

A conceptual study on historical perspectives of Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract

The problem of the State of Jammu and Kashmir had plagued India's relations with Pakistan in the Post-independence era. At the time of independence, it was one of the princely states of India who failed to decide whether to join Union of India or Pakistan before 15 August 1947. Pakistan despite Standstill Agreement with the State of Jammu and Kashmir could not fulfil its promises to supply consumer goods to the State and having found the State helpless attacked in its territories with the help of tribes. The development was alarming enough and compelled Hari Singh, the then Maharaja of State, to seek military and other supports from the Indian government. Hence the State was not a part of Indian territory the latter was advised by Lord Mountbatten first to get accession of the state completed. Acting on his advise hectic arrangements were made and Indian military forces landed there to get vacate the occupied territory of State. Since then Pakistan has been claiming because most of the people in the state were the followers of Islam, Pakistan should be its natural ally, while the legal points along with international law on the subject favour India. Apart from deadlocks on number of other development issues, four straight fighting between the two had taken place with no solution of the problem in sight. The present article intends to analyze the historical perspectives of Jammu & Kashmir state, India.

KeyWords: Jammu & Kashmir, History, India, disputes

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir, a component state of the Indian Union covers an area of 86,023 square miles extending from 32° 17' to 36° 58' N. and from 73° 26' to 80° 30' E. Conveniently called by the shorter term 'Kashmir', the State includes besides the Valley, the areas of Jammu, Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar. By virtue of its central position in Asia, Kashmir commands a strategic importance touching as it does the borders of Pakistan, Russia and China. It stands on the old Central Asian trade route and the Kashmir Valley has, since ancient times, been the halting place of the caravans traveling between the plains of India and Central Asia. A detailed description of its geography is necessary to elucidate the pronounced variations found in the different aspects of the State. The Jammu district embraces the largest slice of this region and next to it area is Mirpur. Jammu city is about 1030 feet high from the sea and spreads over more than a mile. The prominent features of the city are its temples with pointed spires, and the imposing palace.

The next natural division of the State lies between the 'Outer Hills' in the south to the lofty mountain ranges dividing the Kashmir Valley from Jammu. Aptly called the 'Middle Mountains' the elevation of this tract ranges from 4000 to 12000 feet above the sea. It comprises the valley of Bhadrwah Kishtwar and Padar. There is a luxuriant growth of vegetation all over this area. The forests are rich with silver fir, deodar, spruce, oak and pine. The lower parts are cultivated wherever possible. The main crops grown are maize, rice, millet, barley and wheat. Cultivation in this area is dependent on rain which however is not enough for growing rice. Irrigational facilities are now being extended to this part of the State. Unlike the 'Outer Hills' snow falls and on higher elevations it stays long.

The ancient Greeks called it Kasperiria,¹ and in the classical literature Herodotus mentions it as Kaspatyros, and Hekataios calls it by the name of Kaspalyros or Kaspapyros. It is called Shie-mi in the narrative of To Yeng and Sung Yan (578 A.D). Henu Tsaing who visited Kashmir in 631 A.D. calls it Kia-shi-mi-lo.

The desiccation of the valley is believed to have been caused by an earthquake which created an outlet for the lake waters through the Baramula gorge.² Srinagar, the capital of the state, situated in the centre of the Valley, stands on the banks of the Vitasta. One of the oldest cities in India, its history dates back to the time of Ashoka who is credited with having founded it during his visit to Kashmir.³ Srinagar with its numerous canals and the adjacent Dal Lake is aptly called the 'Venice of the East' and is a centre of trade and commerce.

Beyond the valley are Ladakh, 'the land of the Lamas', Baltistan and Dardistan. The whole region is mountainous. Ladakh lies to the east of Kashmir Valley. The elevation of this part of the State varies from 8000 to 15000 feet above the sea. The mountains vary in height from 17000 to 25000 feet. The Karakoram ranges from the northern boundary of Ladakh. To the south lies the Ladakh range and further south the Zaskar range, the two being cut by the river Indus.

Historical Perspective

The history of the people of Jammu and Kashmir is a record of constant impulses of immigration from the north-west, west, south and east direction. The alien races, ethnic groups and various religions have influenced the cultural ethos and mode of life of people of this region. In the north-west, the Ladakhis in the east, the Gujjars and Rajputs in the south and Paharis in the south-east have closely influenced the existing ethnicity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The racial composition of the State was also influenced by the immigrants from the territories of Turkmenia, Tadzkistan, Uzbiakistan, Kazakistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. It too had a close bearing of the Indo-Aryans on the racial composition of the people of state.

