

Understanding factors in the the kashmir conflict politics essay



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History has brought about many changes in the world we now view as our own. Many of the nations in which we reside have gone through a significant number of changes to become the administrative units we now recognise and call upon for protections which we consider to be fundamental. The region of Kashmir is located in the north of India, right between Pakistan, Afghanistan and China. This area is, and has been, experiencing trouble since the second-tier of the 20th century, even throughout an on-going difference in faith held among the inhabitants of the region, as well as a historical change of hands in terms of colonial leadership. The following essay will begin by providing a short list of definitions for terms that will be used and read throughout this reading, and will continue by offering a history of the Kashmir state and the demographics to be found in that region. This essay will then look at religion, Islam and national identity, and in doing so, will attempt to shed light upon a recurring theme within the setting of this conflicted area: religion and religious implications mapped throughout the conflict. The essay will then present the reader with the Kashmiri secessionist movement, which will briefly indicate the status in which Kashmir finds itself and the alternatives which it has before it. That section will also present pros and cons of negotiation and how the final outcome can be influenced by those decisions. Finally, this essay will seek to outline various issues that revolve around the theme of religion and conclude with an evaluation of the actual role of faith as a source of conflict in this area.

Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, the following terms will be understood and referred to as they will now be explained. Conflict will refer to a given

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situation between two or more parties which have or believe that they have incompatible goals, but that is a natural part of life, and rather inevitable, when the parties pursue clashing goals (Feron 2010). Violence will be understood as all types of direct violence (physical etc.), violent attitudes such as hatred, fear, racism, sexism etc., as well as structural and institutional violence (discrimination within healthcare, employment, or education etc.) (Feron 2010). The term " islamisation" will be understood as the process by which one attempts to render any given thing, person or society, more acceptable or correct with regards to Islam and the Sharia (Islamic law)- this can and does include the process by which one attempts to structurally shape one's governing body. " Islamism" will therefore be understood as a " group of ideologies in Islam that want to use the Sharia, Muslim Law, to its full extent, meaning that secular forms of governments and institutions are considered foreign to a true Muslim society" (Kjeilen 2009). Lastly, the term identity entrepreneurs will refer to actors whose motives are influenced by something other than understood problem at hand (be it political etc.), and who use ancient hatreds, and deep and historic rooted problems between groups or parties, to trigger a reaction that might result in something beneficial to their cause (Feron 2010). All other terms, specific to this conflict, in this essay should be considered in the most general sense of the term.

History

" The State of Jammu and Kashmir is not really a unit geographically, demographically, or economically. It is an agglomeration of territories

brought under the political power of one Maharajah. That is the unity it
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possesses.' The administrative divisions of Kashmir reflect its conspicuous heterogeneity, even though physiographic, demographic, and cultural elements have provided only a few political boundary line" (Mayfield 1955, 184). This describes the setting for the Kashmir dispute, as in a given state where so many differences exist one could easily expect different goals and the possibility of conflict. Only months following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, India and Pakistan had already commenced war over the region of Kashmir. Most interestingly, in the time of partition, a Hindu was ruler of the region, and even though the region was mainly populated by Muslims, he made the decision to join Kashmir to India, acknowledging that India was to provide the Kashmiri people with an opportunity at a referendum so that the very people could express vocally to the region what their wish was, this referendum never took place, and has served as an issue that many in the surrounding area disagree with (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994). The ruler, Maharaja of Kashmir, had taken this leap in asking India for assistance to begin with after Pashtuns from Pakistani's Afghania went into Kashmir, which India viewed as an attempt to increase authority and presence in Kashmir. Prime Minister Nehru made a public radio announcement promising the previously mentioned opportunity for the Kashmiri to voice their public opinion in the form of the referendum, which was supposed to decide their fate, and in the midst of all of this India called upon the United Nations Security council, and eventually a cease-fire was established, where Pakistan and India would be present at each side of the line (as mentioned before). " There has been no strict adherence to either of Lord Mountbatten's suggestions, and among the disputes that have arisen regarding accession the Kashmir issue has been prominent" (Mayfield 1955). <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

It comes back to this argument many times throughout the history of this particular dispute between Pakistan and India, although it is evident that no one side could have been appeased if there were ulterior motives at play. This particular war ended in the division of the state into two regions which would remain under the control of the two sides (India and Pakistan), although the Kashmiri viewed themselves as one people (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994). The fight for Kashmir did not end there as in 1965 India and Pakistan entered into war over the state after Pakistan infiltrated Kashmir, which India retaliated to by crossing into Pakistan, resulting in the arranging of a cease-fire line by the UN Security Council.

