

Jammu and Kashmir: Competing Concepts of Nationalism

BY NILANJAN RAGHUNATH

Since their formal partition in 1947, India and Pakistan have argued over the border province of Jammu and Kashmir. For the most part, the region has remained under Indian control, though this has been hotly contested both within the territory and from without. The diverse population of Jammu and Kashmir includes Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs which in turn represent several ethnicities, language groups, and castes with different loyalties. Even Muslims, who constitute a majority in the Kashmir Valley, are divided among those who want an independent nation, those who want to join Pakistan, and still others who want to remain within Indian territory. In addition, the last fifty years have witnessed territorial disputes between the powers of the region, including the October 22, 1947 Pakistani appropriation of what it terms the “Northern Territories and Azad Kashmir,” and the 1962 war between India and China in Aksai Chin, part of the original state of Jammu and Kashmir. More recently, most confrontations have occurred between India and Pakistan, since Pakistan believes that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir should be part of the Pakistani nation-state. India contends that these territorial occupations and disputes by Pakistan and China are illegal but has so far been unable to prevent them. The issue is complex and has involved many political debates, wars, and terror attacks by insurgents on innocent civilians in India.¹ But despite all the resulting attention paid to the region, the existing literature on Jammu and Kashmir lacks a sociological dimension. This sort of analysis is important because it reveals that competing concepts of nationalism and factionalism, exacerbated by ideas of religious fundamentalism, are at the root of the political chaos.

Most of the scholarly debates regarding the separatist movements and conflicts over the region of Jammu and Kashmir ignore the sociological analysis of contestations over definitions of nation-states. For example, political scientist

Nilanjan Raghunath is a graduate student in Sociology at National University of Singapore.

Ishtiaq Ahmed argues that both nations have pursued policies of confrontation via relatively minor engagements along the Line of Control—an impermanent and disputed division of the state of Jammu and Kashmir between the two countries resulting from the 1972 Simla Agreement. Ahmed argues that these policies have substituted for nuclear confrontations and have categorically prevented the resolution of the crisis.² Meanwhile, political scientist Maya Chadda links the clashes in Jammu and Kashmir to ethnic identity politics shaped by the various interpretations of the region's history.³ Political scientist Subrata Mitra, however, attributes the clashes to the history of partition politics between India and Pakistan created by powerful elites in the wake of British colonial retreat.⁴

Although these political studies have significant merit, they ignore an essential dimension of the conflict. Specifically, the chaos of the region has been compounded by the different ideas of nationalism which have emerged in both India and Pakistan and are now competing for hegemonic control in Jammu and Kashmir. In many cases, these nationalist ideas are championed by fanatic insurgent groups which present themselves as freedom fighters and claim to represent the interests of broad sectors of the population. In general these militants represent no great religion nor any legitimate cause but merely their own ends, but they often use misconstrued religious beliefs and religious fundamentalism to gather popular support from mainstream believers. Jammu and Kashmir contain a mixture of local freedom fighters and foreign terrorists who disguise themselves as freedom fighters, claiming to defend all Muslims and the Islamic faith.

Islamic Nationalist Visions

The genesis of Jammu and Kashmir's Islamic national identity started on the Indian sub-continent in 1906, when elites from various Muslim communities joined to form the All India Muslim League.⁵ In 1932 a group of young, university-educated Muslims formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference to coordinate the popular movement against the Hindu Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, calling for social justice and a democratic government. Yet by 1938, what had begun as a strictly Islamic movement started to take on a multisectarian, national character as Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah—who would later serve as chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir under Indian rule—recast the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference as the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. This opened the organization to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike—anyone committed to the spirit of interreligious tolerance (*kashmiriyat*) and prepared to join the struggle for an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite Sheikh Abdullah's efforts, elements of the socially

conservative Muslim Conference eventually regained strength, and were emboldened by its allegiance with the All India Muslim League to overthrow British Colonial rule and direct the Jammu and Kashmir movement toward independence from all non-Muslims.⁶

The divisions among nationalist leaders became even more pronounced as their constituent factions focused on ending British colonial rule in India. Alliances initially formed across cultural and religious lines often broke down according to the changing social, political, and religious affiliations of the leaders who created them. The Indian National Congress Party, established in 1885, became the key leader of the independence movement against British rule in India. Led by pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, it called for a secular, democratic, and multicultural nation-state in India, which did