The political history of Kashmir begins, according of Kalhana, with Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor who erected several Buddhist temples and statues and founded Srinagari, the present Srinagar, as its capital system of administration and during the period Buddhism attained a new horizon. Among the

¹ A third fragment in Ptolemy (VII,42) gives Kaspeiria as one of two provinces in Menander's home kindom east of the Jhelum, Chenab and Ravi which would correspond to Southern Kashmir. See Tarn, *The Geeks in India and Bactria* p. 238.

² W.R. Lawrence, *The valley of Kashmir*, pp. 42-43.

³ Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, i-104.

other Hindu rulers were Lalitaditya (724-760 A.D.), Avantivarman (855-883 A.D.), Samkaravarman (883-902 A.D.), Harsa (1089-1101 A.D.) Uccala (1101-11 A.D.). The last Hindu ruler of Kashmir in ancient period was Kota Rani, who assumed power after the death of her husband, Udyanadeva. The general condition of the people under Hindu rulers remained good and irrigation canals found later on testify that the Rajas did not spend and helpless and about 1346 A.D. Muslim rulers began to reign in Kashmir.

Important among Muslim rulers were Sikandar who succeeded Shams-ud-Din, the first Sultan of Kashmir and earned for himself the nickname of Butshikan or the idol breaker. He was enemy of Hindu temple, books of Hindu learning. He left worshipping people with three options – death, conversion or exile. However his son Zain-ul-Abdin was quite different from him and expressed a partial zeal in state's development works. From 1586-87 the valley passed from the period of the Sultans of Kashmir into the hands of the Moghul Emperors. Moghul Emperors set the revenue of the state and made it a pleasant place through planting and gardening. The period following from 1756 the rule of the valley was passed into the hands of Afghans who proved the cruellest master the valley had ever seen. The people of Kashmir were so vexed with the brute rules and turned with hope to the rising power of Ranjit Singh. He was the Sikh monarch of Punjab and acquired Kashmir in 1819. His rule was an improvement for the people of the State.

By the time the power of the British in India expanded and they began to chalk out an strategy for annexation of Kashmir as a buffer state in the region. In 1830 Lord Hastings, the then Governor-General of India, visited Kashmir and gave Raja Gulab Singh a certified of merit for his excellent arrangements during the tour. They both came into contact and Gulab Singh had visualised that in order to achieve his aims the British could be a powerful master. Death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 followed the collapse of the central authority thereby opening the field for the British to act.

Treachery and internal dissension led to the signing of the treaties of Loharo and Amritsar. These treaties made Raja Gulab Singh the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. The British did not care to ascertain the wishes of the people of Kashmir while bringing the territory under the subjugation of Gulab Singh. With the signing of the treaties British interference in the affairs of the state started and gradually the ruler became weak and helpless. After the death of Gulab Singh in 1857, his third son Ranbir Singh assumed power who maintained the traditions of his father and remained loyal to the British. He also helped the latter in suppressing the revolt of 1857 in various regions. He was succeeded by Partap Singh who came eager to show extreme loyalty to the British and lived in the shadow of fear. During his reign the British completed the reorganisation of civil administration and reorganised all departments. Meagre developments were made in the field of communication due to Anglo-Russian rivalry but largely the territory remained backward in sphere of education, trade and everything that could bring an enhanced way of life in the valley.

The last king before the British withdrawal was Maharaja Hari Singh who took over in 1925. The people of the State were not happy in his reign and the king had no control over administration. Public resentment and resistance in the against the autocratic rule of Maharaja generated disappointments in the masses that led to the formation of a political organisation in 1932. The entire political organisation in the valley was reconstituted in 1938 led by Sheikh Abdullah in the name of National Conference. The new force had a mass-base and it united the state against the oppressive policies of Maharaja to form a responsible government in the state.

After the lapse of British paramountcy over Indian territory the State of Jammu and Kashmir became an independent one like the other Princely State of India. As it could not make choice regarding accession before a bone of contention between India and Pakistan following the British withdrawal. The new state made a situational accession with the Union of India on being forced by Pakistani attack. Signing of the Instrument of Accession by Hari Singh, the then Maharaja of State, made India its legal heir while the Government of Pakistan termed the Instrument based on fraud and violence. The accession of the state was made disputed by Lord Mountbatten who wrote a letter, in addition to the Instrument, expressing the wish to have a decision in reference to the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. On January 1, 1948, India took the matter to the UN in the hope of solving the problem to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. The first war that occurred in 1947-48 proved helpless in making a just solution.

Accession of the State was made with the signing of Instrument by the ruler and open support of the people and their lone leader, Sheikh Abdullah. The latter was the undisputed, sole leader of the National Conference while the same position was held by Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the Muslim League. Sheikh Abdullah was opposed to joining the State of Pakistan perhaps due to the fear that his arch rival Jinnah would come to power and so he attacked his lot with India. Initially on his issue of Plebiscite the strongest opposition came from him. He claimed himself as the sole representative of Kashmir and whatever he would decide, would be good enough for the Kashmir and thus there was no need of having a plebiscite to ascertain people's wish. He, on his behalf, left no one in doubt that the State of Jammu and Kashmir belongs to India only.