This history left the majority of Kashmir in the administrative hands of India (two-thirds), even though the majority of inhabitants of the state were Muslims. While efforts to maintain post-war bilateral communications open have been successful in establishing some bilateral agreements, these methods are still underway today, and faced many obstacles in the decades to follow- including but not limited to India denying the United Nations access to Kashmir in 1990 (Korbel 1949). An example of one of these channels of communication was the making of the Simla Accords (1972), where Pakistan and India agreed that any and all discussions and decision-making regarding Kashmir would be a bilateral communication where both sides would be included in the result, and since the two nations have sent each other proposals regarding Kashmir etc. (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994). The effect of a line of control (LOC) served as a boundary which today still serves as a foundation for hope that there could even possibly be some sort of international division (a border in a sense) were India and Pakistan to

attempt a full-on division of sovereignty, or to share said sovereignty, but there are many barriers and lines which break the flow of communication, and perhaps at the same time which render communication possible; this is a situation where both sides have had to give a little. Though even with such channels of communications, Pakistan has viewed India as the enemy in that they stand between Pakistan and Kashmir, and their quest to unite the Muslim people. The history of this conflict is tainted with interests and goals from all sides to gain control over the state of Kashmir, with each party supporting the outbreak of rebellion against the other party through the use of the inhabitants of the state, and so religion is coined as the driving force among these individuals, as they believe they are working toward rendering their community more pure and even more functional or that there will somehow be peace through their militancy. In the past decade certain events brought about ruptures in Kashmir and in its neighbouring regions, such as the incident of the Babri mosque and anti-Muslim riots in Gujurat, which sparked reactions from Muslims in India, egged on conflict and fuelled the drive for immediate action. These are only a few of the details that describe the long and conflict-rich history of the state of Kashmir, but they are key factors in understanding the level of importance that religion plays for participating agents.

Religion

" Another common feature of Christianity and Islam... is that the religious community is increasingly seen as an identity group, emphasising the 'us and them' approach. Universality of religion, or the idea that the born-again hard core is just the vanguard of a larger community of lukewarm or <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

sociological casual believers, who consider themselves followers of a religion without practising it, is less and less accepted by the 'true believers'... the feeling of being part of a minority is an issue not of demography but of alienation from a dominant culture that is totally secular etc.... (Roy 2004, 35-6). While it is clear that there are differences among the the existing backgrounds of faiths to be found in Kashmir, the prominent religion in the state remains to be Islam. A very transparent theme of " keeping the faith" tends to line the conflict, and it is interesting to dig deeper and find out why. The issue of faith has long interrupted political frequencies in South Asia. Even before having the opportunity to decide upon the future of Kashmir, religion was a barrier which was difficult to overcome. Islamic identity is very strong, just like many other religious identities, and so it should come as no surprise that this issue has time and time again resurfaced, and this was no different at the time of partition of the Subcontinent in the 1940's. " This awareness of a separate Muslim identity was much stronger at the level of the elite, however, than at the level of the masses. At times, these feelings erupted into calls for jihad against the British, for example, the Wahabi and Fraizia movements. They also manifested themselves in the creation of religious schools, like Deoband, to preserve the Muslim way of life. Finally they emerged as the reformist Aligarh Movement to promote modern education, reinterpret the teachings of Islam, and secure the rights of Muslims as a minority community. In the early twentieth century, various attempts were made to forge a united front with the Hindus for an India independent of Great Britain. These attempts met with repeated failure" (Islam 1981, 2). Establishing religious landmarks is a way of preserving them, and making them even more recognised within the area one lives in.

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While these methods can raise awareness of one's own religious identity, it can also spark controversy with those of another religious identity, as it clashes with their personal views and beliefs; the reality of it confronts them upon doing so. Religion has been blamed with stirring up conflict in the region even more than was already there, and once division of the state of Kashmir had already taken place.

" The rebellion by Muslims in the Kashmir province of India has contributed to sporadic military conflict with neighboring Pakistan, which is religiously and ethnically similar to the population in the province. The international ramifications of this dispute are even greater now that both Pakistan and India are nuclear powers" (Fox 2001, 68). For both Pakistan and India, Islam and religion in general still represent a significant factor in that the will of the ummah generates a large response both within the borders of the state of Kashmir as well as outside (India, Pakistan). This ripple effect does not stop there; as time has passed the situation has evolved and religious ties to the territory have grown stronger, as well as the general will of the Muslim community to expand their faith structurally throughout their homeland. In attempting to establish a more islamified society, Muslims inside and out of Kashmir have in a sense provoked a cause-effect reaction from the Kashmiri of diverse faiths. The notion of identity with regards to religion is more visible today as the conflict has attracted international attention- notably from Muslim nations around the world who have long criticised India for its treatment of Muslims within the Kashmir state. This stems from the fact that, as previously mentioned, India has yet to permit a referendum to the Kashmiri public, which would add a more realistic perspective to the

equation of bilateral discussions with regards to any extension of sovereignty (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994). The concept of identity and religion lines the bulk of this conflict and is deeply rooted, but this is not to say that there would be complete cooperation from members of different faiths since even before partition it is said that there has always been some level of distinction and separation based on religion.