DIFFERENT IDEAS OF NATIONALISM HAVE EMERGED IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN, FEEDING REGIONAL CHAOS.

not attract those Muslims who wanted a separate religious nation. In 1947 a messy division of territory and people between India and Pakistan resulted in a massive flight of refugees and religious rioting on both sides.⁷ The nationalist visions fragmented along the lines of religion and secularism. The principality of Jammu and Kashmir found itself in a predicament in

1947 when Maharaja Hari Singh signed a treaty with India to protect Jammu and Kashmir while Pakistani tribesmen annexed a part of what they termed *Azad* (free) Kashmir.⁸ Yet some of its Muslim leaders initially leaned towards India in the belief that the post-colonial Indian democracy would guarantee independent status for Jammu and Kashmir as a nation-state and provide military protection from Pakistan, while other Muslim leaders wanted to retain their Indian identity and be a part of secular India.⁹

The situation has left Muslims from Jammu and Kashmir with the task of actualizing their much-debated visions of nationalism in an independent nation-state. Not all Muslims from Jammu and Kashmir identify themselves as Indian or Pakistani despite citizenship in either country. Many have relatives on either side of the Indo-Pakistan Line of Control, and their nationalist visions do not coincide with the political and military boundaries set by either state. To those Muslims seeking to hedge against integration into the Indian nation-state, the Islamic rhetoric of Pakistani nationalism is especially attractive. Militant groups often exploit this Islamic affinity for Pakistan, while pro-Pakistani secessionist groups use it as a tool to amass social solidarity among the varied Muslim ethnic communities in Jammu and Kashmir.

Moreover, ethnic heterogeneity has prompted various leaders, including activists and militants, to increasingly organize their protests and violent struggles around religious ideas, promoting Islamic religious hegemony in their attempt to bring about a unilateral voice. Actors can be divided into several factions: those whom the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan classify as freedom fighters because of their claims to fight for an independent state or federation of the regions of Jammu and Kashmir; political and apolitical activists trying to bring peace to the region regardless of the political status quo; and those who belong to militant groups classified by India as militants because of their ruthless violence against civilians. Although these militants follow different leaders and are not united, each group wishes to achieve fundamentalist hegemony by fighting the deployments of Indian troops on the Indian side of the Line of Control.

Though they possess a common aim, these factions have unresolved conflicts among themselves. Although the local Sufi practices are tolerant of other religious beliefs, the peoples of the region have suffered threats and violence by the extreme Islamist factions that India claims originate in Pakistan. It is important to note that not all Muslim leaders and civilians in the Indian region of Jammu and Kashmir support factions wanting a separate state. Many Sufi mausoleums of prominent saints worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims have been destroyed by the extremist groups, evidencing the dire state of multiculturalism in the region.¹⁰ These fanatical organizations seek to break the influences of both tolerant Sufi practices and Hindu traditions on Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir. In order to garner Pakistani support they identify their causes as jihad or holy war.¹¹ Although, as political scientist Sumantra Bose argues, the Jammu and Kashmir secession movements did not begin on religious grounds, radicals have used it as the primary means of divorcing the region from moderate Sufism or secular Indian nationalism.¹²

A Tenuous Status Quo

Separatist movements result from dissatisfaction with the existing territorial definitions of the nation-state, and they often seek to reorganize existing territories by the use of force. Thus, in understanding the development of separatist movements, it is essential to analyze the development of the ideology of the parent nation-state. One cannot look at the Jammu and Kashmir separatist movements without understanding at least some of the issues regarding the historical partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and other Indian nationalists tried to construct a national identity for India that differed from the premodern kingdoms and frontiers. The new allegiances

of the various kingdoms that formed the Indian nation-state on August 15, 1947 validated this nationalism. However, not all citizens of Jammu and Kashmir totally embraced Nehru's vision of secularism, demonstrating that nationalism is not an innately primordial or static phenomenon and that various visions can continue to emerge despite the dominant and legally ratified formation of the nation-state.¹³

Sociologist David Brown suggests that separatist movements, such as the ones in Jammu and Kashmir, develop if the civic organ of a nation-state cannot support the ethnic and multicultural ambitions of its citizens.¹⁴ To use Karl Mannheim's terminology, India has adopted an "ideological" stance insofar as it seeks to

