

Kashmir Conflict: An Analysis of Ethno-Religious Perspective

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, Kashmir is one of the most militarized regions with 700,000 Indian military personnel Controlled by arms, weapons, and terror, Kashmir is generally referred to as one of the most insecure zones of the world having a potential threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan. Although, numerous options and solutions have been proposed by different sections of society i.e. politicians, political analysts, and multiple international organizations to settle the issue of Kashmir the real cause of conflict generally out of focus. The question arises why Kashmir is the major cause of skirmish between the two neighbouring nuclear powers when both share borders at Lahore, along the Rann of Kutch, Sir Creek Line, and in the Arabian Sea?

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The answer to these questions lies in addressing the ethnoreligious causes of the Kashmir conflict. This paper is an effort to identify the core issues of ethnoreligious conflict within Kashmir and their role in the Kashmir conflict and its solutions. The paper's primary focus is the contemporary situation of the Kashmir territory, so whenever the present-day situation changes, the validity of the article will also be altered.

Key Words: Kashmir, Conflict, India, Pakistan, Religion, and Politics

Introduction

Kashmir occupies an area of 222,236 square kilometers.¹ It is blessed with natural resources and beauty. It is named as Paradise on earth due to its friendly climate and rich culture. Kashmir is geographically occupied by triangular powers that include India, Pakistan, and China.² In terms of ethno-religion, it is encircled by Afghanistan (a Muslim Pashtun Country),³ China (Majority of its population consists of followers of Confucianism/Buddhism)⁴ and India (the majority of its population follows Hinduism).⁵ Interestingly, all three neighbouring powers have their claims on the Kashmir territory.⁶

Kashmir had been ruled by Kaurava Dynasty for more than 1266 years.⁷ Later, it was overtaken by Gonerdyia Dynasty in 2448 BC.⁸ The people of these dynasties were snake worshippers.⁹ The next ruling dynasty of Kashmir consisted of followers of Buddhism;¹⁰ the religion which was practiced by Sino-Caucasian as well.¹¹ Some recent sources refer to the fact that Kashmir is

¹ Musarat Javed Cheema, "Pakistan-India Conflict with Special Reference to Kashmir" in *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, 2015. 45.

² Deepa Wiswam, *Role of Media in Kashmir Crisis* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2010), 55-56.

³ M. K. Kaw, ed., *Kashmir and its People: Studies in the Evolution of Kashmiri Society* (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2004), 51.

⁴ Bansi Pandit, *Explore Kashmiri Pandits* (N.A. Dhrama Publications, 2008), 96-98.

⁵ Shyam Kaul and Onkar Kachru, ed., *Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh: Ringside Views* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1998), 218.

⁶ Tariq Ali, Hilal Bhatt, et.al, *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (London: Verso Publishers, 2011), 54.

⁷ Girirwar Charan Agarwala, *Age of Bharata War* (New Delhi: Indological Publishers, 1979), 228.

⁸ James Prinsep and Edward Thomas ed., *Essays on Indian Antiquities, Historic, Numismatics and Paleographic of the Late* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 242.

⁹ Prinsep and Thomas (ed.), *Essays on Indian Antiquities, Historic, Numismatics and Paleographic of the Late*, 101.

¹⁰ J. N. Ganhar and P. N. Ganhar, *Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh* (New Delhi: Shri Ram Nath Ganhar, 1957).

¹¹ Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (England: Altamira Press, 2002), 79.

inhabited by Brushno and Kalash, who are Aryans as they have a fair complexion.¹² Some other shreds of evidence link people of Kashmir with the followers of Judaism who migrated from Egypt and got settled there.¹³ This school supports its argument by proving the fact that a significant portion of Kashmir's population consists of Dardic people who speak Sanskrit.¹⁴ Over the centuries, the majority of its people embraced Islam. The struggle for freedom started mainly after the Jammu and Kashmir region was taken over by Gulab Singh.¹⁵

Present-day Azad Kashmir consists of people belonging to diverse religions and ethnicities such as Brushn and Shina.¹⁶ Cheema in her article¹⁷ discussed the reasons why there is an unending conflict between India and Pakistan. She claims that the reason is the issue of identity and justification of the claim of foundations of a state. For India, the inclusion of Kashmir means the winning of its secular government claims whereas for Pakistan it means uploading the Islamic identity. She simplified the issue by relating it to the post-partition era. However, the issue is very complex and has its roots long before the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent. It appears that the real conflict resides in ethnoreligious identity and it is not just an issue of political identity/supremacy.

