As Kashmir seethes under clampdown by the Indian state apparatus for a complete month, it is imperative to look at the situation from the prism of India’s colonial history that demonstrates the continuation of the asymmetry of power. Of course, nothing paradigmatic has happened. The coloniality of power relations has always been the framework but the current move by the government brings it out in sharp relief.

This is similar to the politics of the British Crown and its Indian subjects. In the past four weeks, beginning August 5, the Indian state while postulating its ‘Grand Strategy’ has exhibited in clear terms, colonial imitation – consciously or unconsciously – in terms of rhetoric, strategy – primarily the procedure for quelling the impending rebellion, and lastly, the end result.

Prior to the imposition of curfew and pronouncements made in the Parliament regarding the abrogation of Article 370 that gave special status to the State of Jammu & Kashmir, the BJP-led Central government used diversion tactics by obfuscating the political rhetoric that was emerging out of Kashmir. The only available ‘information’ was of an impending cross-border terror attack. While this helped in creating an atmosphere of panic and instilling a sense of fear among the locals, it also furthered the larger political agenda of polarization – of divide and rule – the primary political tactic borrowed from the British.

Taking the following three instances or images that emerged early on, we see a clear overlap, which is the underlying discourse of coloniality.

First, during a session in the Rajya Sabha on August 5, 2019, the Minister of Home Affairs, Amit Shah, asserted, "Kashmir is Bharat’s Mukut-Mani" [Kashmir is India’s jewel in the crown]. It is a matter of
no coincidence that this language is strikingly similar to how India’s place in the great British Colonial Empire was portrayed – as the “brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown”.

Second, another significant plank for justifying this monumental move has been that of economic growth and progress of the region by opening up it for investments. This was the baseline of PM Narendra Modi’s speech to the nation. Not only is this circumspect on the reality that on several indicators economy of J&K is better than many other regions/states of India, but more significant is the implicit discourse of resource grabbing, beneath the veneer of charity and development. Notably, this led to a perversion of discourse – visible on social media platforms that were replete with claims that manifest a sense of entitlement among a section of Indian men in their most sexist remarks expressing their intentions of marrying Kashmiri girls and thus objectifying the women of the Valley.

In this vein, the comment made by former World Bank consultant Aneesa Draboo is more insightful. During a show in The Wire, on August 6, 2019, entitled, “Hum bhi hai Bharat” [We are also India], she said that this decision seems to have been taken for the ‘Other’. It is not only deplorable that the real stakeholders and people affected were completely kept in the dark but more problematic is that an entire discourse with its own reasonings and conclusions has been projected to help and support the very people who suffer.

Third, quite telling is this image that was shared on twitter which shows a document held by Minister of Home Affair, Amit Shah. It is a zoomed and cropped image which lists out the sort of “plan of action” of the government for abrogating Article 370. A fascinatingly narrow aspect of the image is a point which reads, “possibility of disobedience among uniformed personnel”. The closest parallel that we can draw is the plight of the Indian soldiers and officers in the British army, who were deployed in the Eastern theater during the Second World War. The feelings of purposelessness (in fighting for an estranged cause) and humiliation (in their treatment vis-a-vis British soldiers) are strikingly similar. Significantly, a soldier deployed in the Valley told a journalist who is covering the current situation in the Valley and is related to the scribe, “We can leave now but we are waiting for the command from the top.”

It is, thus, emphatically clear that the current move by the government has significant resemblances with the tools employed by the British Empire in putting an entire population under subjugation. The modus operandi of such a rule – measures, technicalities and tricks – that have been associated with colonial era continues to be the dominant and desirable strategy for a postcolonial state like India.

As Anibal Quijano, the pioneering scholar on the subject notes, “coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn’t exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples.” In other words, the template of, and the discourse around this blatant move is of the coloniality of power: The rhetoric of a people (and their resources) being described as prized possessions, the play of Otherization for the benefit of the said Other and the justifications of such action based on thin layers of technicalities devoid of deeper ethics.

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