**ETHNIC HETEROGENEITY
HAS PROMPTED LEADERS TO
INCREASINGLY ORGANIZE
THEIR PROTESTS AROUND
RELIGIOUS IDEAS.**

maintain the political status quo via distortion of social reality, which India has been accused of doing by denying the legitimacy of Muslim separatist struggles in Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Pakistan's desire for a larger share of Jammu and Kashmir reflects a "utopian" conception of nationalism that also distorts reality. To change the status quo, Pakistan has even tried to alter social reality by continuing to demand the integration of Muslims from Jammu and Kashmir who did

not choose to migrate in 1947. Indeed, Pakistan attributes the troubles in Jammu and Kashmir to "unfinished business" lingering from the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan.¹⁶ But Hindu-dominated India cannot give up Jammu and Kashmir, because it is the only Muslim-majority state in a country that has built its foundations on the precepts of secularism and multicultural cohesion rather than religious hegemony.¹⁷

Jammu and Kashmir presents a difficult situation because Indian and Pakistani nationalist rhetoric inherently involves the sensitivities of cultural, religious, and political differences that exist between the rival nuclear countries. Militancy on the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir is now dominated by pro-Pakistani groups, which have bolstered the popular rebellion with better financing and organization from foreign bases and sister rebellion groups situated in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the pro-independence lobby for Jammu and Kashmir fails to address the impossibility of its objective, as Pakistan is highly unlikely to give up its strategic position in Gilgit and Baltistan or abandon its rule in its part of Azad Kashmir. Moreover, India believes that Jammu and Kashmir's accession into Indian territory in 1947 was full and final and thus is nonnegotiable. However, not all Muslims in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir concede to Indian or Pakistani control of the region.¹⁸

The interaction of external political influences from Pakistan and India have hidden the varied conceptualizations of the destiny of Jammu and Kashmir by the various Muslim ethnic groups.¹⁹ The agendas of the changing alliances among the dominant players of the separatist movements have resulted in constant redefinitions of nationalism to suit new political needs. The political leaders in India and Pakistan and the factions in Jammu and Kashmir have sought but failed to construct a coherent narrative in the face of much regional and territorial diversity, religious polarization, and international pressures. Political scientist Walker Connor argues that ethnic attachments built on the myth of a common ancestry are more powerful than attachments to other forms of community.²⁰ However, Muslims from the region do not share a common ethnic ancestry—Kashmir is home to many Muslim communities, such as the Bakkarwal, Dard, Gujar, and Kashmiri. Thus, there is no single history to support all nationalist ideas.

Nevertheless, Sheikh Abdullah, the founder of secular nationalism in Kashmir, offered an interpretation of the region's history that would be acceptable to Indian authorities.²¹ In that historical narrative, the people of Jammu and Kashmir, whose distinctive cultures date to antiquity, have been enslaved and oppressed by neighboring powers over the last several centuries, while local people have struggled against those powers for justice and self-determination.²² Nationalists from Jammu and Kashmir stress a progression of diverse philosophical and religious influences that have formed their people's rich cultural heritage: Buddhism in the fourth century BC; indigenous Hindu Shaivism, followed by Hindu Vaishnavite influences; and finally Islam, which reached Jammu and Kashmir in the fourteenth century and made it into a preeminent center of learning and the arts. As evidence of Jammu and Kashmir's long history of oppression and subjugation, nationalist-minded historians cite the loss of freedom under the Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh rule, followed finally by the rule of the Dogra kings until 1947. They portray the latter as usurpers, imposed upon the region by British imperialists, and guilty of vanity, greed, and indifference to the people. Significantly, they are also viewed as having been anti-Muslim when a majority of their subjects were in fact Muslims. Muslims considered the Hindu Brahmin elite to be compliant and selfish collaborators of the Dogra court, helping to perpetuate injustice and oppression. In a similar vein, much of this nationalist historical literature is rich with statistics and economic data that support the charge that Muslims have been discriminated against and exploited by a feudal order imposed by imperialists and nurtured by its successors. Thus, the concepts of class conflict and imperialist exploitation have entered this nationalist discourse.