" The following quotation from Jinnah's speech at the All India Muslim League Conference in 1940 is a crystallization of representative Muslim thinking of that period: 'The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry, nor dine together and they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions'" (Qtd in Islam, 1981, 1). In order to preserve and propagate their faith, Muslim organisations sought out a means of institutionally expanding Islam within Kashmir, with the influence and support of neighbouring Pakistan. In 1941, the establishing of Jamaat Islami and also the Association of Ulama of Islam (Pakistani parties) began this through a system of Madressas which were meant to aid the Muslim minority in India to endure and prosper in communities where their faith was a symbol of distinction. This type of islamification was generally supported by Pakistan as it actually worked within the political system of the Pakistani government. For these purposes, there is a necessity for political and religious agents to enforce and encourage the expansion of the founding principles for these organisations, not only to build a stronger force in Pakistan but also to create a domino effect in Kashmir as well, and this is exactly what figures such as Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sheriff and regimes

such as Zia did. These figures could and did use Islamic parties to ensure the spreading of Islamism and the reformation of systems throughout Pakistan and India (where Muslim followers existed) (Islam 1981). With religion being such a driving force in this dispute over Kashmir, one must ask what the nature of the true cause behind it all is- what truly drives this on-going battle?

Identity Entrepreneurs

We can take the influence of the Taliban for instance, or even site other conflicts such as Palestine, Bosnia, Kosovo or even Hungary in the past, to draw upon links that demonstrate how religion can become a tool that certain individuals or interested parties use or manipulate to move the masses. While in the case of Kashmir, it is not difficult to see that there are recurring issues with faith and territory, there exists a limit to how much of the conflict actually stems from these principles- where faith and religion stop and tact starts (if they are at all separated in the conflict). How much can religion cover and to what extent does it drive the motives of the involved parties? There must be a line where religion becomes secondary and interest (outside of religion) takes over the decision-making process, or begins to influence it more than that of the religious goal (Copland 1981). Many negate the strong links to religion that this conflict has stating that there were historically recognised instances where this almost homogenous state once thrived on diversity, and that Pakistan and India have always had separate agendas.

" Two reasons for Pakistan's desire to control Kashmir stand out above all others: the development of hydroelectric power, and the protection of water sources for irrigation in the Punjab and Sind. Several years before the creation of Pakistan, Moslem planners had selected Kashmir for expanding industrial development through utilization of its hydroelectric potential.'

Definitely, the plans were oriented to aid Pakistan as a whole, not simply to benefit an underdeveloped Kashmir" (Mayfield 1955, 190). It is easy to view the outside factors, and to realise that there is no simple answer, and no one thing (not even religion), that dominates the premises on which Pakistan wishes to take control of Kashmir, but it is important to realise the strong religious ties within the actual conflict and the repercussions of a complete loss of control. On the other hand, when looking deeper into the problem on the other side of the LOC, it is also evident that India has motives which are not exactly based on protecting the rights of Sikhs or Hindus, nor Buddhists.

" India's principal claim to Kashmir is based on Mountbatten's acceptance, for India, of the Maharaja's accession.' Lacking strong physical ties with Kashmir, India has endeavoured verbally to minimize Pakistan's and at the same time to offset communication advantages held by Pakistan by improving and adding to Indian communication lines into Kashmir" (Mayfield 1955, 192). These claims are observations from the past, and since then methods of communication and also formations of groups encouraging rebellion and change have also evolved, but it has not changed the fact that opposition to present circumstances is fuelled by semi-external actors, who wish to see Kashmir divided or given to them for further benefit. These methods are to be expected when ulterior motives exist. There is little

equality to be found in the actions of such a conflict as even though the <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

Kashmir region falls under the Union of India, it is governed by Article 370, hence it is even to implement or be ruled by the same laws as in other places in India, rather it must follow a specific set of rules more geared toward its particular situation and its state (in all areas that do not fall under foreign affairs, finances and communications, or defence (Parliament must also get state government to coordinate any laws outside of this sphere) (Korbel 1949). This essay has mentioned history, foundations of religion, actors and attempts at gaining influence in the state of Kashmir for possible gain etc., but there exists substantial populations which are currently opting for the alternative means of gaining independence or liberties.

