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## 5th August 2019: The Day Kashmir's Future Was Redrawn

Published on July 24, 2025

Document Date: Wed, Feb 11 2026 02:28:52 am

Category: , English, Kashmir -

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In August 2019, the Government of India removed Article 370 and Article 35A from the Constitution. These were special provisions that gave Jammu and Kashmir a unique status within India. For decades, people in the region believed these articles were more than just legal provisions; they were a promise that their identity, culture, belonging, and certain rights would be protected. Article 370 allowed Jammu and Kashmir to have its own constitution and a certain level of independence in making laws, while Article 35A gave special rights to permanent residents, such as exclusive rights to own land and access to government jobs and scholarships.

Some argued that these provisions were stopping the region from fully developing and integrating with the rest of India. It was said that these articles polarized people by creating a sense of Kashmir's "special status" and holding back progress. Removing them was seen as an effort to open the region to more investments, build new industries, create jobs, and ensure equal rights for all, regardless of where they came from. This move was framed as an act of national unity, aimed at bringing peace and prosperity to a region that had suffered decades of conflict and violence.

But for many people living in Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, things looked very different. The region was suddenly under heavy military, with soldiers everywhere. Phones and internet services were cut off for months. Schools and colleges were closed. Local political leaders, including former chief ministers, were detained or placed under house arrest. Ordinary people couldn't communicate with their families, run their businesses, or attend online classes. The way the decision was carried out made it feel as if Kashmiris had no voice or choice in something that affected their lives so deeply.

One of the biggest fears among Kashmiris is the loss of their unique identity and culture. Before August 2019, land ownership was restricted to permanent residents, which helped maintain the region's demographic balance and protected its cultural heritage. With the removal of these

protections, anyone from any part of India can now buy land and settle there. Many Kashmiris fear this will slowly change the demographic makeup of their homeland and leave them as minorities in their own region. For them, this isn't just about property; it's about belonging, identity, and control over their future. A university student described this impact in these words: "My grandparents fought hard to protect our land and our identity. Now I worry that in 20 years, we will be strangers in our own home."

The emotional impact of this decision has been heavy. People feel alienated and mistrustful of the government because such a significant step was taken without even consulting them or their elected representatives. Their state was also downgraded to a Union Territory, which reduced its political power and control. This created a sense of humiliation for many, who feel like they have been pushed further away from the rest of India rather than brought closer.

From an economic perspective, the government promises big investments, infrastructure projects, and jobs. However, on the ground, many people feel these promises are slow to materialize or may not benefit locals as much as outsiders. Youth unemployment is still high, and tourism, once a lifeline for many, has been affected by security concerns and instability. The long internet shutdown also caused students to lose precious learning opportunities and harmed small businesses that relied on online services.

For many Kashmiris, the issue is not only about jobs and development but also about dignity and respect. They want to feel heard and included in decisions about their land and future. The abrogation of Article 370 may have removed old legal barriers, but it also deepened emotional wounds. People who have already lived with conflict and uncertainty for decades now feel an added sense of insecurity about their identity and future.

Some people in India believe these fears are exaggerated and that, over time, the benefits will reach everyone. But for many Kashmiris, trust has been broken. Rebuilding that trust will take more than building roads or opening industries; it will require honest dialogue, respect for local voices, and sensitivity to the region's culture and emotions.

The reality of Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir after August 2019 is complicated. Many people feel their identity has been weakened, their political voice silenced, and their future made uncertain. Healing these grievances will require understanding and empathy, not just policies and investments.

The truth is that progress cannot only be measured in infrastructure or investments. For the people of Kashmir, it also means peace of mind, respect for their cultural identity, and having a say in their own future. Without addressing these emotional and political concerns, development alone cannot bring lasting peace.

Jammu and Kashmir is an illegally occupied territory by India. The people of Kashmir were promised a plebiscite under United Nations Security Council Resolution 47 (1948), and a dozen more that followed which was never held. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A in 2019 is seen as a unilateral action that changes the region's status without the consent of its people, something many around the world view as being against both international agreements and the spirit of UN resolutions.

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