James and Ozdamar held religion responsible for instigating ethnic identity. They consider the religion of Islam as the primary cause of fostering ethnic identity in Kashmir.¹⁸ It seems that the argument is prepared to praise India's secular identity against Pakistan's Islamic identity and they ignored the attitude of the Hindu community towards Muslims of India. Another question that needs to be addressed is that if India is a secular democracy; why the Modi's government in India won the elections on *Hindutva*¹⁹ and why the government by (Baharatiya Janata Party)

¹² Shri Ram Bakshi, *Kashmir: Valley and its Culture* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1997), 166.

¹³ Kaw, *Kashmir and its People*, 51.

¹⁴ Ranabir Samaddar, (ed.), *Peace Studies: An Introduction to the Concept, Scope, and Themes* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 335.

¹⁵ Christopher Snedden, *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 71.

¹⁶ William Frawley, *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 198.

¹⁷ Musarat Javed Cheema, "Pakistan-India Conflict with Special Reference to Kashmir" in *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, 2015. 45-69.

¹⁸ Carolyn C. James and Ozgur Ozdamar, *Religion as a Factor in Ethnic Conflict: Kashmir and Indian Foreign Policy* in "Terrorism and Political Violence" Vol. 17, 2005. 447-67. See Also Husayn Ansarian, *The Islamic Family Structure* (Qum: Ansarian Publishers, 2003), 77-84.

¹⁹ M. G. Chitkara, *Hindutva Parivar* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishers, 2003), 218.

means a reign of terror for non-Hindus and scheduled casts living in India and Muslims in Kashmir?

Similarly, Wenning focused on religion as the main cause for the rise of conflict between India and Pakistan. This article further highlights the idea that religion has not only disturbed the region but it is also transforming Kashmir into a global magma.²⁰ This issue is expanding and is threatening global peace. The researchers consider religion as the sole cause of conflict. Their conclusion appears to be based on miscalculation and misinterpretation. Conversely, the ethnic arena concerning the Muslim population in the case of Kashmir also needs to be explored by keeping the historical evidence in mind.

Role of Ethno-Religion in Demarcation of Boundaries of Kashmir

At the announcement of the June 3rd Plan of 1947 related to partition of the Indian Sub-Continent; Jawaharlal Nehru pressed Mountbatten-the last Governor-General (through multiple means) not to include Kashmir in Pakistan and asked him to avoid even its division between the newly emerging states.²¹ Nehru's claim was based on the rationale that he was a Kashmiri Brahmin,²² so he never wanted to lose his native place in favour of Pakistan. Thus, at that point, ethno-religious identity compelled Nehru to resist the inclusion of Kashmir in Pakistan or its partition according to the basic rule of division, which was the demarcation of the international boundary based on majority's religious affiliation. Although Jinnah kept on pressing Mountbatten to merge Kashmir with Pakistan or to leave it as an independent princely state, the Earl did not pay much attention to Jinnah's request.²³ Jinnah's first claim was based on the idea of Muslim brotherhood which links the Muslims living anywhere in the world and geographical proximity.

²⁰ Holger Wenning, *Kashmir: A Regional Conflict with Global Impact* in "New Zealand Journal of Public and International Law, Vol. 01, November 2003, 197-228.

²¹ For details see, Akbar Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²² Sten Widmaln, *Kashmir in Comparative Perspective: Democracy and Violent Separatism in India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 37.

²³ Douglas Johnston, (ed.), *Faith-Based Diplomacy Trumping Realpolitik* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 39.

When Jinnah was informed about the alterations in the partition plan by Nehru, he sent a messenger to Mountbatten to inform him that alterations in the partition plan were not acceptable to All India Muslim League because they feared that its outcome would lead to ethnic riots. Jinnah's messenger was informed by Allan Campbell, who was the private secretary of Mountbatten that there were no changes in the partition plan. The messenger however witnessed a map hanging in the room with a line drawn exactly in the same pattern that indicated the change in plan. This is how Nehru-Edwina-Mountbatten²⁴ nexus had won over Jinnah's peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict.

Kashmir in Post 1947 Era

After the partition of 1947, Maharaja decided to maintain Kashmir's independent status and signed a standstill agreement with Pakistan.²⁵ Muslim population rose in revolt and demanded a merger with Pakistan.²⁶ Responding to the uprising Maharaja used violent power against the Muslim population of the region. The Pashtoons reacted against the genocide of Muslims in the Kashmir region and came forward to join their struggle.²⁷ This provided a point of justification to Maharaja who asked India for help.²⁸ Utilizing the situation to mould circumstances in India's favour, Nehru offered military support to Maharaja and demanded to merge Kashmir with India.²⁹ The Maharaja consented and the Indian forces entered Kashmir.³⁰ To protect the Muslim masses of Kashmir, Pakistan moved its military.³¹ This resulted in the war of 1948.