The Kashmir Secessionist Movement

The Kashmir Secessionist Movement has been underway for very long now. " With massive public support, a secessionist movement accompanied by insurgency began in the Kashmir valley in 1989" (Tremblay 1996-97, 2), substantial populations of Kashmir have pulled from previous ideas and began insisting on freedom as opposed to the formerly preferred autonomous status (pre-1953), where Indian access was limited, which would make for a Kashmiri state completely free of India (Tremblay 1996-97). Through the opposition there are evident examples of change and of realisation of the situation that is currently taking place. For example, there is the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) who wishes to see an independent Kashmir, while the Hizbul Mujahedeen would like to see an Islamic state formed and associated with Pakistan. Even the Kul-Jammat-e-Hurriyat-e-Kashmir (All Kashmir Freedom Front), who normally support an Islamic state and association with Pakistan, had requested the <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

implementation of the United Nations Resolution on Self-Determination within Kashmir, and that the fate of Kashmir be decided by the awaited plebiscite, while many in these same circles have been crossing into Pakistani, 'Azad Kashmir,' for a long time receiving military training etc (Tremblay 1996-97). The interesting detail at this point being that Kashmir had already long become run by secessionist groups, and that there are few more possibilities left for Kashmir now than when the partition took place (in terms of paper solutions).

India and Pakistan could offer to let both sides participate fairly in a referendum, but there are possibilities on each side of lack of will when it comes to this solvency, and in any case Kashmir could then become independent, or India and Pakistan could acquire a shared-sovereignty over Kashmir, but it is certain that whichever party declines the population the right to said referendum could indeed lose any and all support from groups within the state, and if India were to gain favour of the groups, and no doubt the international community, there are strong possibilities they could negotiate autonomy in the region and lessen the force from Pakistan (Tremblay 1996-97). The issue with the mentioned resolution is that, it gives no insurance of satisfying the militants, and while gaining control of Kashmir over Pakistan it would render Pakistan's actions illegal in the state as well as place pressure on the policies from Islamabad to demonstrate recognition of the loss, since it is not in Pakistan's interests. Even using the LOC as grounds for the international border between India and Pakistan does not insure that money, arms and people would stop crossing the border (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994)- especially now that the valley has taken on a " gun culture"

(Tremblay 1996-97). Through these details it is easier to view that the situation in Kashmir is quite unique, containing within it issues of identity, historical promises not yet met, religious divisions among society, special status ruling and governing which is blatantly different to that of the rest of the nation which is ruling the state, and these are all aspects that tie in links to religion on a rather geopolitical plane. Kashmir finds itself surrounded by interested parties seeking the right manner and moment to gain the advantage in the conflict, and therein lay the conflict as well. These are all based on outside interests and most are not centrally located within the conflict itself- within the sphere of bettering the situation for the Kashmiri. Still, while this essay has been able to briefly introduce history, notions of deeply rooted religious conflicts (both internal and external), along with manners in which Kashmir finds itself torn between many interested parties (mainly India and Pakistan), there still remains the fact that all of these factors showcase the conflict as ethnic, whereas this essay will conclude differently.

Conclusion

" Religion and culture no longer have a relationship with a territory or given society, which is what we call deterritorialisation. It means that religion has to define itself solely in terms of religion: there is no longer any social authority or social pressure to conform" (Roy 2004, 38). It cannot be, with all of the given history that the Kashmir conflict is only to be viewed from a religious platform, when it is obvious that both India and Pakistan have other agendas and interests when it comes to the divided state. In Kashmir, there were three main bodies of believers: Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, and <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

yet historically these groups have proven to be able to live amongst each other in harmony without significant violence or issue (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994). Many details of this conflict are similar to other significant religiously influenced conflicts involving Islam (and other religions), and the themes are similar still, while not overwhelmingly so due to the over-transparent existence of identity entrepreneurs and strategic interests that surface throughout the history of the very conflict. The Kashmir Conflict contains aspects of unheard grievances, government rule which is not in compliance with the beliefs of the inhabitants themselves, a strong willed community seeking religious unity, and external actors that are able to facilitate this but whose agendas have blurred the lines of justice- even since the time of the original reasons for conflict. It is very important to recognise that most conflicts that involve issues with religion are most definitely tied to other agendas, such as political etc. The fact that a conflict has a political agenda does not cancel out its religious value or guarantee an inappropriate use of religion within the sphere of the conflict itself. In the case of Kashmir, it is more than evident that the majority of the population is Muslim, and there is most certainly a common desire to reshape policy- even to begin reformation of the current government. This would perhaps better suit the lifestyle and could respect more the beliefs of the inhabitants of the conflicted state, making it easy to understand that such links between the Kashmiri faiths and their desire for change seem to go hand-in-hand, but the important detail to be recognised is the underlying and surfacing conflict characteristics that result from the combination of the religious and secular factors. This essay concludes that the Kashmir conflict, while portraying many landmark religious traits, all evident and found for, is more a conflict of interest over <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-factors-in-the-the-kashmir-conflict-politics-essay/>

the Kashmir State, encompassing a desire to gain access, reputation and geopolitical equality.