

Fluid landscapes, sovereign nature: Conservation and counterinsurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir

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Abstract

This article analyzes how environmentalism reinscribed violent forms of state sovereignty in the disputed region of Kashmir in the aftermath of a decade-long uprising against Indian rule. After the return of an elected government, six years after its suspension in 1990, environmental restoration legitimized new forms of state and nature making in Kashmir. Nature rather than territory emerged as an arena of citizen activism, which further strengthened the state's ability to regulate the use and management of Kashmir's water resources. State and civic bodies deployed discourses of history and restoration to create new and imagined ecologies based on visions of nostalgia, commerce, and esthetics. By undermining place-based understandings of nature and ecology, discourses of environmental stewardship and conservation ended up fostering violent mechanisms of social and political control.

Keywords

Environment, Kashmir, conservation, activism, state power

Introduction

In 2000, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) spurred a popular movement to conserve the Dal Lake, a 12 km² water body located in Srinagar, the capital of the Indian-controlled state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The PIL was an urgent plea to mobilize the state's legal and juridical apparatus to curb extensive pollution and

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unchecked human encroachments on the Dal Lake. Integral to Kashmir's phantasmagoric representation as "paradise on earth" – a Mughal epithet widely used to reaffirm Kashmir's sublime and transcendent beauty – the Dal Lake quickly became the symbol of an emergent environmentalism in the region, one that shaped how nature came to be imagined as a site of governance, restoration, and nostalgia.

Yet, the extensive campaign to save the Dal, in which politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, NGOs, students, and government agencies participated actively, could barely hide the traumas of a violent decade. Since 1989, Kashmir had witnessed an armed rebellion for *azadi* or "freedom" from Indian dominion. Popular demands for *azadi* were countered by the Indian military's brutal regime of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, and other counterinsurgency tactics, which many argue established a "civic and legal state of exception" in Kashmir (Chatterji, 2010; Duschinski, 2010). In addition to Kashmiri populations, the military also extended its violent control over Kashmir's land and water bodies by establishing its defense installations in and around the Dal Lake and in strategic locations such as hilltops, meadows, and mountainsides. Notwithstanding the return of a democratically elected government to power in 1996 – with the National Conference (NC), Kashmir's oldest political party, at its helm – state and military-sponsored violence continued unabated in the years that followed. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, elections in Kashmir have failed to legitimately address aspirations for self-determination even though political elites in India and Kashmir have repeatedly used them to enforce a state-mandated normalcy (Staniland, 2013: 932). Most Kashmiris vote to ensure that their basic necessities for *bijli* (electricity), *pani* (water), and *sadak* (roads) are fulfilled (cf. Tremblay, 2009: 925), although in many instances, in particular during the 1996 elections, people were forcibly dragged out of their homes to vote. In no way, then, as Reeta Tremblay argues, should "electoral participation" be seen an "affirmation of Indian rule in Kashmir" (2009: 925).

Given the deep ambivalence of Kashmiris toward state entities, the PIL filed by a young Kashmiri law student in 2000 and endorsed by many other civic and student organizations, therefore represented a significant break from the ways in which Kashmiris had previously engaged with the institutions of the government and the judiciary. A vital tool of the civil justice system that allows Indian citizens to file direct legal petitions on matters related to "public interest," such as human rights, child labor, education, armed forces, and the environment, PILs have considerably strengthened juridical oversight over the conduct and performance of government agencies since the 1980s (Deva, 2009; Rajamani, 2007). For instance, as part of this juristic revolution, Indian courts could mandate "new principles to protect the environment" and "confer additional powers" on existing government bodies, directing them to act in the interests of the general public by ensuring speedier and efficient execution of environmental policies (Deva, 2009; Sahu, 2008: 377). Instead of rejecting institutional control over local lakes and resources and contesting an unpopular government in Kashmir thus, the PIL-initiated

movement to save the Dal Lake cemented the J&K government's expanding role in environmental stewardship and conservation.¹

This paper asks why most Kashmiris, otherwise so opposed to state hegemony, willingly subscribed to the new relations of rule and subordination that environmentalism engendered? Environmentalism, we argue, allowed for a different kind of state making in Kashmir, one that in addition to boots on the ground also deployed affective registers of desire and loss to mourn for a place once celebrated for its pristine land and waterscapes. In a context where the promise of democracy and rule of law had decidedly failed and the government was cognizant of its inability to rule through popular consent, narratives of environmental ruin enabled the newly elected government to reinvent its economic, moral, and sovereign orders. Even before the PIL was filed in 2000, the NC government had taken concerted steps to restore and conserve the Dal Lake to boost tourism as part of Kashmir's economic and political rehabilitation.² Soon after the NC's return to power in 1996, images and narratives of environmental dystopia became commonplace: from state sponsored billboards to regional newspapers to public debates, it was clear that the lake stood as a poignant yet powerful reminder of Kashmir's ruin and degradation.

By the time we arrived to conduct fieldwork in Kashmir in 2008, discourses of the lake's decline had worked up to a feverish pitch, with much of the blame attributed to Hanjis, a minority community of lake dwellers whose settlements on the Dal Lake were held responsible for the lake's shrinking water expanse. A diverse occupational group of farmers, houseboat owners, and fishermen that had lived for generations on and around the lake, Hanjis were the primary targets of violent governmental interventions that followed the filing of the PIL. To a large extent, Hanji caste, race, and occupational inferiority framed much of the public discourse around their evictions. Known variously as a separate "race/tribe" (Parashar, 2004: 90), "ethnic" group (Bhat and Mathur, 2011), or "caste" (Fazal and Amin, 2012: 513), Hanjis were seen and largely saw themselves as distinct from mainstream Kashmiri society. While some historic sources name Hanjis as the original inhabitants of Kashmir, colonial accounts describe them as expert boatmen who were either *Vaishyas* or Gypsies, and were brought to Kashmir from Sri Lanka by Raja Prabat Sen (Lawrence, 1895: 313; Parashar, 2004: 90). Although their ancient history remains contested, there is little doubt that the geographic and ecological conditions in the Kashmir Valley allowed for the development of extensive waterways for trade and transport in which Hanjis played an active part (Chapri, n.d.). By the 1970s, however, most of these waterways had been closed in order to develop infrastructure for motor transport in the rapidly urbanizing Srinagar city (Chapri, n.d.). As a result, the previously mobile Hanjis became increasingly confined to the Dal Lake and its shrinking parameters, reifying notions of what it meant to be a Hanji, an otherwise highly fluid category. Their residence on water, their dependence on water for livelihood purposes, as well as their lower caste status, thus, became especially significant markers of Hanji difference. These differences have made possible the objectification of the community

and the subsequent interventions against them, especially after 1996 when discourses of environmental restoration became commonplace in Kashmir. For instance, several environmentalists attributed the lake's decline to Hanji encroachments on the lake but also to their "vile and scheming" character that, according to them, had ruined and contaminated the lake's pristine waters. "We should use a broom and sweep them out of the lake," said one conservation enthusiast, a sentiment that was echoed by others who deployed colonial caricatures of Hanjis as "less respectable," "quarrelsome," and even "immoral" to frame Hanjis as the bearers of filth and disorder (cf. Moore et al., 2003: 21).³ Both the state government and environmental enthusiasts thus relied on fundamental incongruities between space and race to justify Hanji evictions and to sanction the violent remaking of Kashmir's ecology and environment in the post-election period.

