struggle between native Indians and their European colonizers in North America, “is an annihilating struggle”. Annihilation doesn't necessarily mean the physical extermination of people—by bludgeoning, beating, burning, bayoneting, gassing, bombing, or shooting them. (Except sometimes. Particularly when they try to put up a fight. Because then they become Terrorists.) Historically, the most efficient form of genocide has been to displace people from

their homes, herd them together, and block their access to food and water. Under these conditions, they die without obvious violence and often in far greater numbers. This was how the Herero people were exterminated by the German General Adolf Lebrecht von Trotha in Southwest Africa in October 1904. “The Nazis gave the Jews a star on their coats and crowded them into ‘reserves,’” Sven Lindqvist writes, “just as the Indians, the Hereros, the Bushmen, the Amandebele, and all the other children of the stars had been crowded together. They died on their own when food supply to the reserves was cut off.” In a democracy, as Amartya Sen says, we are unlikely to have famine. So in place of China’s Great Famine, we have India’s Great Malnutrition. (India hosts fifty-seven million—more than a third—of the world’s undernourished children.)

In Dantewara district of Chhattisgarh, where some of the world’s finest iron-ore is, 644 villages have been emptied. 50,000 people have been moved into wretched police camps, the young among them have been armed and trained to become a vicious peoples’ militia called the Salwa Judum. The remaining 300,000 people are off the government’s radar, no one really knows where they are, how they are surviving. The police has branded all those not in the camps as Maoists or Maoist sympathizers which makes them legitimate targets for India’s famous ‘encounter’ killings. The Security forces are taking position, waiting for the rains to end.

But almost every day as the news trickles in, it seems clear that the killing and the dying and of course the raping of women, an inevitable aspect of militarization, has already begun.

How has it all come to this?

Twenty years ago, in the winter of 1989 many of us watched the joyous moment when the Berlin wall came down and this city was re-united. But we knew that the hammers that shattered the wall were powered by another war that had been fought far away in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan when capitalism won its long jihad against Soviet Communism. Within months of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Indian government, once a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, performed a high-speed somersault and aligned itself completely with the United States, monarch of the new unipolar world.

In India the rules of the game changed suddenly and completely. Millions of people who lived in remote villages and deep in the heart of untouched forests, some of who had never heard of Berlin or the Soviet Union, could not have imagined how events that occurred in those faraway places would affect their lives. The Indian economy was thrown open to international capital. Laws that protected workers rights were dismantled. The era of Privatization and Structural Adjustment was upon us.

Today, words like ‘Progress’ and ‘Development’ have become interchangeable with economic ‘Reforms’, Deregulation and Privatization. ‘Freedom’ has come to mean ‘choice’. It has less to do with the human spirit than it does with different brands of deodorant. ‘Market’ no longer means a place where you go to buy provisions. The ‘Market’ is a de-territorialized space where faceless corporations do business, including buying and selling ‘futures’. ‘Justice’ has come to mean ‘human rights’ (and of those, as they say, ‘a few will do’). This theft of language, this technique of usurping words and deploying them like weapons, of using them to mask intent and to mean exactly the opposite of what they have traditionally meant, has been one of the most brilliant strategic victories of the new dispensation. It has allowed them to marginalize their detractors, deprive them of a language in which to voice their critique and dismiss them as being ‘anti-progress’, ‘anti-development’, ‘anti-reform’ and of course ‘anti-national’—negativists of the worst sort. Talk about saving a river or protecting a forest and they say, ‘Don’t you believe in Progress?’ To people whose land is being submerged by dam reservoirs and whose homes are being bulldozed they say, ‘Do you have an alternative development model?’ To those who believe that a government is duty bound to provide people with basic education, healthcare and social security, they say, ‘You’re against the Market.’ And who except a cretin could be against a Market?

As writers we spend our lives trying to minimize the distance between thought and expression, trying to give form to our intimate, most inchoate thoughts. This new Development language does the opposite. It is designed to deceive, to mask intent.

This language heist may prove to be the keystone of our undoing.

Two decades of this kind of ‘Progress’ in India has created a vast middle class punch drunk on sudden wealth and the sudden respect that comes with it—and a much, much vaster, desperate underclass. Tens of millions of people have been dispossessed and displaced from their land by floods, droughts and desertification caused by indiscriminate environmental engineering—the massive infrastructural projects, dams, mines and Special Economic Zones. All of them promoted in the name of the poor, but really meant to service the rising demands of the new aristocracy.