Yet the concept of *kashmiriyat*—cross-cultural tolerance based on the notional unity of invented traditions and historically-shared experiences—broke down when Indian leaders used it to assimilate the religious differences in Jammu and Kashmir into the larger Indian secular ethos.²³ Maharaja Hari Singh's policies favored Hindus and Muslims from other regions over Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir for government and military jobs. In 1927 a law was passed that defined "hereditary state subjects." Those not covered by this definition were not allowed to own land or hold public office in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This exclusionary rule inspired religiously affiliated movements in Jammu and Kashmir, as Hindus and Muslims formed separate associations seeking to create their respective national identities. The Muslim majority called for greater political and religious freedom and the Hindus further integrated themselves with the Indian secular nationalist movement.²⁴ According to historian Eric Hobsbawm, "invented traditions" such as *kashmiriyat*, consisting of national symbols, mythology, and duly customized history, constitute a key component of any nation.²⁵ When the concept fractured, so too did political unity.

Nonetheless, under the National Conference and its leader Sheikh Abdullah, nationalism in Jammu and Kashmir was secularized with supporters such as Jawaharlal Nehru, freedom-fighting nationalist Abul Kalam Azad, and the Indian National Congress. The diversity of Sheikh Abdullah's political associates since 1935 was possible because of the traditionally amicable relations between Hindus and Muslims, despite general Muslim antipathy to the Maharaja Hari Singh's rule.²⁶ However, since 1947, nationalist ideas emerging from Jammu and Kashmir have been continually overridden by the Indian ideological stance and Pakistani utopian control. Hence, there have been chaotic endeavors to distort economic, social, and political realities both to maintain the existing borders by India and to change the same by Pakistan and pro-secessionist factions.

The current separatist movements in the region ostensibly represent the demographic majority of Muslims, whose multiple cultural identities have generally been ignored to constitute an undivided Islamic majority.²⁷ However this attempt has further propagated factionalism and fundamentalism, which undermines their efforts to be internationally recognized as a cohesive and peaceful group seeking independence. Instead, the world perceives a problem of unsettled territory between India and Pakistan.²⁸ Muslims in the region, listening to various factions who claim to be fighting on their behalf, continue to be manipulated by those groups.

The Quest for a Coherent Nationalism

The physical base of a nation-state comprises its population and territory, along with all natural and man-made wealth held within its borders. The area of Jammu and Kashmir controlled by Pakistan has strategic, territorial, and political importance for the Indian nation-state because of its historical and cultural significance, which derives from the decision of the ruler of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to accede to India in 1947. Because of this importance, neither India nor Pakistan is willing to give up the territory that was formerly the Principality of Jammu and Kashmir. Rather, they seek to assimilate Jammu and Kashmir into their larger nationalist visions.²⁹

Significantly, the people of Jammu and Kashmir do not share a common ethnicity. This is particularly important given the recent history of the region's people. When a dominant power—for instance, a colonial power—is overthrown, many nationalist visions can emerge. One method for identifying a nation with a shared ethnicity is common ancestry, language, religion, or culture.³⁰ Though many different nationalist visions did emerge following the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent, the diversity of the population has rendered religious dogma the only effective unifying mechanism for dominant agencies of control. This is true despite the fact that Muslims in the Jammu and Kashmir region originate from Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and other central Asian countries.³¹ Muslims who sometimes identify themselves according to ethnic groups like Dogri, Gujar, Bakkarwal, or Kashmiri have been compelled to identify themselves only as Muslims to distinguish themselves from, and thus avoid being labeled as, "Indians" in general. Every attempt is being made by the factions in Jammu and Kashmir to rid their nationalist images of any cultural "shreds and patches" originating from Hindu and Buddhist influences. The separatist movements and factions disregard the religious diversity and tolerance of the local people.