For Hanjis, especially the farming community, or Zamindar Hanjis, who will be discussed at length in the latter portion of the essay, the government's attempts to recreate the Dal Lake as a "pure water body" disregarded the lake's complex ecology as well as Hanjis' overlapping livelihood and residential histories on it. Pointing to vast swathes of agricultural land and his 100-year-old ancestral house in the interiors of the Dal Lake, a Hanji lake dweller asked us, persuasively: "how could this house have existed on the lake if it had only been water?" Ongoing initiatives to conserve the lake were, in the Hanji view, guided by narrow political and economic interests that disregarded the lake's mixed ecology. Despite such contestations, however, images of Hanji encroachments circulated endlessly in the public sphere, authorizing violent Hanji evictions and reinforcing new ecological imaginaries of the lake as a *pure* water body.⁴

As this paper will show, the widespread desire to conserve Kashmir's natural resources was hardly innocuous. An unacknowledged effect of conservation was the steady expansion of the state's violent and authoritative powers over Kashmiri society and landscape. While Kashmiri activists and advocates of *azadi* who opposed the Indian occupation of Kashmir viewed other governance initiatives with deep distrust, conservation was perceived to be less contested, even apolitical. Indeed, after a decade of severe political and ideological schisms, many actors from the state and civil society were prepared to overlook their differences in order to save the Dal Lake, which to them was the pride and symbol of Kashmir. In other words, invocations of environmental crisis substantially transformed "seditious" Kashmiri citizens into environmental stewards.

To be clear, environmentalism did not quell "dissident" Kashmiris nor did it erase popular sentiments for *azadi* or freedom. Rather, projects of environmental reconstruction successfully aligned many Kashmiris with the government's agendas to normalize everyday life even as repressive regimes of violence and territorial control carved up spaces of exception on the Dal Lake. Such spaces of exception were not necessarily the "outcome of law's suspension or evisceration" but the work of "elaborate [legal and] regulatory efforts" (Fluer Johns, qtd in Gregory (2006: 412)) that stripped Hanjis of their political and residential rights on the lake. Despite their rejection of the state's counterinsurgency tactics that had killed

thousands of Kashmiris in less than two decades, the desire of many Kashmiris to salvage the Dal Lake reinstated and strengthened the government's violent control over the region's people and waterscapes.

In the following sections, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in 2008, 2009, and 2012 with Hanjis, conservation bureaucrats, civil society organizations, environmental enthusiasts, politicians, and lawyers, participant observation of citizen-rallies and of meetings between Hanjis and conservation bureaucrats, as well as discourse analysis of government documents and media, we show how restoring nature became the government's key strategy for exerting control in a disputed territory. We argue that representations of Hanjis as encroachers erased alternative readings of the lake's history and ecology along with sanctioning new forms of violence against them at a time when the government was using environmental restoration to create a semblance of peace and order in Kashmir.⁵ Our attention on Hanjis, in particular, is an effort to highlight enduring forms of violence in "postconflict" Kashmir – the way certain communities have been made to bear the burden of economic and political resuscitation – as well as to draw out alternative visions and histories of Kashmiri land and waterscapes. To this end, we argue for holding the violence of environmental state making in conflict zones – its ability to provide "logic to authoritarian environmental interventions" (Rademacher, 2008: 111) – in tension with the desire of many Kashmiris to preserve the region's natural resources amidst Kashmir's deep political turmoil.

Nature, counterinsurgencies, and environmental state making

Environmental state making is closely linked to what Michael Goldman refers to as "green neoliberalism," a set of policies pursued by the World Bank to create "new roles for state actors" as well as new forms of "legality and eco-rationality" that champion the use of natural resources to "integrate countries into the global [tourist] economy" (2005: 38–39). Other scholars have noted that environmental states work in conjunction with the imperatives of the free market to "conserve" and "reregulate nature through [diverse] forms of commodification" (Owley, 2012: 8). Therefore, contrary to popular understandings that treat it as a radical critique of "free market capitalism," conservation can be markedly aligned with the demands of transnational capital. Conservation policies have often restructured states or strengthened the market's role in determining resource use and access; they have also often created dualities between nature and culture by promoting fantastic perceptions of nature as wild, timeless, and pristine (Castree and Braun, 1998; Haraway, 1992, 2000; Hughes, 2006; Lansing, 1991; Wilson, 1991). Such fantasies can be more pronounced in contexts where the representation of ecological forms is already shaped by powerful imaginaries of stasis and timelessness. For instance, Ben Orlove (2002) shows how, as iconic symbols of "nature," lakes, as opposed to rivers and seas, are considered to be "prosaic" and undramatic (xii). Their static appearance as "single bounded [bodies] of water" hides their ephemeral character as well as their geologic mutability (Orlove, 2002: xxii). Lakes, more than

rivers or oceans, can thus act as perfect representations of timeless nature (Orlove, 2002: 41). They can embody an imagined cultural past and become sites for the nostalgic reinterpretations of nature and history.

Such fantastic productions in which human labor, history, and culture are cast aside to recreate nature as pristine or unspoiled are key characteristics of market-based discourses and practices of environmental conservation. Closely allied with neoliberal economic ventures, environmental conservation validates social and moral exclusions based on racial, class, occupational, national, and gendered difference (Kosek, 2006; Moore et al., 2003). Under the pretext of environmental stewardship and regeneration, conservation has been shown to legitimize the public erasure of undesired social difference and delegitimize land and water-use practices that do not fulfill “the needs of the economy” (Goldman, 2005: 184). South Africa’s transboundary ecotourism venture, for instance, provides one example where racial and class hierarchies were reinforced by conservationists who allowed white tourists to cross national boundaries while restricting the mobility of black peasants to small and bounded villages (Hughes, 2006).

Though conservation has been used as an explicit strategy of control and governance, and theorized as such, it is only recently that scholars have turned their attention to the political work of environmental state making in conflict zones. While burning forests or destroying a nation’s natural resources is an old wartime tactic, discourses of regeneration and conservation are also deployed either as counterinsurgency tactics against dissident populations or as nationalist tools to forge an eternal bond between nature, place, and citizenship (van Ettan et al., 2008). Conservation projects can tame spaces and subjects that are seen as threats to national imaginaries of territorial unity or sovereignty in politically unstable territories (Greenough, 2003; Rademacher, 2008; Tarlo, 2000). For instance, Peluso and Vandergeest argue that during the Cold War, conservation projects were particularly aimed at transforming jungles, long considered to be “theaters of insurgency,” into “political forests,” a process meant to align suspect and dangerous populations with the civilizing projects of citizenship and nation building (2011: 587). In the Indian context, as Mukul Sharma argues, radical Hindu conservationists trace environmental deterioration to the “abandonment of traditional Hindu values and technology” because of which conservation of a “truly Indian and [Hindu] landscape” is seen as critical to projects of “national unity and integration” (Sharma, 2002). Environmentalism in this instance, Sharma shows, serves as the pretext to forge an ultra-nationalist body politic founded on exclusionary and xenophobic ideals of *Hindutva* (see also Sharma, 2011). Environmental policies are therefore as much about reinventing nature as they are about legitimizing politically expedient ideologies in order to help consolidate fragile state formations.