The battle for land lies at the heart of India’s ‘Development’ debate. A year ago, India’s former finance minister P. Chidambaram said that his vision was to get 85 per cent of India’s population to live in cities.<sup>1</sup> Realizing this ‘vision’ would require social engineering on an unimaginable scale. It would mean inducing, or forcing, about *five hundred million* people to migrate from the countryside into cities. That process is well under way and is quickly turning India into a police state in which people who refuse to surrender their land are being made to do so at gunpoint. Underlying this nightmare masquerading as ‘vision’ is the plan to free up

vast tracts of land and all of India's natural resources, leaving them ripe for corporate plunder.

Already forests, mountains and water systems are being ravaged by marauding multinational corporations, backed by a State that has lost its moorings and is committing what can only be called 'ecocide'. In eastern India bauxite and iron ore mining is destroying whole ecosystems, turning fertile land into desert. In the Himalayas hundreds of high dams are being planned, the consequences of which can only be catastrophic. In the plains, embankments built along rivers, ostensibly to control floods, have led to rising river beds, causing even more flooding, more waterlogging, more salinization of agricultural land and the destruction of livelihoods of millions of people. Most of India's holy rivers, including the Ganga and the Yamuna, have been turned into unholy drains that carry more sewage and industrial effluent than water. Hardly a single river runs its course and meets the ocean.

Sustainable food crops, suitable to local soil conditions and micro-climates, have been replaced by water-guzzling hybrid and genetically modified 'cash' crops which, apart from being wholly dependent on the market, are also heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers, pesticides, canal irrigation and the indiscriminate mining of ground water. As abused farmland, saturated with chemicals, gradually becomes exhausted and infertile, agricultural input costs rise, ensnaring small farmers in a debt trap. Over the last few years, more than 180,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide. While state granaries are bursting with food that eventually rots, starvation and malnutrition approaching the same levels as in sub-Saharan Africa stalk the land.

It's as though an ancient society, decaying under the weight of feudalism and caste, was churned in a great machine. The churning has ripped through the mesh of old inequalities, recalibrating some of them but reinforcing most. Now the old society has curdled and separated into a thin layer of thick cream—and a lot of water. The cream is India's 'market' of many million consumers (of cars, cell phones, computers, Valentine's Day greeting cards), the envy of international business. The water is of little consequence. It can be sloshed around, stored in holding ponds, and eventually drained away.

Or so they think. They didn't bargain for the war that has broken out in India's heartland: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

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But Coming back to 1989. As if to illustrate the connection between 'Union' and 'Progress', in 1989, at exactly the same time that the Congress government was opening up India's markets to international finance, the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), then in the opposition, began its virulent campaign of Hindu nationalism (popularly known as

‘Hindutva’). The Hindutva project, largely the brainchild of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological heart, the holding company of the BJP. The RSS was founded in 1925 and then modeled overtly along the lines of Italian fascism. Hitler, too, was and is, an inspirational figure. Here are some excerpts from the RSS bible, *We, or, Our Nationhood Defined* by M. S. Golwalker.

Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindustan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting on to take on these despoilers. The Race Spirit has been awakening.

Or:

To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here...a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.

Today the RSS has more than forty-five thousand *shakhas* (branches) and an army of several million *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) preaching its doctrine across India. They include India’s former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Leader of the Opposition L. K. Advani, and the three times Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi. It also includes senior people in the media, the police, the army, the intelligence agencies, the judiciary and the administrative services who are informal devotees.

In 1990, the BJP leader, L.K. Advani, travelled across the country whipping up hatred against Muslims and demanding that the Babri Masjid, an old sixteenth-century mosque that stood on a disputed site in Ayodhya, be demolished and a Ram Temple built in its place. In 1992 a mob, egged on by Advani, demolished the mosque. In early 1993 a mob rampaged through Mumbai attacking Muslims, killing almost one thousand people. As revenge a series of bomb blasts ripped through the city killing about 250 people. Feeding off the communal frenzy it had generated, the BJP defeated the Congress in 1998 and came to power at the Centre.

It’s not a coincidence that the rise of Hindutva corresponded with the historical moment when America substituted Communism with Islam as its great enemy. The radical Islamist Mujahideen—whom President Reagan once entertained in the White House and compared to America’s Founding Fathers—suddenly began to be called terrorists. Then of course, in 1990

came the First Gulf War. The Indian Government, once a staunch friend of the Palestinians, turned into Israel's 'natural ally'. Now India and Israel do joint military exercises, share intelligence and probably exchange notes on how best to administer occupied territories.

