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# Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Diversity in Jammu & Kashmir: Perceptions on unity and discord - Demise of Kashmiriyat

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## Introduction

*“We must always remember Kashmir is not a thing to be bandied about between India-Pakistan. It has a soul of its own; it has an individuality of its own. We cannot, certainly much less Pakistan, play with it as if it were something in the political game between the two countries.”*

The serious verity of these words, spoken by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru before the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India’s parliament) in 1955, seems to have been forgotten in the continuity of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Indeed, in the 73 years since the Partition of British India, the tug-of-war over the erstwhile Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan has not attenuated as both India and Pakistan have tightened their grip on their side of the rope. Naturally, this division and the violence it incurred has fermented deep resentment in J&K, with various State and Non-State actors proliferating their vision and ideology on the future of Jammu and Kashmir.

Yet, it is important to remember that for the better part of J&K’s history, its inhabitants had developed a strong sense of peaceful coexistence between its numerous religions, peoples and customs. J&K is a panorama of plurality, with longstanding heterogenous traditions and cultures that have (up until its recent history) been united in their diversity. Yet this diversity has been entrenched by the actions and narratives of internal and external actors that seem to, in Nehru’s words, play with J&K as if it were something in a political game. The indigenous traditions of peaceful coexistence, inscribed in the philosophy of Kashmiriyat, have been eroded throughout the conflict, replacing diversity with division.

To note, the violence that followed the partition of British India and the bifurcation of the Princely State was initially not rooted in religious issues, but attempts by Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference to congregate the people of the Princely State around the notion of Kashmiriyat, as to concretise nationalistic sentiment, failed in the face of the advent of political Islam and the increasing division along religious lines.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how geographical and political divisions in postpartition J&K have contributed to the demise of Kashmiriyat, the erosion of Kashmir’s indigenous secularism, and the rapid increase of religious radicalisation. Questions of religious, cultural and ethnic identities have also played a role in the dissolution of unity.

For the sake of simplifying the complex history and particularities of J&K's pluralism, this paper will be structured according to current geographical divisions, including the intricacies of J&K numerous religions, cultures and ethnicities, followed by a section on political divisions and the conflict itself before concluding.

### The creation and division of the Princely State

The official formation of the Princely State of J&K dates back to 1846, upon the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar following the First Anglo-Sikh war. The contents of this treaty ceded the entirety of Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan and Ladakh to the Raja of Jammu, Gulab Singh, for the grand sum of 7.5 million rupees- to be paid to the British (Akbar, 2002). Gulab Singh became the first Maharaja of the Princely State, and established the Dogra dynasty, while recognising the suzerainty of the British Empire.

Gulab Singh's descendant, Hari Singh, ruled J&K as its last Maharaja from 1925 to 1949. The demise of the Dogra dynasty was brought about by the partition of British India, the latter naturally putting Maharaja Hari Singh in a difficult position. When the notion of creating two separate States became a reality, he was given the choice to accede to either India or Pakistan. It is important to note that he was a Hindu ruler in a Muslim-majority territory and Pakistan was to become an Islamic Republic, and India was to become a secular one, albeit with a Hindu majority. Maharaja Singh had to consider J&K's Muslim majority, its Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh minorities, as well as J&K's longstanding history of religious tolerance.

Remaining independent would have been an ideal choice for the Maharaja as that would ensure the continuity of his rule, yet the Maharaja was aware that this option was only feasible on paper and not practical. J&K's strategic position bordering China and Afghanistan, and only a narrow strip of land away from the Soviet Union, was coveted in the days leading up to the Cold War, as were its vast natural resources, notably water. J&K being positioned at the foot of the Himalayas, is situated very close to the source of the Indus River, which starts in the Tibetan Plateau in China, flows through Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan, and descends through Pakistan before reaching the Arabian Sea. Control over the course of the Indus River, and its numerous tributaries, was primordial for Pakistan, as it is its longest and most important water flow (Times Now, 2019).

Maharaja Singh's hesitation turned from weeks to months, and resulted in impatience from both India and Pakistan. In order to appease this impatience, the Maharaja offered to sign standstill agreements with both countries. Singh sent telegrams on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1947 to representatives of both the Indian and Pakistani Dominions, in them, suggesting that "*existing arrangements should continue pending settlement of details*". While Pakistan readily accepted and signed the agreement, India requested that further negotiations take place. However, the parties never arranged them, and no Standstill Agreement was signed between India and J&K. Pakistan did not respect the provisions of the agreement, and soon after its signing, Pakistan began instigating raids and supplying weapons to populations across the border with J&K.

Things took a turn in October 1947, when tribesmen from the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, as well as army regulars, invaded the sovereign State of J&K in violation of the signed Standstill Agreement and covenants of International Law. The violent destruction they left in their wake alarmed the Maharaja, who called upon India for help. India agreed to send troops to defend J&K and requested a legal basis for entering the State of J&K with its Army, which translated in the fact that J&K would accede to India. Thus, the Instrument of Accession was signed on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1947 between the Maharaja and the Indian State.

This brought India and Pakistan to the first of three direct confrontations over J&K. The Indian army was able to liberate the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh from invading forces and when the Indian army came close to taking the Muzaffarabad-Poonch-Mirpur belt, Prime Minister Nehru chose to take up the issue to the United Nations (UN) for mediation and resolution. His reasons for involving the UN in the bilateral matter are unclear, but it could be that Nehru was aware that the political and logistical cost of the conflict over J&K was an exorbitant price to pay for two nascent States. He perhaps sought to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, and this might explain why he took up the issue under Article 35, Chapter XI of the UN Charter, namely Pacific Settlement of Disputes, rather than under Chapter XII, Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression. However, it is speculated that Nehru expected the UN to reprimand Pakistan for its act of aggression, but he underestimated the political dynamics in the days leading up to the Cold War, and that the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) had their eyes set on Pakistan to become a buffer State against the Soviet Union.