Yet to focus exclusively on state-led interventions is to discount the role that emergent environmental subjectivities play in forging new social and environmental orders, especially amidst extreme forms of political violence and unrest. Everyday participation in environmental decision-making can powerfully shape citizen subjectivities and align them with the regulatory apparatus of the government,

producing, in turn, new environmental subjects who actively take on the task of caring for the environment (Agrawal, 2005). Environment-related discourses and institutions shape conceptualizations of identity and citizenship, a process Arun Agrawal (2005) identifies as “environmentality.” Affective tropes of nostalgia and desire for an idealized nature are particularly effective in “instilling new forms of environmental conduct” in populations and making them receptive to stringent forms of governmental control (Darier, 1996: 585). Anthropologists attentive to the workings of environmental state building in conflict zones but also to the subtle albeit contested transformations of subjectivities that environmentalism fosters must therefore ask: what forms of surveillance and violence might the conjunctures between popular environmental activism and repressive ecological orders engender and legitimize? To what extent does citizen-led environmentalism validate the state’s inviolable control over contested spaces and resources, and to what extent does it exceed state logic? And, how might narratives of postconflict peace and recovery obscure the violent projects of ecological restoration and environmental state making?

Recreating paradise: Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) and the politics of environmental state making

Bureaucratic interventions to “save the Dal” started as early as the 1970s when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the chief minister of Kashmir, instituted numerous measures to prevent human encroachments on the lake. The first such intervention, called the Dal Development Project, was designed to facilitate vehicular traffic around the lake and create a promenade for recreational and commercial purposes (Chaku, 1990). From its inception in the 1970s, the Dal Lake’s conservation was deeply contested, mostly by Hanjis who bore the brunt of such efforts. For instance, infrastructural and urban development projects carried out in the name of conservation led to the eviction of at least 2600 Hanji households from the Dal Lake in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁶ Hanjis, who were already excluded from Kashmir’s social and political mainstream, were especially critical of Sheikh Abdullah’s decision to construct foreshore roads that encouraged hotels and other businesses to mushroom along the lakeshore. Hanjis claimed that Sheikh Abdullah’s efforts established the precedent for a differentiated legality in Kashmir, mostly along ethnic and occupational lines.⁷

Conservation policies at the local level were hard to contest, however, since they were the outcome of a growing emphasis on international environmentalism as well as good governance initiatives of the World Bank in the 1970s and 1980s: with money from multilateral institutions pouring into India for environmental and conservation projects, state governments across the country enhanced their “efficiency” and institutional capacities by forging connections with private and public sectors. By the 1980s, new alliances emerged in Kashmir and beyond between formal spheres of government (the executive, legislature, judiciary), NGOs, and

other civil and commercial bodies such as local banks and corporations to collaborate on projects of environmental or biodiversity conservation. Several redundant state departments were either dissolved or restructured to create new “administrative units or agencies” called Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) that were entrusted with managing and conserving lakes and wetlands across the country. One such SPV, called the LAWDA, was established in Kashmir in 1997, not long after the 1996 elections. LAWDA was set up to consolidate and centralize disparate conservation-based initiatives of the state government and align the lake’s conservation with ongoing environmental and conservation projects in India (Reddy and Char, 2006: 232).

Soon after its formation, LAWDA took immediate steps to “save the Lake”: it removed

weeds from the interiors of the lake on [a] war footing basis; it built pavements and parapet walls around the Dal Lake; it procured top-of-the-line machinery to extend and deepen the lake’s water expanse; and it ensured that “pollution levels in different portions of the water body [were frequently] assessed.”⁸

LAWDA was also vested with sweeping powers to evict Hanjis, demolish their homes, and prevent Hanji farmers, or, *zamindars*, from indiscriminately converting portions of the lake into cultivable *raads* or floating gardens. An obvious outcome of LAWDA’s wide-ranging interventions in the post-election period was that Kashmir’s water bodies came under the strict purview of the newly established NC government.

In a sense, LAWDA’s mandate was to reinvent Kashmir once again as an idyllic space of spectacular land and waterscapes so that it could revive the tourist industry after a violent and prolonged insurgency. Such a mandate was strictly in line with the Indian directive to proclaim the defeat of Kashmir’s armed resistance and recast Kashmir as peaceful and nonviolent even as a repressive military apparatus continued to silence popular dissent against the Indian state. Although Kashmiris rightly criticized Indian maneuvers (both violent and nonviolent) to suppress widespread aspirations and struggles for *azadi*, they hardly ever rejected perceptions of Kashmir as “idyllic nature” or as a “near perfect environment” with its “dense forests, snow covered mountains, and beautiful valleys.” Indeed, their affective ties to their land and waterscapes fostered a new environmental consciousness among Kashmiris, which eventually resulted in the civil society movement in the 1990s to “Save the Dal.” In addition to government agencies devoted to the task of conservation, NGOs like HOPE and Global Green Peace also worked collaboratively with LAWDA to manage and treat the solid waste generated inside the lake through human activities. Various schools, colleges, and other civic organizations in the city organized rallies to highlight the continued ruin of the lake. In one such rally organized by a local kindergarten in collaboration with Aircel, an Indian mobile network operator, young kids marched on with their placards urging people to “stop polluting the lake” in order to save Kashmir’s beautiful heritage.

No longer a “matter of intuitive feeling,” the Dal Lake’s conservation, it was clear, had become a “wide ranging social [and political] program” (Guha, 2006: 6; also see Paehlke, 1995) in which a diverse set of actors, from citizen activists, ecological experts, and civic and government bodies to banks and corporations, collaborated to conserve and extend the Dal Lake’s shrinking water expanse. In what can arguably be called the birth of environmentalism in Kashmir – a movement that combined wider concerns over pollution, urban decay, and Hanji encroachments with more narrowly defined goals of conserving and extending the Dal Lake’s water expanse – environmental enthusiasts rarely opposed the state’s predatory control over the lake. Instead, they furthered it by unanimously rejecting Hanji perceptions of history, ecology, and the environment.⁹ In the next section, we explore how citizen initiatives to save the lake reinforced the state’s regulatory powers over recalcitrant people and territory while fostering deeply violent modes of exclusion and social control.

Azadi versus environmentalism, territory versus nature

By 2000, only three years after its formation, LAWDA came under intense public scrutiny for its dismal progress to stem encroachments, curb pollution, and restore the Dal Lake’s water expanse. Civic bodies blamed LAWDA officials for misappropriating government funds in the name of conservation and filed a charge sheet against the organization, leading to fifty official suspensions in a year. Predictably, LAWDA lost considerable legitimacy and was widely derided as the “Lakes and Waterways Destruction Agency.” LAWDA’s failure to curb Hanji encroachments was critiqued in several public forums. For instance, a play entitled “April Fool,” one of the many public media that deployed the discourse of citizen responsibility to save the Dal, used strands of humor and sarcasm to conjure a scenario where the waters of the Dal had completely dried up and the government was issuing permits for the construction of a residential colony. Greedy and self-interested individuals, including government officials and Dal residents, were shown investing in real estate to claim a portion of the Dal Lake with an utter disregard for the fate of the environment. Such public portrayals of LAWDA’s mismanagement were common and reflected many Kashmiris’ suspicion of top LAWDA officials as corrupt individuals who were unmoved by the Dal Lake’s deterioration.