Of course once it came to power the BJP too embraced the Free Market.

Within weeks of taking office, it conducted a series of thermonuclear tests. The orgy of triumphant nationalism with which the tests were greeted introduced a chilling new language of aggression and hatred into mainstream public discourse. In February 2002, following the burning of a train coach in which fifty-eight Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya were burned alive, the BJP government in Gujarat, led by Chief Minister Narendra Modi, presided over a carefully planned genocide of Muslims in the state. The Islamophobia generated all over the world by the 11 September 2001 attacks put the wind in their sails. The machinery of the state of Gujarat stood by and watched while more than two thousand people were massacred and 150,000 Muslims were driven from their homes. It was a genocidal massacre, and though the number of victims was insignificant compared to the horror of say Rwanda or the Congo, the Gujarat carnage was designed as a public spectacle whose aims were unmistakable. It was a public warning to Muslim citizens from the government of the world's favourite democracy. Even now, the Muslims of Gujarat live in ghettos, socially and economically boycotted and with no justice in sight. Their killers remain free, respected members of society.

After the carnage, Narendra Modi pressed for early elections. He was returned to power with a decisive mandate from the people of Gujarat. Five years later he repeated this success: he is now serving a third term as chief minister.

In January 2009 at a public function. The CEOs of two of India's biggest corporations, Ratan Tata (of the Tata Group) and Mukesh Ambani (of Reliance Industries) celebrated the development policies of Narendra Modi, and warmly endorsed him as a future candidate for prime minister. And thus, with a kiss they sealed the organic relationship between 'Union' and 'Progress' —or, if you like, between Fascism and the Free Market.

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Recently the nearly two billion dollar 2009 Indian General Election was concluded. That's a lot more than the budget of the US elections. According to some media reports the actual amount that was spent is closer to *ten* billion dollars. Where, might one ask, does that kind of money come from?

The Congress and its Allies, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), have won a comfortable majority. Interestingly, more than 90 per cent of the independent candidates

who stood for elections lost. Clearly, without sponsorship it's hard to win an election. And independent candidates cannot promise subsidized rice, free TVs and cash-for-votes, those demeaning acts of vulgar charity that elections have been reduced to.

When you take a closer look at the calculus that underlies election results, words like 'comfortable' and 'majority' turn out to be deceptive, if not outright inaccurate. For instance, the actual share of votes polled by the UPA in these elections works out to only 10.3 per cent of the country's population! It's interesting how the cleverly layered mathematics of electoral democracy can turn a tiny minority into a thumping mandate.<sup>14</sup>

In the run-up to the polls, there was absolute consensus across party lines about the economic 'reforms'. Several people have sarcastically suggested that the Congress and BJP form a coalition.<sup>15</sup>. Reassured by the 'constructive' collaboration, the consensus between political parties, few were more enthusiastic about the recent general elections than major corporate houses. They seem to have realized that a democratic mandate can legitimize their pillaging in a way that nothing else can. Several corporations ran extravagant advertising campaigns on TV—some featuring Bollywood film stars—urging people, young and old, rich and poor, to go out and vote.

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For better or for worse, the 2009 General Elections in India seem to have ensured that the 'Progress' project is up and running. However it would be a serious mistake to believe that the 'Union' project has fallen by the wayside.

As the 2009 election campaign unrolled, the BJP's monstrous new debutant, Varun Gandhi (another descendent of the Nehru dynasty), who makes even Narendra Modi sound moderate and retiring called for Muslims to be forcibly sterilized. 'This will be known as a Hindu bastion, no \*\*\*\*\* Muslim dare raise his head here,' he said, using a derogatory word for someone who has been circumcised. 'I don't want a single Muslim vote.'

Varun Gandhi won his election with a colossal margin. It makes you wonder—are 'the people' always right?

The hoary institutions of Indian democracy—the judiciary, the police, the 'free' press and, of course, elections—far from working as a system of checks and balances, quite often do the opposite. The courts have shown themselves to be more or less completely in the thrall of corporate interests. The media of course, owes more than 90% of its revenue to corporate advertising. On the whole these institutions provide each other cover to promote the larger interests of Union and Progress. In the process, they generate such confusion, such a cacophony, that voices raised in warning just become part of the noise. And that only helps to

enhance the image of the tolerant, lumbering, colourful, somewhat chaotic democracy. The chaos is real. But so is the consensus.