Mountbatten being the Commander in Chief of armed forces of India could stop the war to reach a peaceful solution of Kashmir issue but he did not take any practical step. This helped India to

²⁴ Khalid Chowdhry, *Apocalypse 1947* (Pittsburg: Dorrance Publishing, 2019), 13. For Pakistan, Mountbatten said, "administratively it is the difference between putting up a permanent building, a nissen hut or a tent. As far as Pakistan is concerned, we are putting up a tent." Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.

²⁵ N. Jayapalan, *Foreign Policy of India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2001), 238.

²⁶ Amitha Shastri and A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, (ed.), *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia: Democracy, Identity, Development and Security* (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), 207.

²⁷ Owen L. Sirrs, *Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate: Covert Actions and Internal Operation* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 16.

²⁸ Fozia Nazir Lone, *Historical Title, Self-Determination and the Kashmir Question: Changing Perspectives in International Law* (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2018), 80.

²⁹ Vassilis K. Fouskas, *The Politics of Conflict: A Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 75.

³⁰ Erik Goldstein, *Wars & Peace Treaties: 1816-1991* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 86.

³¹ J. N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War & Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 105.

occupy Kashmir using its military. India had used the same strategy in the states of Hyderabad, Junagadh, and other princely states. Moreover, there was a handsome number of British army officers in Pakistan's army including its Commander in Chief Lt. Gen. Frank Messervy.³² He followed the guidelines of Lord Mountbatten and did not allow the military personnel of Pakistan to move against the Indian army in Kashmir. Furthermore, the British army on Pakistan's side refused to obey the orders of Mr. Jinnah. Luckily however the Pashtoon *Mujahideens*³³ supported the people of Kashmir. Facing defeat in Kashmir on the Military side, India/Nehru opted for United Nations.

India attempted the UN to oust Pakistan from the soils of Kashmir. Hyngari Shankar-a prominent lawyer from India-pleaded case of India against Pakistan on the forum of UN³⁴ taking Nehru's statement that Pakistan was incapable to defend its claim for Kashmir in UN and thus will be forced to quit. But Jinnah appointed Sir Muhammad Zafrulla³⁵ to face Indian representative with such zeal, vigour, and facts of incidents that India was compelled to change its nominees.³⁶ Zafrulla not only proved that the stance of India on Kashmir is based on falsehood but asked the UN to pass a resolution on Kashmir³⁷ and thus UN proposed solution for Kashmir in the shape of Plebiscite.

Facing the failure of its claim in the UN, India started creating law and order situation in the Kashmir region to avoid Plebiscite as it was mentioned in the UN resolution that

³² Messervy served as the first Commander in Chief of Pakistan army from 15th August 1947 till 10th February 1948 Kuldip Singh Bajwa, *Jammu and Kashmir War (1947-48): Political and military Perspective* (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 2004), 105, whereas Douglas Gracy succeeded Messervy as the Second Commander in Chief from 11th February 1948 till 16th January 1951. For a complete list, see <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/1947-2019-a-list-of-army-chiefs-who-lead-pakistans-army/>

³³ Samir Puri, *Pakistan's War on Terrorism: Strategies for Combating Jihadist Armed Groups Since 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 12.

³⁴ When India came to know of Khan, then they sent Hyngari Shankar, who was the best lawyer. It was because Nehru was well aware of the abilities of Khan. Muhammad Nasrullah Raja, *Tameer o Tarakhi-e-Pakistan Mein Jammāt Ahmadiyya Ka Misaali Kirdar* (London: Privately Published, 2010), 185.

³⁵ Adil Hussain Khan, *From Sufism to Ahmadiyya: A Muslim Minority Movement in South Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 113. For Details related to life and work of Sir Zafrullah Khan, refer to, Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, *The Forgotten Years: Memoirs of Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992).

³⁶ Munir Ahmed Munir, "Pakistan kay Pehly Wazir-e- Kharja Sir Zafrulla Khan say Munir Ahmad Munir ka Interview," in *Atish Fishan Lahore* (Lahore: Atish Fishan Publishers, January 11, 1981), 34.

³⁷ Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2003), 68.