Disheartened, civic bodies, including NGOs, student bodies, and individual citizens in 2000 petitioned the Srinagar High Court, using the instrument of “public interest petitions” to seek the court’s legal oversight over LAWDA’s lax and unsatisfactory policies. The PIL asserted that the lake was an integral element of “people’s common heritage” and that the judiciary should play an important part in its restoration. Many environmental activists argued that in a region that had long suffered from ineffective governance due to protracted conflict, “only the court could play an effective role to salvage the Dal.”¹⁰ In a series of legal directives that brought the Dal Lake under the High Court’s strict juridical gaze, LAWDA was instructed to “speed up their conservation measures,” to ensure that

Hanji demolitions were successfully undertaken, and to prevent Zamindar Hanjis from converting large portions of water into *raads* or floating gardens.¹¹ Instead of weakening LAWDA, the court's involvement in environmental conservation further secured LAWDA's "trusteeship" (Rajamani, 2007) and regulatory powers over the region's water resources.

In a context where calls for *azadi* (freedom) from India had dominated political life for over two decades, a legal petition seeking the court's active involvement in conservation seemed all too paradoxical: not only had the central and the state governments vehemently opposed Kashmiri demands for independence from Indian rule, but the space for civil society had also been severely curtailed.¹² Some in the media therefore considered the PIL to be the "first instance" when Kashmiris had truly exercised their constitutional right by demanding the court's urgent involvement in environmental stewardship and governance.¹³

The civic and legal activism to "save the lake" can be read as the widespread desire of Kashmiris to stake claims to their land and waterscapes in a context where the Indian military's occupation is experienced through strategies of spatial and territorial domination (Bhan, 2014a, 2014b; Junaid, 2013; Visweswaran, 2013). Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013) has suggested precisely such a reading of the Kashmir Bicycle Movement (KBM), a Facebook group initiated in the summer of 2013 that encouraged Kashmiris to bike instead of ride cars, both to demonstrate their responsibility toward nature but also to rethink *azadi* by regaining access to alleys and pathways occupied predominantly by the Indian military. As Kabir notes, the cycle, known in the local vernacular as *zalgur*, came to stand in for an embodied practice of reclaiming space in a militarized zone, a "part of Kashmiri resistance to the [army] convoy and the larger machinery of which it is part" (2013). Though critical of the nostalgia that permeates popular representations of Kashmir, Kabir makes the case for environmentalism's radical potential to resist "the Indian occupation of both Kashmiri mind and territory" (2013).

The activism around the Dal Lake certainly shared some traits with the KBM, including, as we expand upon below, being seen as one of the few spaces of civic activism available to Kashmiris. Yet in deploying the legal apparatus of the PIL, civic activism strengthened state-centered interventions to save the Dal Lake instead of offering a radical re-reading of Kashmiri land and waterscapes based on competing Hanji claims to the lake and its diverse ecology. Indeed, by mobilizing people's deep-seated attachments to the lake, the citizen-initiated PIL endorsed the government's extensive juridical powers over Kashmiri resources and territory. Some in the government and media saw the PIL as proof that Kashmiris had given up their dissident politics and were willing to collaborate with the government on issues of urgent concern. Indeed, "the proactive pursuit of the case by HC (High Court)," they argued, had "turned the Dal's restoration into Kashmir's most popular issue outside its treacherous politics and spawned a dedicated government-civil society conservation effort."¹⁴

Despite its widespread popularity, environmental activism in Kashmir was not uncontested. At least in its early years, many Kashmiri leaders and human rights

groups perceived environmental activism as a threat to the popular movement for azadi or freedom from India. After several years of persistent struggle, pro-azadi organizations and civil society NGOs had successfully politicized the Indian government's unequivocal claims over Kashmir. For these groups, environmentalism severely compromised the demands for azadi that had dominated Kashmiri politics in the 1990s. Writing passionately in newspapers and public forums, many of these groups claimed that "talking about environment and ecology in times of turmoil was like talking taboo at prayer. As long as there were human rights violations, there could be no talk of heritage or conservation."¹⁵ Indeed, according to a popular newsletter devoted to environmental issues, several pro-azadi organizations had threatened the founding member of Green Kashmir, the first environmental NGO in Kashmir, because environmentalism had "divert[ed] people's attention from the azadi movement to non-issues" and undermined popular mobilization against the continued brutality of a military occupation.¹⁶

Many young environmental activists, however, were deeply motivated to "save the lake" and firmly believed that while "azadi could wait, the Dal could not."¹⁷ What troubled them most was the "total apathy of azadi" leaders toward the health of Kashmir's invaluable treasures.¹⁸ They posed direct, often provocative questions, in blogs and newspaper articles: "If [pro-azadi leaders] could move millions for marching to achieve "azadi," why, they asked, had [these leaders] failed to mobilize "Kashmiris to save the Dal Lake, the very heart of Kashmir?" Saving the Dal to them was, after all, "half way to getting "azadi!"¹⁹

Among several key environmental activists who were at the forefront to "save the Dal" in the 1990s were young men like Aftab Qadri, a young social scientist who had spent a considerable amount of time in the southern Indian city of Bangalore during the peak of the armed resistance in Kashmir.²⁰ When he returned home in the late 1990s, the extreme violence of previous years had abated and it was time, he recalled, to "view Kashmiri politics in more productive ways." Qadri, along with some of his like-minded peers, decided to join Green Kashmir. For Qadri, environmental activism was not meant to dislodge questions of azadi. Kashmir was not, in his words, an "empty signifier," an empty space, but indeed a "thriving body of land and waterscapes that needed to be conserved for azadi to remain meaningful." Rather than distract from azadi, a focus on environmental conservation was meant to add, he explained, "body to Kashmiri claims for freedom or independence."

Unlike many of his peers, however, who seemed overwhelmingly focused on the Dal Lake's conservation, Qadri was not oblivious to the political work of environmentalism in Kashmir. In a deeply self-reflective moment, many years after his time as an environmental activist, he expressed to us the reasons why pro-azadi leaders might have been skeptical of environmental movements in the early 1990s. For the social or political movement of azadi to succeed, he argued, Kashmiris were rightly invested in highlighting their ongoing occupation by the Indian state: "If you give the impression that life can thrive under a military occupation, that people can focus on their surroundings, their environment, you are relegating the

freedom struggle to the background; you are marginalizing the struggle for Kashmir's azadi."