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Speaking of consensus, there's the ever-present matter of Kashmir. When it comes to Kashmir the consensus in India is hard-core. It cuts across every section of the establishment—including the media, the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia and even Bollywood. There is no time here for me to tell the story of Kashmir, the story of a tragedy that never seems to end. And yet to speak of India and not mention Kashmir is unforgivable, and, for me, impossible.

The struggle for freedom in Kashmir began in 1947, but the armed uprising began in 1989, twenty years ago. The conflict has claimed about seventy thousand lives. Tens of thousands have been tortured, several thousand have 'disappeared', women have been raped and many thousands widowed. More than half a million Indian troops patrol the Kashmir valley, making it the most militarized zone in the world. (The United States had about one hundred and sixty-five thousand active-duty troops in Iraq at the height of its occupation.) The Indian army now claims that it has, for the most part, crushed militancy in Kashmir. Perhaps that's true. But does military domination mean victory?

The trouble is that Kashmir sits on the fault lines of a region that is awash in weapons and sliding into chaos. The Kashmiri freedom struggle is caught in the vortex of several dangerous and conflicting ideologies—Indian Nationalism (corporate as well as 'Hindu', shading into imperialism), Pakistani Nationalism (breaking down under the burden of its own contradictions), US Imperialism (made impatient by a tanking economy), and a resurgent medieval-Islamist Taliban (fast gaining legitimacy, despite its insane brutality, because it is seen to be resisting a foreign occupation). Each of these ideologies is capable of a ruthlessness that can range from genocide to nuclear war. Add Chinese imperial ambitions, an aggressive, re-incarnated Russia, the huge reserves of natural gas in the Caspian region and persistent whispers about natural gas, oil and uranium reserves in Kashmir and Ladakh, and you have the recipe for a new Cold War (which, like the last one, is cold for some and hot for others).

Kashmir is set to become the conduit through which the mayhem unfolding in Afghanistan and Pakistan spills into India, where it will find purchase in the anger of the young among India's one hundred and fifty million Muslims who have been brutalized, humiliated and marginalized. Notice has been given by the series of terrorist strikes that culminated in the

Mumbai attacks of 2008.

India's temporary, shotgun solutions to the unrest in Kashmir (pardon the pun) have magnified the problem and driven it deep into a place where it is poisoning the aquifers.

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Perhaps the story of the Siachen Glacier, the highest battlefield in the world, is the most appropriate metaphor for the insanity of our times. Thousands of Indian and Pakistani soldiers have been deployed there, enduring chill winds and temperatures that dip to minus 40 Celsius. Of the hundreds who have died there, many have died just from the cold—from frostbite and sunburn. The glacier has become a garbage dump now, littered with the detritus of war, thousands of empty artillery shells, empty fuel drums, ice-axes, old boots, tents and every other kind of waste that thousands of warring human beings generate. The garbage remains intact, perfectly preserved at those icy temperatures, a pristine monument to human folly. While the Indian and Pakistani governments spend billions of dollars on weapons and the logistics of high altitude warfare, the battlefield has begun to melt. Right now, it has shrunk to about half its size. The melting has less to do with the military standoff than with people far away, on the other side of the world, living the good life. They're good people who believe in peace, free speech and human rights. They live in thriving democracies whose governments sit on the UN Security Council and whose economies depend heavily on the export of war and the sale of weapons to countries like India and Pakistan. (And Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, the Republic of Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan . . . it's a long list.) The glacial melt will cause severe floods in the subcontinent, and eventually severe drought that will affect the lives of millions of people.<sup>25</sup> That will give us even more reasons to fight. We'll need more weapons. Who knows, that sort of consumer confidence may be just what the world needs to get over the current recession. Then everyone in the thriving democracies will have an even better life—and the glaciers will melt even faster.

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While I delivered my lecture to a tense audience packed into a university auditorium in Istanbul (tense because words like *unity*, *progress*, *genocide* and *Armenian* tend to anger the Turkish authorities when they are uttered close together), I could see Raket Dink, Hrant Dink's widow, sitting in the front row, crying the whole way through. When I finished, she hugged me and said, 'We keep hoping. Why do we keep hoping?'

We, she said. Not you.

The words of the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, sung so hauntingly by Abida Parveen, came to me:

*nahin nigah main manzil to justaju hi sahi*

*nahin wisaal mayassar to arzu hi sahi*

I tried to translate them for her (sort of):

If dreams are thwarted, then yearning must take their place

If reunion is impossible, then longing must take its place

END

Arundhati Roy