The real face of Sheikh Abdullah came to the fore once he was saddled firmly and accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir was completed. He began to misuse, rather blackmail his position in the eyes of Indian government for which he was the sole hope of national integration on the one hand and test of Indian secularism on the other. Abdullah belied Nehru's hope that the former would not only remain with India but would take an active part in the political, economic and social development of the country. At the end of 1952 it became clear that he was guided by Pakistani leaders and their thinking. His authoritarian and autocratic style of functioning in the state compelled the Government of India to dispose him from the chair and put behind the bars in August 1953.

Several official and unofficial attempts were made including the efforts of Indian government and the UN to solve this contentious issue. Solution of the Kashmir problem is important not because it is a Muslim majority area but because it has the key to normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. For Pakistan gaining Kashmir may be a matter of religion, for India it is a part of its culture. The case of Kashmir stands apart, because Kashmir is not a case of communal conflict. It may be a case of any other conflict, but it is essentially not a case of communal conflict. It is attached with India due to old bounds and sentiments. It is not close to our minds only but to hearts too.

New Delhi, on her part, has always avoided full-fledged war with Islamabad on the issue. The initial war of 1947-48 could not get it done and the matter was put before the UN. In response to India's complain and Pakistan's explanations the world body had passed two resolutions in April and August 1948, respectively. The resolution contained three parts of which first one was related to the cease fire that had come into effect from January 1, 1949. Ceasefire between the two had left with India its major and best part while Pakistanis had control over smaller and less important parts of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan-controlled part of the territory is called 'Azad Kashmir' but India had retained its traditional nomenclature. After some years the issue of Kashmir had become a part of the

cold war. While the Anglo-American bloc was inclined towards Pakistan the former Soviet Union backed India. Right from the year 1962, on number of occasions the two had tried to solve the problem through direct talk or negotiation but without success.

The war of 1965 convinced Islamabad that Kashmir could be gained only through internal rebellion and not through external aggression. Following the war India signed a Tashkent agreement which was a more disappointing for Pakistan than for India, Z.A.Bhutto, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, defended the agreement by saying that only when the people of Jammu and Kashmir have exercised their inherent right of self-determination and that the Declaration was only the dialogue between India and Pakistan for a permanent solution of the 'tragic dispute'. In due course the idea for self-determination was converted in the dream of a Azad Independent Kashmir. For the purpose an organization named Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was formed. In recent past several other organizations have also been set up to look after the ideal of Kashmir's independence and demanded integration of the portion of territory occupied by Pakistan and controlled by India. The demand of the right of self-determination and independence for the state of Jammu and Kashmir had led the problem in the direction, beyond the control of New Delhi and Islamabad.

From the viewpoint of security and integrity of Pakistan its war with India in December 1971 was the worst. The 13-day direct fight had disintegrated Pakistan and a new sovereign, independent nation-Bangladesh emerged on world's map. The agreement at Simla of Kashmir a bilateral affair that should be settled between the two countries. The promises made at Simla were short lived and the two had straight fighting in Kargil in 1999. Till now four wars had been fought between India and Pakistan keeping this problem at the centre. Even after Kargil Islamabad stood almost destroyed. It also led to the change of guard in the country-from the democratic ruler Nawaz Sharif to Pervez Musharraf, a Army General.

Despite a humiliating defeat at the battle-field Pakistan handled the aftermath well in diplomatic terms. The direct result of the war and the agreement that followed were return of PoWs, withdrawal of troops and resumption of diplomatic relations. Apart from this the Simla Pact also contained a Kashmir settlement comprising four parts. The last paragraph of the pact not only grouped together a Kashmir settlement but also bound the parties to another summit to resolve them all. 'Both governments agree that their respective heads will meet again at a mutually convenient time in the future and that in the meanwhile, the representative of the two sides will meet to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalization of relations'. On the issue they were also afraid of the United Nations and both the leaders- Mrs. Gandhi and Bhutto expressed willingness in the Raiya Sabha and National Assembly respectively to resolve the problem bilaterally. Unfortunately, the proposed summit was never held and promises could not be translated into action.

In the post-Simla periods several rounds of unsuccessful discussions were held between India and Pakistan and for number of years it had set the course of relations between the two. In between 1972 and 1989 Pakistan never raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir or described it as a "Core Issue" in any of the discussion. On the other hand alienation of the people of Kashmir continued as earlier. It was made considerable headway due to the sequence of events and the general mood of the public become from anti government to anti-India. There has been a persistent policy of denying Kashmir a right to democracy: one -party rule has been imposed on the state through manipulation of elections, opposition parties have been prevented from growing and elementary civil liberties and human right

have been denied to the people. This refusal to integrate be the single greatest block to the process of Kashmir's emotional and political integration with the rest of India. The basic premises of this policy are that the Kashmir are unfit for democracy. This is not only to the people of Kashmir but to all democratic sensibility.