Notwithstanding Qadri's complex understandings of environmentalism and the initial contestations around its meanings and practice, Kashmiris had cast aside such debates by the time we began our fieldwork in 2008. Narratives of ruin and degradation had infused the public discourse with a newfound urgency in Kashmir, an urgency that many unanimously agreed needed as much public attention as the political movement for azadi. Thus, while demands of azadi were not absent, narratives of environmental crisis took center stage, with the Dal Lake becoming the rallying point for Kashmir's legal and popular activism. For example, during the summer of 2008 as widespread protest rallies for azadi once again gained momentum after several years of "relative calm" or forced peace in the Valley, we were invited to a round-table discussion at Kashmir University where a group of activists, bureaucrats, and scholars fiercely debated the causes of the lake's decline. At the meeting, the Vice Chancellor instructed several university departments to focus on the legal, ecological, and geological aspects of the lake's conservation so that academic efforts could complement LAWDA's ongoing efforts to save the lake. Indeed, even pro-azadi activists and leaders who had previously rejected environmentalism as a deliberate ploy to wean people away from the freedom movement for Kashmir were embarrassed by their apathy towards the Dal Lake's rapid deterioration. By the time of our fieldwork, they, too, had openly expressed their support for NGOs like Green Kashmir and become its active members.²¹

New environmental subjectivities of caring for and protecting Kashmir's natural resources were apparent as citizens not only acquiesced to the state's regulatory efforts but also called for a reassessment of Kashmiri politics based on the need to conserve pristine land and waterscapes. For instance, in a context where elections were often boycotted to challenge India's rule, an environmentalist writing in a local newspaper urged dissident citizens "to fight elections not on political issues but on environmental considerations."²² He asked activists who feared that participation in Indian-held elections could delegitimize the prolonged struggle for Kashmir's azadi from India to shun their ideological differences and join the political fray. For him, the Dal Lake's conservation needed "politicization of a different kind," one that would allow multiple interest groups including state bodies and pro-azadi organizations to unite in their efforts to "preserve Kashmir's environment."²³

The Dal Lake's conservation, it was clear, provided a depoliticized space for citizen activism, a kind that worked in conjunction with the state rather than against it (cf. Ferguson, 1994). Reframing the Dal Lake's conservation as a common goal was meant to encourage dissident citizens to participate in the electoral process even as they remained ideologically opposed to Indian claims over Kashmir. Environmental activism therefore produced a new kind of a citizen-subject in Kashmir, one who remained skeptical of the institutional workings of Indian law and democracy but was thoroughly, if unwittingly, allied with the government's violent interventions in the name of environmental restoration. Inspired

by images and narratives of the lake's ruin, nature became a new arena of struggle in Kashmir, a shift that markedly shaped people's political subjectivities and reflected their growing preoccupation with ideologies of nature care and environmental stewardship.

Yet, as the next section argues, environmentalism marked the inception of a socially differentiated relationality to nature: "aspiration[s] for a better environment" (Razzaque, 2004: 1) were common among the city's educated middle and upper classes and represented what Amita Baviskar (2002) aptly refers to as "bourgeois environmentalism," a sensibility that conflicted with Hanjis' residential and livelihood claims on the Dal Lake. Along with reinforcing divisions of class and location, conservation also reaffirmed entrenched racial and occupational divisions between Hanjis and non-Hanjis, constituting a dramatically new and altered terrain of identity politics and difference.

Bourgeois environmentalism and "Hanji encroachments"

Popular environmental activism in India, many argue, has sanctioned an institutionalized assault on poverty and social justice given that demands for a "wholesome environment" often compete with coexisting claims of marginal populations to use the environment for housing or livelihood (Baviskar, 2002; Véron, 2006). The emergence of PILs in the 1980s exemplified shifting middle class sensibilities and subjectivities around nature as legal and juridical institutions endorsed projects of conservation and beautification, often at the peril of marginal populations. In Kashmir, too, PILs became a tool to refashion the lake into an aesthetic space devoid of cluttered hutments and poverty, seen as the telltale signs of the city's decline from a high-end tourist destination to a haven for Hanji squatters. Unlike Hanjis who lived in persistent fear of High Court authorized demolitions, most non-Hanji hoteliers and wealthy businessmen enjoyed a degree of impunity despite building massive tourist infrastructure inside the Dal Lake and in its surrounding catchment areas. Environmental restoration could be successful as a strategy of government only to the extent that it did not alienate hoteliers who were considered important stakeholders in Kashmir's tourist industry and its postinsurgency economic revival. Ongoing initiatives to save the lake were thus predominantly shaped by what Igoe and Fortwangler (2007) identify as commodified nature, a speculative vision of the lake based on its potential as a pure water body, at once an aesthetic and political maneuver to reinvent the lake as a site of desire, revenue, and normalcy.²⁴

Although tourism legitimized the government's spurious claims about "peace" and "normalcy" in Kashmir, a fact many conservationists and activists critical of Indian rule acknowledged, their unquestioned commitment to "save the Lake" complemented LAWDA's ongoing efforts to rid the lake of Hanjis and to reestablish it as a "favorite tourist destination."²⁵ Such a vision, however, had to contend with Hanjis' legal claims to portions of land and water even as their property rights were repeatedly discredited: administrative delays made it difficult for Hanjis to

receive compensation for their land and water and Hanjis were called derogatory names such as squatters or encroachers to invalidate their legal and historic rights to the lake. While not every Hanji was a “legal” dweller, many Hanjis owned portions of the lake based on property rights formalized through Sir Walter Lawrence’s Land Settlement Act in the 19th century. Indeed, portions of the lake could be sold or purchased as recently as 1974 when Sheikh Abdullah issued a moratorium on such transactions to prevent further settlements on the lake. Despite institutional sanctions, the sale and purchase of lake property (including houses, land, and water) continued unabated until 1986. Finally, in 1986 a census survey of Hanji households was conducted to assess the nature and extent of Hanji settlements and to devise plans for their rehabilitation. According to a senior LAWDA official, the survey was so “liberal” that it legalized all forms of settlements on the lake – from “Hanji houses to their cowsheds.”

Soon after the onset of the armed rebellion in 1989, Kashmir was immediately brought under the Indian government’s direct governance through the imposition of Governor’s Rule. Due to unprecedented levels of violence and unrest in the state, the Dal Lake’s conservation was sidelined between 1989 and 1996 and Hanji rehabilitation as well as broader issues of environmental conservation received no governmental or civic attention. Consequently, when the NC government constituted LAWDA in 1997 to oversee the Dal Lake’s conservation, there were many Hanji families or household members whose names did not appear in the 1986 survey. But rather than treat their population growth as a social fact or a human right, LAWDA regarded many Hanji families as encroachers and denied them the benefits of government compensation or rehabilitation. Indeed, in the absence of any credible evidence that the average size of a Hanji household was significantly different from the prevalent average in the state, LAWDA officials deployed highly racialized discourses of population explosion to vilify Hanjis.²⁶

Even Hanji households entitled to government-sponsored rehabilitation on the basis of the “liberal” survey of 1986 received no funding from the central or state governments. Instead, funds received from the central government were earmarked primarily for land acquisitions or for technical projects that included building watershed development and sewage treatment plants or dredging and de-weeding the lake to increase its water expanse.²⁷ A senior LAWDA official told us that despite their best efforts, the Jammu and Kashmir state government had been unable to secure adequate funding for Hanji resettlements. The separation of rehabilitation from land acquisition reflected a deep-seated apathy for Hanjis who were deemed expendable within narrowly conceived frameworks of conservation and resource management. And, yet, urgent Hanji evictions were considered a critical first step to reinvigorate Kashmir’s tourist industry and restore order and stability in the region.