The Government of India and the Government of Pakistan reaffirm their wish that the future status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir shall be determined by the will of the people and to that end, upon acceptance of the Truce Agreement both Governments agree to enter into consultations with the Commission to determine fair and equitable conditions whereby such free expression will be assured.³⁸

The statement hints that a peaceful environment is a prerequisite to conducting a plebiscite in Kashmir. Strategically the government of India created a situation that resisted the fulfillment of this primary requisite to get the plebiscite in the region. On the arrival of the UN team in Kashmir, the situation on the ground was more that of a civil war. Thus, the plebiscite was not possible until peace was ensured. The nefarious design of our neighbour proved successful to halt the peaceful solution to the Kashmir issue. In the UN, Zafrulla kept on pressing the organization to ensure a peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict. So, UN representatives visited India and Pakistan to make another attempt but the Indian government kept using delaying tactics. Clearly, India wanted only one solution to Kashmir that it must accede to India. However, Pakistan did not surrender its principle stance and efforts for the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir.

India kept itself engaged not only on the borders of Pakistan but it also tried to occupy areas of China along with borders of Kashmir. For this purpose, India mobilized the military on the India-China border to accomplish the mission but failed to accomplish its agenda. Retrospectively, India had to surrender its territories to China. After facing failure at the Indo-Chinese border, India again indulged in skirmishes that resulted in war with Pakistan in 1965.³⁹ In 1999, another war (though limited one) began at Peak of Kargil Mountains; part of Kashmir.⁴⁰ A threat of nuclear war between the two neighbours was delayed only due to the interference of the international community.⁴¹

³⁸ Resolution adopted by the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan on August 13, 1948 (Document No.1100, Para. 75, dated November 9, 1948). Accessed on July 07, 2019 <http://mofa.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Resolution-adopted-by-the-United-Nations-Commission-for-India-and-Pakistan-on-13-August-1948.pdf>

³⁹ Farooq Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013).

⁴⁰ Lowell Dittmer, *South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma: India, Pakistan, and China* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 137.

⁴¹ Annie Waqar, "Nuclear War between India and Pakistan? An Expert Assesses the Risk," in *The Conversation* on March 06, 2019. <http://theconversation.com/nuclear-war-between-india-and-pakistan-an-expert-assesses-the-risk-112892>, accessed on 24-06-2019.

Kashmir Conflict and BJP Government

BJP government opted for the policy of blood and iron to deal with the Kashmir issue.⁴² Many academics have even compared Modi's policy of Kashmir with that of Palestine vs Israel.⁴³ India militarized the region to such an extent that it forced the Kashmiri youth to get indulged in armed conflicts instead of peaceful protests to their right of self-determination. Kashmiris were left with no option but to fight their war with stones against the deadly arms of Indian forces.⁴⁴ Most of the Indian authors have penned the argument that India's founders wanted an independent Kashmir⁴⁵ but Modi has adopted the stance to occupy Kashmir for Hindu Nationalism.⁴⁶

Patrolling personals were deployed around Kashmir borders to avoid its contact with Pakistan and other neighbouring regions.⁴⁷ This step was particularly taken to bar Media men and other Organizations such as amnesty international to get correct information about Kashmir. Furthermore, constant curfew increased problems for the Kashmiri Muslim population. Means of communication were generally kept suspended in Indian Occupied Kashmir to limit their contact with the world⁴⁸ Kashmiri voices against Indian occupation were generally censored or they had to surrender lives for raising voice against this unlawful occupation.⁴⁹ Modi's government even

⁴² Manoj Joshi, "Why Modi Government's Ramzan Ceasefire in Kashmir is Doomed to Fail," in *Observer Research Foundation* May 23, 2018. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/why-modi-governments-ramzan-ceasefire-in-kashmir-is-doomed-to-fail/>, accessed on 24-06-2019.

⁴³ Azad Essa, "When it Comes to Palestine and Kashmir, India and Israel are Oppressors-in-Arms, in *Middle East Eye*, March 1, 2019. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/when-it-comes-palestine-and-kashmir-india-and-israel-are-oppressors-arms>, accessed on 24-06-2019.

⁴⁴ Khalid Bhatti, "The Pulwama Massacre," in *The News*, December 21, 2018.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/408599-the-pulwama-massacre>, accessed on 24-06-2018.

⁴⁵ Manoj Joshi, "What would India have been without Nehru?" in *The Herald*, August 14, 2017, <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153825>, accessed on 25-06-2019.

⁴⁶ Hilal Mir, "India's Modi will Continue to Use Kashmir as Fodder for Hindu Nationalism," in *The World*, May 24, 2019.

<https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/india-s-modi-will-continue-to-use-kashmir-as-fodder-for-hindu-nationalism-26953>, accessed on 25-06-2019.