In addition, the inconsistent and violent attempts to identify a unified nationalist vision among the varied groups in Jammu and Kashmir have further compelled them to conceptualize their homogeneity along singularly religious lines in opposition to Indian secular nationalism. Yet this attempt breaks down when the various factions try to organize and assert their specific national agendas. In Jammu and Kashmir, the lack of coherence among nationalist visions has resulted in a disunited struggle for independence,

**THERE IS NO SINGLE
INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY
TO SUPPORT THE VARIOUS
NATIONALIST IDEAS.**

exacerbated by geopolitical disputes over the validity of historical agreements on accession, political boundaries, and territories. The Indo-Pakistani conflict cannot be attributed to age-old hatred between the two populations, because both are multicultural and—as sociologist Geoffrey Benjamin aptly labels them— “secondary nation states” which are postcolonial creations.³² Instead, the nationalist visions that India and Pakistan have foisted upon the territory have not accorded with those of the people living in the territory divided between them. ▣

NOTES

¹ For information on Jammu and Kashmir, see “Jammu & Kashmir: The Complete Knowledge Base” <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com> and “Jammu & Kashmir Government: Profile.” <http://jammukashmir.nic.in/profile/welcome.html>.

² Ishfaq Ahmed, “The 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan: A Paradigm for Pathological Politics in India and Pakistan,” *Asian Ethnicities* 3:1(2001): 9-28.

³ Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security, and Separatism in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁴ Subrata K. Mitra, “War and Peace in South Asia: A Revisionist View of India-Pakistan Relations,” *Contemporary South Asia* 10:3 (2001): 361-379.

⁵ Shirin Keen, “The Partition of India,” created Spring 1998. <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Part.html> and Sajad Ibrahim, “Challenges to Nation Building in India,” *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* LVI: 3-4 (2000): 77.

⁶ “All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (AJK MC),” *GlobalSecurity.org*. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/ajkmc.htm>.

⁷ Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination, and a Just Peace* (New Delhi: Sage, 1997), 25.

⁸ Gerald James Larson, *India's Agony over Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 246-247.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 244-256.

¹⁰ “Jammu & Kashmir Government: Profile.” <http://jammukashmir.nic.in/profile/welcome.html> and M. Saleem Pandit “Terror Attack on Holy Man in Sopore, 2 Dead,” *The Times of India*, 22 June, 2006. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1672553.cms>.

¹¹ See “Jammu & Kashmir: The Complete Knowledge Base.” <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com>. Sufism and non-populist Islam is discussed by Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 79-84.

¹² See Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination, and a Just Peace*.

¹³ Shirin Keen, “The Partition of India.” <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Part.html>.

¹⁴ David Brown, “Why Might Constructed Nationalist and Ethnic Ideologies Come into Confrontation with Each Other?” (Paper presented at the South East Asian Research Center, City University of Hong Kong, November 2001), 5.

¹⁵ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (San Diego: Harvest, 1936).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mobashar J. Akbar, “Behind the Veil of Partition,” *The Asian Age*, November 2000. <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/archives/archives1998/98december10.html>.

¹⁸ Christopher Thomas, *Faultline Kashmir* (Uxbridge: Brunel Academic Publishers, 2000), 266-270.

¹⁹ Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India*, 60-71.

²⁰ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 1.

²¹ See Yesdezar D. Gundevia and Sheikh M. Abdullah, *The Testament of Sheik Abdullah* (Dehra Doon; Palit and Palit, 1974).

²² See Prem Nath Bazaz, *Kashmir in Crucible* (New Delhi: Pamposh Publications, 2005).

²³ See Narender Sehgal, *Memorial of Mistakes: Converted Kashmir* (New Delhi: Utpal Publications, 2001).

²⁴ The transformation of the Kashmiri people into a nation is discussed in U. K. Zutshi, *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1986). See also Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapter 1.

²⁶ Eqbal Ahmad, “A Kashmiri Solution for Kashmir,” *South Asian Magazine*, November 2000. http://www.sacw.net/i_aai/EHonKashmir.html.

²⁷ Kashi Nath Pandita, “Talibanization of Kashmir,” *Kashmir Information Network*, 2001. <http://www.kashmir-information.com/KNPandita/article2.html>.

²⁸ The complexity of the Kashmir's ethnic and religious differences is discussed in Balraj Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of the Indian Federation* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1981).

²⁹ Zahida Pirani, "Conflicts in Kashmir: The Kashmir Voice," *Prospects* 1:2 (2000).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Majid Hussein, Kashmir Geography. <http://www.koausa.org/Geography/ethnic.html>. Jammu and Kashmir. <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com>.

³² Geoffrey Benjamin, "The Unseen Presence: A Theory of the Nation-State and its Unseen Presence," Working Paper 19, National University of Singapore, 1988.