For instance, according to the Detailed Project Report for the Conservation and Management of Dal-Nagin Lakes:

No trauma could be more painful for a person and members of his family than to get uprooted from a place where they have lived for generations and to move to a place

where he may be a total stranger. Yet if the uprooting has to be done for the conservation of the lake and restoration of its health which holds promise of progress and prosperity for the people of JK, the uprooted people have to be made to undergo hardship and distress and face an uncertain economic and social future.²⁸

Despite the “traumas” of losing their homes and livelihoods, Hanji evictions were cast as ethical, even necessary, for the Dal Lake’s revival and conservation and for the larger public good, especially at a time of ongoing political turmoil. Hanji evictions also fit wider agendas that surpassed the goals of conservation: forced evictions indicated the existence of a robust government in Kashmir, one that controlled the city’s natural resources and was determined to harness them for Kashmir’s overall peace and economic reconstruction. A parliamentary standing committee report noted that “conservation of the Dal [needed to be] viewed more in terms of economic augmentation so peace [could be restored] in the valley.”²⁹ It was clear that restarting Kashmir’s tourist economy and generating new sources of employment was critical for legitimizing a sense of normalcy in the region and keeping “Kashmiri youth away from subversive activities.”³⁰ And, given its iconic status in Kashmir’s tourist industry, the Dal Lake, more than any other tourist site in Kashmir, was to play a critical role in realizing the vision of Kashmir’s postconflict healing and recovery.

Needless to say, Hanjis were hurdles to the vision of an environmental utopia that the government actively pursued to revive Kashmir’s “postconflict” economy. Hanjis threatened the already elusive promise of peace, normalcy, “progress and prosperity” as well as a “more stable future” for Kashmir.³¹ The remaking of the Dal Lake as Kashmir’s “prime tourist destination” and that of Hanjis as predators or encroachers transformed the lake into an intensely policed zone, one where force or violence could be deployed in the name of public interest and where the violation of Hanji political and human rights continued unabated.

The sound of a roaring motorboat in which LAWDA officials arrived with local police squads announced new forms of authoritarian power that Hanjis found difficult to contest. Hanji resistance to these evictions was invariably countered with massive violence; their rations, clothes, and belongings were thrown into the lake and they were castigated publicly for their intrinsic greed and ignorance. LAWDA could arrest Hanjis if they defied the court’s strict regulations against illegal constructions or if they were caught transporting construction materials into the lake. Indeed, the government’s violence toward Hanjis was not limited to depriving them of their homes and livelihoods.

Even when they were not violently evicted, Hanji activities were closely monitored through explicit instruments of surveillance and control. For instance, in 2007 the High Court in Kashmir ordered LAWDA to cut down 400,000 trees so that the lake could “breathe easy.”³² Felled trees were never removed from the lake, an oversight that worsened its overall condition. However, several Hanjis we spoke with claimed that the LAWDA’s intent was never to save the Lake: trees were felled to remove “camouflage for thousands of unauthorized Hanji”

settlements on the Dal Lake.³³ LAWDA deployed local vigilantes from among Hanjis, who acted as informers and constantly monitored the lake for illegal Hanji settlements or constructions. Hanjis derisively referred to these informers as “touts” and lamented how their complicity with government driven evictions and demolitions had considerably weakened inter-community ties, making the state’s coercive power that much more insidious and powerful.

Despite the fear of violent reprisals by LAWDA, Hanjis did not passively accept characterizations that undermined their identities or threatened to deprive them of their homes and livelihoods; instead, they offered alternative ecological histories of the lake that destabilized fantastic perceptions of the lake as a pure water body.

Hanji multiscapes

In our conversations, Hanjis foregrounded their occupational and livelihood histories on the Dal Lake in order to oppose the government’s plan to restore the lake by extending its water expanse, which had allegedly shrunk from 25 to 12 km² in the past decade due to “unchecked Hanji encroachments.” As noted earlier, Hanjis were an occupationally diverse community who were tied to the lake in disparate, yet intersecting, ways: Houseboat owners, the upwardly mobile who had successfully embedded themselves into the tourist economy by offering their luxury boats to domestic and foreign tourists; *doonga* owners, who did not own such boats, but ferried local travelers and tourists; and lastly, the zamindars, who will be the focus of the remainder of this paper, were an occupational group of farmers that cultivated vegetables on the floating gardens (*raadhs*) inside the lake, contributing at least 70% of their produce to local and regional markets.³⁴ Given their occupational and residential histories, Zamindar Hanjis were the most vocal in questioning the official conceptualization of the lake as a pure water body. They countered official narratives of the lake’s shrinkage and encroachments by offering a radical rereading of the lake’s history and ecology.

For Zamindar Hanjis who had farmed and lived on the Dal Lake for centuries, the lake had historically existed as a *combination* of water and landmass, perceptions that undermined its official imaginary as a pure water body.³⁵ Most Zamindar Hanji families we spoke with traced their settlements on the Dal Lake to the 16th century, following their persecution by the Mughals and Pathans on sectarian grounds.³⁶ Since the waters of the Dal Lake provided a natural buffer against their enemies, Zamindar Hanjis settled on landmasses inside the lake that they then cultivated. A brochure of the Zamindari Union, for example, declared unequivocally: “The Dal Lake has at no time in history been a complete water-surface in its nascent form, but a combination of water surface and landmass.” Citing Sir Walter Lawrence’s settlement report from 1895, the brochure claimed, “of the Dal’s 25 square kilometer expanse, only 7.30 square kilometers were watery surface and floating gardens; the remaining 17.7 square kilometers was comprised of fixed arable land.”³⁷

Contrary to prevailing policies, which conserved water over landmass, the ecological history of the Dal Lake was therefore far more complex than popular and official representations of it as “a clear water body with gently waving submerged vegetation.”³⁸ The multiplicity of ecological forms on the lake confounded state officials as well conservationists whose restoration efforts were driven by the aesthetics of the Dal as a “pure water body.” Fluid landscapes such as floating gardens or *raads* defied strict categorizations of nature and forced conservationists to confront the lake’s hybrid ecologies. From being considered a “unique feature” of the lake and showcased as a tourist attraction in the 1950s (Kohli, 1952), many conservationists blamed *raads* for “desiccating” the lake and for transforming it into a “claustrophobic land mass.”³⁹ In addition to floating gardens, there were portions of solid landmass inside the lake, used predominantly for the construction of houses, schools, shops, and mosques. Treated both by conservationists and LAWDA officials as “unnatural” aspects of the lake’s ecology, Zamindar Hanjis were once again blamed for converting temporary floating gardens into extensive and permanent landmasses. Yet, for Zamindar Hanjis, if anything was unnatural, it was the lake’s increasing water expanse due to increased government interventions. According to Ghulam Hassan, the leader of the Zamindar Union, who spoke to us inside his ancestral home on the Dal Lake:

Most of the Dal was a paddyland other than some water bodies interspersed in between. Because of natural factors and state interventions like construction of gates to contain water, the paddyland gradually submerged. The misconception is that we have encroached upon the lake, but my ancestors have been here for centuries. Their graves are on this lake too. How could we have constructed houses on marshy lands?

As conservationists and bureaucrats reinvented the Dal Lake, Hanjis, too, invoked multiple ecological histories of the lake to both resist singular interpretations of nature and reposition themselves as the rightful stewards of the lake. Differing historical conceptualizations of the lake thus were not merely symbolic struggles to define the lake as land or as water. Evictions effaced Zamindar Hanjis’ right of habitation on the lake and stripped them of their symbolic and material identities as agriculturalists. Therefore, Zamindar Hanjis deplored LAWDA’s stubborn vision of conservation that rejected the lake’s multiple ecological histories. Their question “to which historical position should the Dal be restored to?” forcefully challenged mythic perceptions of the Dal Lake as a pure and timeless water body while exposing the violent foundations of environmental state making in Kashmir.