From 1989 onwards militancy in Kashmir had passed through various phase. It acquired a qualitatively new terrorist character. Having permitted conditions within Kashmir to deteriorate to the level that they had reached, the Indian state had little option but to fight hard to break the insurgency. The Kashmir policy of the Government of India has been marked by the carrot and stick approach. Right from the days of arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953, the brute face of the Bakshi regime failed to suppress popular unrest. It was then supplemented by lavish central aid to the state along with the supply of rice at heavily subsidized rates. More generous central aid was once again promised in exchange of Farooq's agreement to share power with the Congress in 1986. From the start, force and aid had been used as instruments to win the loyalty of the people not for the nation but the Government and party in power.

Indian misrule gave birth to an uprising in Kashmir. In course of time militancy entered a new phase. It was no longer a fight between the militants and the security force. It gradually assumed the form of a total insurgency of the entire population. The conspicuous failure of the state had occurred earlier in allowing matters to get to that point. The needs of party politics and security could not be reconciled. As a result grievous damage was done not only to the volitional connection of the state with the rest of the country, but also to the concept of Kashmiriyat that linked the 36 per cent non-Muslims of the State. The establishment helped Muslim zealots capture Kashmiriyat.

In this atmosphere of total confrontation between security forces and the Kashmir Muslims, the excesses of the militants and the killing of innocent civilians by them could hardly attract much attention. By the time Pakistan decided to start a low-intensity conflict in Kashmir based on the experience gained from the deniable war in Afghanistan it had pursued in the Eighties together with the US against the Soviet Union. General Zia had transformed Pakistan under his strategy of Islamisation. The very natural of the militant movement in Kashmir implied intolerance of dissent and use of violence as the principal means of action. Its targets were not always the personal of the security forces and so-called informers but also civilian official and non-officials, political leaders and common citizens.

In 1988, the Kashmir dispute attained an extra dimension when India and Pakistan became overt nuclear powers. By the time Pakistan embarked on the Kargil operation in 1999, the low-intensity conflict in Kashmir was yielding mostly negative results for Pakistan in terms of international support. The operation clearly meant to highlight the Kashmir cause, failed to make Pakistan realize that it had become too isolated internationally for the policy of highlighting to work. In afterwards offers and counteroffers were made for the settlement of Kashmir by both countries but they rejected for the reason best known to all. Just after the war Pakistan urged India to take up the Kashmir issue on "priority basis" as it was root cause of tension between the two neighbours. Meeting of leaders-Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif in July 1998 at the SAARC Summit in Colombo had paved the way for the resumption of stalled dialogue between the two countries. They agreed, despite disagreements to move towards a solution which would be in the mutual interest.

In the post –Pokharan and Kargil periods the problem of Kashmir has the potential to create not only armed confrontation but possible nuclear war. That is why the rapprochement between India and Pakistan has been supported by overseas powers. The process of confidence-building measures initiated by India and Pakistan needs to be institutionalised and an element of irreversibility needs to be embedded in these measures. A solution could grow to become a resolution, if the mindset of the people in the region change. Once a framework had been created, which involved intensive dialogue between India and Pakistan it would not be difficult to find a solution. Pakistan has to be dealt with a multi-pronged strategy. Most importantly, we have to strengthen communal harmony and promote respect for pluralism within India. Pakistan will see the futility of seeing parity with India only when we are at peace domestically. Trade, contacts and economic affairs would be regulated by both sides, which would also be responsible for Kashmir's external security. Domestic policy would be decided by an elected autonomous government. In contrast to the policy adopted in Punjab which led to the untold human suffering, the 'healing touch' policy is on the card in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The root cause of the lack of a strategic vision in India's policy is the inability of Indian Policy-makers to look at themselves through Kashmiri eyes.

Conclusion

The entire series of misunderstanding reveals how difficult it has become for government to make radical departures of policy in the information age. The only way to bring lasting peace is to eschew final goals and concentrate on the process. Open road and rail links between the parts of Kashmir, open both parts of Kashmir for tourism and trade, give both parts of Kashmir the autonomy that their constitutions normally contain allow them to form links with each other, and do all this in step with the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. This can only be done in stages and trust will grow as each stage is completed. India and Pakistan have a more than half century experience of the subject which they have seen through the Kaleidoscope of war and terrorism, verbal duels in the United Nations, bilateral negotiations and quasi-mediation. At the end of the day it is becoming clearer to both sides that neither reference of historical claims nor the US resolutions and liberation struggles will resolve the problem. The 'final settlement' the two sides are committed to can only come through a political compromise which must be fashioned with the understanding that politics is, after all, the art of the possible.

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