⁴⁷ Matthew J. Webb, *Kashmir's Right to Secede: A Critical Examination of Contemporaries Theories of Secession* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 127.

⁴⁸ Nandita Dinesh, *Memos from a Theatre Lab: Immersive Theatre and Time* (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2019), 10.

⁴⁹ Shujaat Bukhari, *Why the Death of Militant Burhan Wani has Kashmiris up in Arms*, "BBC" July 11, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36762043>, accessed on 25-06-2019.

started targeting the neonates by the use of pellet guns.⁵⁰ Kashmiris freedom fighters have termed it as continued genocide against Kashmiri Muslims.⁵¹

The Kashmiri Muslim critics have been kept under house arrest.⁵² Furthermore, the region has been militarized at an alarming ratio to the civilian population.⁵³ In the present scenario, it is evident that the occupation forces want to force Kashmiris to accept their domination or quit Kashmir. Consistent efforts are being made to bring a demographic shift in the Muslim population in IOK by carrying out their Genocide as once it was practiced in Myanmar and is still in vogue in Palestine.⁵⁴ As mentioned in the UN Resolution of 1948,⁵⁵ it is being done under a plan to convert the Muslim population into a minority before letting the international observers enter into IOK to create an atmosphere for the plebiscite. This is how artificially created Hindu majority will be given the right to vote in the favour of India⁵⁶ and it may result in the fulfilment of India's long-awaited dream and the manifestation of its hegemonic designs.

Solutions to Kashmir Conflict in the Framework of Ethno-Religious Identity

India has alleged time and again that it is not the Kashmiris who are struggling for independence but Pakistani agents who are trained for destabilizing Kashmir to carry out terrorist attacks in India.⁵⁷ As a result, Pakistan has to enhance its diplomatic policy to handle the allegations of India for which it has to focus on gaining the support of the UN, OIC, SCO, and SAARC to

⁵⁰ "Indian Pellet Guns in Occupied Kashmir Kill, Blind and Enrage," in *The Dawn*, November 30, 2018.

⁵¹ Zamir Akram, "Genocide in Kashmir" in *The Tribune*, August 08, 2017

⁵² Jehangir Ali, "Hurriyat Leaders Detained, Released Ahead of Meeting with Sartaj Aziz," in *The Citizens*, August 20, 2015 <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/2/4833/HURRIYAT-LEADERS-DETAINED-RELEASED-AHEAD-OF-MEETING-WITH-SARTAJ-AZIZ>, accessed on 26-06-2019.

⁵³ Rifat Fareed, "Indian Forces kill Civilians and Rebels in Kashmir," in *Aljazeera*, December 15, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/indian-forces-kill-civilians-rebels-kashmir-181215113733350.html>, accessed on 26-06-2019.

⁵⁴ Whitney Webb, "Robert Fisk Exposes Israel's Hidden Role in the Brewing India-Pakistan Conflict," in *The Mint Press*, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/robert-fisk-exposes-israels-hidden-role-in-the-brewing-india-pakistan-conflict/255860/>, accessed on 26-06-2019.

⁵⁵ Mohammad Yasin Malik, "Comment: Fear Rules Kashmir as BJP Goes About Realizing its Dream," in *Daily Dawn*, September 27, 2018.

⁵⁶ M. G. Chitkara, *Kashmir: LOC* (New Delhi: A. P. H. Publishing, 2003), 156.

⁵⁷ Rajpal Budania, *India's National Security Dilemma: The Pakistan Factor and India's Policy Response* (New Delhi: Indus Publication, 2001), 97.

pressurize India to let Kashmiris get their right of self-determination.⁵⁸ Furthermore, dialogue between the followers of different religions (inter-religion dialogue) is needed to bring peace in Kashmir particularly where ever role of religion for ensuring peace is required to create harmony among followers of different religions along with taking care of ethnic affiliations/emotions of the people of conflict areas.

Conclusion

The solution to Kashmir conflict lies in answering the pertinent question of ethnoreligious dynamics. The support of the international community may prove to be a primary factor to get the Kashmir de-militarized. Avoidance in targeting particular ethnic groups will help prevent ethnoreligious conflict in the region. This will create a conducive environment to conduct plebiscite which may lead towards the solution of Kashmir issue. Besides the Palestine issue, the Kashmir conflict has remained one of the unsettled issues of the world demanding immediate solution which can only be done through a genuine understanding of the religious and ethnic realities of the region.

⁵⁸ Jolyon Mitchell, *Promoting Peace, Inciting Violence: The role of Religion and Media* (New York: Routledge, 2012).