Taking politics out of conservation

We have shown how conservation initiatives to “save the Dal Lake” erased the lake’s complex ecological and social histories through a series of sustained

discursive, ideological, and policy maneuvers that conjured an imagined waterscape while fostering insidious forms of social and political control. The reimagining of the Dal Lake as a “pure water body” began at what Ybarra calls a “conjunctural moment,” a moment where electoral democracy was being reinstated even as demands for *azadi* or freedom continued to animate the wider body politic (2011: 2). Thus, a critical task of the newly elected government in 1996 was to secure its legitimacy and subvert the popular movement for *azadi*. Conservation, we have argued, represented the government’s attempt to deflect the politics of freedom or independent statehood and to depoliticize its authoritarian powers over recalcitrant people through projects of environmental renewal and restoration. An important part of the state-sponsored environmental restoration plan was to reestablish Kashmir as a global tourist destination and create new avenues for economic growth so widespread aspirations for *azadi* or freedom from India could be managed or contained.⁴⁰

Given the specificities of their occupational and residential histories on the lake, Hanjis, we argued in the paper, bore the costs of the state’s environmental restoration efforts, in particular those that related to conserving the Dal Lake. Despite their critical stance toward the government and its persistent attempts to ignore Kashmir’s disputed territorial status, many environmental activists complemented LAWDA’s efforts to evict the lake’s Hanji inhabitants, disproportionately blaming the community for the lake’s decline instead of politicizing other forms of military and nonmilitary encroachments in and around the lake.

The scapegoating of Hanjis, we have shown, was based on a racialized logic in which both state and civic bodies saw Hanjis as impediments to the lake’s long-term health and renewal, an urgency that created unprecedented alliances between the state, judiciary, and the civil society in Kashmir. Citizen-led environmentalism and its ideological construction of nature as “wild” and “pristine” blamed the Dal Lake’s ruin on communities that were considered “naturally” inferior. Ideologies of race and nature alongside the political economy of “postconflict” development and restoration therefore worked together to sanction the state’s use of targeted violence against Hanjis. To the extent that state and civil actors worked simultaneously (and sometimes collaboratively) to save the lake, the environment became a depoliticized space for civic activism, the only kind that did not overtly challenge the government’s authoritative and violent powers in Kashmir. Indeed, Kashmiri demands to involve the High Court in the lake’s renewal reinstated the government’s control in a space gripped by radical forms of antigovernment politics. Instead of offering an alternative view of the lake’s history or ecology, citizen-led PILs reinforced the state’s regulatory control over the Dal Lake and sanctioned repressive ecological orders in which violence against Hanjis was thoroughly normalized.

For their part, Hanjis resisted depictions of the lake as a “pure water body” based on their complex labor histories as well as their intimate relationships with the lake’s diverse ecologies. The lake was a source of identity and survival for the Hanjis, a product of diverse social, political, and occupational histories that defied

its strict evaluations as wild and pristine. Their resistance, however, failed to alter hegemonic perceptions of the lake's ecology or to stop efforts to conserve *only* the water surface of the lake for which Hanji evictions were considered a critical first step. Hanjis therefore became instrumental in rebuilding the state's political machine in Kashmir: they were vectors through which a postconflict vision of order, stability, and restoration was consolidated. To an extent, the issue of the lake's conservation was secondary; what mattered more was that Hanji vilification in public life allowed the government to continually strengthen its claims to moral and political legitimacy at a time of profound upheaval and political anxiety. And, despite their opposition to state-sponsored violence that had devastated thousands of lives in the past decade, Kashmiris rarely contested new regimes of violence that the government was simultaneously instituting in the name of conservation. Environmental protection, it seemed, was considered a moral pursuit for which Kashmiris were far more willing to accede to the state's totalizing powers.

Some of the acceptance of the state's power over the environment has waned through recent developments. The devastating floods of September 2014, for example, brought into stark relief the link between Kashmir's ecological deterioration and state-sponsored development and militarization in the region (Kanth and Ghosh, 2015).⁴¹ Much of the commentary about the floods in media and popular accounts acknowledged that illegal encroachments of critical wetlands through unchecked urbanization, militarization, and development had severely limited their capacity to absorb excess water, causing the unprecedented environmental disaster that destroyed many Kashmiri homes and businesses. Despite the critical stance against the state's management of Kashmir's rivers and water bodies, the discourse around Hanjis "encroachments" also intensified, with many in the state and civil society blaming the community for the disaster. Indeed, soon after the floods, Mr Krishnamurthy, the director of Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, in an interview to *The Hindu*, attributed the devastating floods of September 2014 to "illegal occupations on the Dal Lake." In a context where the term "encroachment" has primarily been used for Hanji settlements on the lake, it should come as no surprise that in the aftermath of the flood, LAWDA officials prevented many Hanji households from repairing or reconstructing their flood-ravaged homes inside the lake. With no rehabilitation plans underway and no permission to rebuild their homes after the floods, many Dal dwellers, a journalist aptly remarked, were "left in a no man's land."⁴²

Since 1989, Kashmir's image as a precious piece of territory, despoiled by the incessant violence of the past two decades, has incited tremendous outrage among Indians. Kashmiris, however, consider India's fetish with Kashmir as a continued obsession with its territory, which explains India's unwillingness to acknowledge widespread Kashmiri political aspirations for *azadi* or freedom. And yet, just as India's insistence on Kashmir as an "integral" part of the nation has undermined alternative imaginings of Kashmiri territory and nationhood, so too did the Dal's iconicity prevent conservationists from acknowledging histories of the lake that challenged its constructions as a "pure water body."

As this paper has attempted to demonstrate, the impulse among conservationists and environmental enthusiasts to conserve the Dal Lake must be situated within the context of years of militarized violence and cross-border warfare that has destroyed Kashmir's land and waterscapes. An NGO worker spoke of Kashmir's environmentalism in the following terms: "It is strange that we seem to be holding on to the Dal Lake when everything else around us seems to be falling apart. But it is only through witnessing extreme destruction that we have understood what preservation means." However, while conservation can be deemed therapeutic, it can produce its own forms of violence by displacing communities, destroying their livelihoods, and delegitimizing their perceptions of nature and ecology.

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Notes

1. Since the filing of the PIL, the Kashmir High Court has become extremely active in the oversight of the LAWDA, the agency charged with Dal Lake's conservation and which we discuss at length in the pages that follow. Importantly, LAWDA-related matters are discussed at the High Court on a nearly weekly basis, with hundreds of orders and resolutions passed by the court to direct and oversee the agency's activities.
2. The logic of economic development, and specifically tourism, as a counterinsurgency tool can be seen in a recent report produced for the Office of South Asia Analysis: "By generating new employment and creating sources of income, especially for unemployed youth, tourism can undermine the sources of separatist recruitment" (Jones et al., 2010: 7; Bhan, 2014b).
3. According to Muneeb, one of our young Hanji informants, Hanjis were selectively accused for "forcing their women into flesh trade during the 19th century famine in Kashmir." Such vile stereotypes were popularized by colonial officials and continue to frame discourses on Hanji morality in Kashmir. For details, see Walter Lawrence (1895: 314).
4. The NC government considered forced Hanji evictions necessary to restore the Dal Lake's shrinking water expanse so water sports and other activities on the lake could boost the state's dismal tourist economy.

5. Although the rapid urbanization along the banks of the Dal Lake and the resulting “encroachments” and pollution inside the lake could be attributed to many factors – the installation of army bunkers, the unplanned construction of hotels (which according to our informants were mostly owned by wealthy and powerful Kashmiri families who received leases to cut down forests and develop the infrastructure for tourism), as well as increased agricultural and military activities (see Khan, 2009) – many scholars, academics, and bureaucrats continue to hold Hanjis responsible for “inflicting [the most] degradation to the lake environment” (sic.) (Fazal and Amin, 2012: 512). Importantly, only a few Hanji families own hotels on the banks of the Dal Lake.
6. The Dal Development Project was implemented in 1977 in consultation with New Zealand under the Commonwealth Technical Assistant Program (see Chaku, 1990: 41).
7. After the ouster of the Maharaja and the conversion of the Muslim Conference to the NC in the 1930s, Sheikh Abdullah adopted a harsh stance toward Hanjis, according to many of our informants. Any scope of reconciliation between Hanjis and the Sheikh was further thwarted when Mirza Afzal Beg, Sheikh’s lieutenant, opposed the induction of Iqbal Chapri, a known and well-respected member of the Hanji community into the Legislative Assembly. Later, certain special provisions that included the “backward class” status for Hanjis were also discontinued. According to Zamindar Hanjis, Sheikh Abdullah’s policies were sectarian in nature, given that the majority of the Kashmiri population as well as Abdullah himself identified as Sunni whereas a large segment of the Hanji population, at least from the Zamindar community, were Shi’a.
8. Greater Kashmir Online (2011). Available at: <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2011/Dec/27/tara-directs-lawda-to-extract-weedss-from-dal-lake-interiors-47.asp> (accessed 15 May 2012).
9. Paehlke (1995) argues for a distinction between conservation and environmentalism. Unlike the earlier conservationists, environmentalists were markedly more concerned with pollution and human health, and in the wake of the 1970s energy crisis, with sustainability (Paehlke, 1995: 261). Paehlke’s views that environmentalism was “potent politically in a way that conservation concerns never were before” (Paehlke, 1995: 261).
10. Indian Express Online (2006). Available at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/oldStory/86803/> (accessed 20 March 2014).
11. Wani AS (2007). Available at: <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2007/Dec/2/court-committee-monitors-dal-restoration-measures-46.asp> (accessed 20 March 2014).
12. Although it is difficult to generalize whether or not Hanjis were involved with the popular movement for azadi, the general perception in Kashmir is that there were only a few Hanjis who actively participated in the armed movement. Usually, the perception is that Hanji livelihoods, because of their reliance on tourism, were the worst affected by the armed movement because of which Hanjis refused to participate. In actuality, Hanjis, expressed different degrees of active support for the armed movement. It becomes even more difficult to assess their involvement as a community because many Hanjis who moved out of water to settle on land a generation or two ago might not explicitly be identified as Hanji.
13. Wani R (2009). Available at: <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/hcs-proactive-approach-gives-a-boost-to-dal-restoration/441326/> (accessed 20 March 2014).
14. Wani R (2006). Available at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/oldStory/86803/> (accessed 5 May 2014).

15. Talib A (2002). Available at: <http://www.indowindow.com/akhbar/article.php?article=100&category=3&issue=17> (accessed 20 March 2014).
16. India Environmental Portal (2001). Available at: <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/node/2251> (accessed 20 March 2014).
17. India Environmental Portal (2001). Available at: <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/node/2251> (accessed 20 March 2014).
18. Ashraf M. Available at: <http://www.jammu.com/kashmir/articles/saving-frozen-dal-lake.htm> (accessed 2 March 2014).
19. Ashraf M. Available at: <http://www.jammu.com/kashmir/articles/saving-frozen-dal-lake.htm> (accessed 2 March 2014).
20. We use a pseudonym here to protect the identity of our informant.
21. See Ashraf M. Available at: http://www.kashmirfirst.com/articles/politics/080608_substantiating_azadi.htm (accessed 2 February 2013).
22. Ashraf M (2007). Available at: http://www.kashmirfirst.com/articles/other/071209_policisation_dal.htm (accessed 28 March 2014).
23. Ashraf M (2007). Available at: http://www.kashmirfirst.com/articles/other/071209_policisation_dal.htm (accessed 28 March 2014).
24. The significance of situating conservation within neoliberal economic frameworks is crucial to disrupt dominant perceptions that consider environmentalism as a response to the excesses of neoliberalism. Rather than working against the proliferation of neoliberalism, recent conservation initiatives have worked in conjunction with the imperatives of the market.
25. Gangwar R. Available at: http://www.desd.org/efc/Education_Participation.htm (accessed 20 March 2014). Images of improved tourism frequently appeared in the media to reinforce India's success in curbing an armed rebellion in the valley and to celebrate Kashmir's return to peace and democracy.
26. The DPR report from 2000 suggests that most households on the lake (59.8%) have 3–6 members, while other households might have a single member or anywhere from 26 to 45 members (2002: 9).
27. The total amount of funding for the project was roughly 60 million USD.
28. Detailed Project Report for the Conservation and Management of Dal-Nagin Lakes, University of Roorkee, Roorkee, India, Chapter 17.
29. Rainwaterharvesting.org. Available at: http://www.rainwaterharvesting.org/dal_lake/dal_lake.htm (accessed 20 March 2014).
30. Tribune India Online (2011). Available at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20110319/jkplus.htm#1> (accessed 20 March 2014).
31. Heeter C (2005). Available at: http://www.alternet.org/story/23401/the_messy_cleanup_of_dal_lake (accessed 15 March 2014).
32. Raina M (2007). Available at: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070121/asp/nation/story_7290382.asp (accessed 18 March 2014).
33. Raina M (2007). Available at: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070121/asp/nation/story_7290382.asp (accessed 18 March 2014).
34. Zamindar Hanjis also own *shikaras* (gondolas) that are a major tourist attraction on the lake. Houseboats and shikaras are of different grades and reflect the complex class stratification that exists within the Hanji community.
35. Landmasses on the lake comprise either of large fixed cultivations or smaller floating gardens, all of which are owned and managed by Zamindar Hanjis (landholders).

36. Zamindar Hanjis identify as part of the minority Shi'a community. While relations between Sunni and Shias have waxed and waned during different periods of history, at the time of our fieldwork, there was a palpable degree of suspicion between the communities. This distrust could be due to cultural restrictions against inter-marriage and inter-dining and also because government policies have deliberately heightened and politicized sectarian differences.
37. "Retrospect and Prospect."
38. Detailed Project Report for the Conservation and Management of Dal-Nagin Lakes, University of Roorkee, Roorkee, India, Chapter 1.
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40. Ashraf M (2012). Available at: <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Apr/21/kashmir-s-tourism-mania-11.asp> (accessed 25 April 2013).
41. See for instance, *The Economic Times* (2014). Available at: http://articles.economic-times.indiatimes.com/2014-09-10/news/53770503_1_jammu-and-kashmir-cse-uttarak-hand-floods (accessed 25 March 2014); Misra T (2014). Available at: <http://www.citylab.com/housing/2014/09/why-the-kashmir-floods-have-been-so-deadly/380051/> (accessed 25 March 2014).
42. Kathju J (2014). Available at: <http://www.risingkashmir.com/govt-apathy-leaves-dal-dwellers-in-troubled-waters/> (accessed 26 March 2014).

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