Following Nehru's petition, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 47, which stated three primary and subsequent conditions for the resolution of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. Firstly, both Pakistan and India should agree to establish a ceasefire. Secondly, Pakistan must withdraw all its troops from the territory of the erstwhile Princely State, after which India must reduce its number of troops to a minimum, for the preservation of law and order. The third condition was to implement a plebiscite, supervised by the United Nations, as to determine the wishes of the people of J&K.

While the ceasefire (now Line of Control – LoC) was observed and signed into being with the Karachi agreement between India and Pakistan in 1949, Pakistan did not withdraw its troops and claim to the region. Thus, the conditions set by the UN for the resolution of the conflict could not be implemented. Following the second Indo-Pak war over J&K in 1965, the two countries once again signed a cease-fire agreement, known as the Tashkent Agreement, mediated by the Soviet Union. While the agreement's terms put an end to the war, neither side was able to establish a solution for long lasting peace. In 1972, in the wake of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, India and Pakistan signed the Shimla Agreement, and agreed that both nations would resolve their differences through bilateral negotiations without the involvement of a third party. Hence, UN involvement and UNSC Resolutions concerning Jammu and Kashmir became obsolete.

The ways through which the Indo-Pak dispute over J&K has unfolded proves that neither bilateral negotiations nor international mediation have been able to provide a

comprehensive, sustainable and long-lasting peaceful solution. The composite culture that had taken centuries to evolve into a scene where different communities coexisted in synchronized harmony has been steadily eroded throughout the unfortunate events of J&K's contemporary history.

While reading this paper, it is important to keep in mind that J&K is far from being a homogenous state. Numerous ethnic groups, such as the Dards, Kashmiris, Ladakhis, Baltis and Dogras, have inhabited the region for centuries and these ethnic groups developed their own distinct cultures and languages, which in various instances were fluidly adopted by other groups. When different religions and religious streams (Buddhism, Hinduism, Shaivism, Islam and Sufism to name but a few) entered J&K, they came not by compulsion and conquest. To quote the words of Kalhana, a notable historian of Kashmir: “...*The country may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit, but not by the force of soldiers*” (Akbar, 2002).

Regrettably, the post 1947 status quo in J&K has crumbled its history of peaceful coexistence, and entrenched divisions that have indelibly changed the souls and characters of the people of J&K.

### Geographical Divisions

The result of the first India-Pakistan war over J&K left the region severed in two, with one side administered by Pakistan and the other by India. Another war, this time between India and China in 1962, saw yet another division. Following a humiliating military defeat, India lost Aksai Chin to China. While the former claimed Aksai Chin was an integral part of Ladakh, thus of J&K, the latter claimed it was an integral part of Xinjiang and Tibet. The following year, Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley, in the northern part of Gilgit-Baltistan, to China as part of the China-Pakistan Border agreement, for the construction of the Karakoram highway. As the parts of J&K administered by China are relatively uninhabited, this paper will focus solely on the parts administered by India and Pakistan.

The inhabitants of the erstwhile Princely State have now lived almost as many decades divided as they did united; their estrangement and the socio-political shifts that fell upon the historical regions of J&K have evidently transformed the outlook of the inhabitants of each region. The following section will focus on the fate of J&K's regions post 1947, as to provide insight into some of the transformations that have shaped present day divisions.

### Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir

Following the first Indo-Pak war and the bifurcation of the erstwhile Princely State, Ladakh along with Jammu and the Kashmir Valley fell under the administration of India. J&K was the only territory to be given special autonomy in the Indian Constitution, and its conditions were described in Article 370 and Article 35A. The former, adopted in 1949, provided J&K autonomy over its internal affairs, with New Delhi retaining control over foreign affairs, defence, communication and currency. This granted J&K the right to its own constitution and flag, and

to legislate its own laws. Article 35A, adopted in 1954, essentially preserved land and property laws, local government jobs and local education scholarships for locals. For example, an Indian citizen from another state or Union Territory could not buy land in J&K nor hold a job in J&K's government.

As a result of this special status, residents held more control and say over the decisions taken regarding their homeland, contrary to residents of J&K under the administration of Pakistan (as will be explained later). The legal status of J&K changed in August 2019, when Article 370 and 35A were nullified and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act was passed. This Act bifurcated the state in two, creating the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Ladakh. Union Territories are special administrative sectors which operate directly under the control of the central government in Delhi. The Union Territory of J&K holds its own legislature, whereas the Union Territory of Ladakh does not.

### Kashmir Valley

Located in the western side of J&K, the valley has always held a place of significant cultural, economic and political importance and it was there that the seeds of religious pluralism were planted. Over centuries, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam developed deep roots in the region, and their coexistence was synchronised in harmony. The Kashmir Valley is the birthplace of Kashmiriyat, a philosophy embedded in the writings of Lal Ded and Nund Rishi. Kashmiriyat embraces the customs of harmony, peace and equilibrium preached by adherents of Hinduism and Islam, and assembles members of different faiths around their traditional, cultural and ethnic ties.

The Kashmir Valley has historically been a predominantly Muslim region, yet its biggest religious minority is Hindus. During the reign of the Dogras, administrative and political positions were often reserved for Kashmiri Hindus, also known as Kashmiri Pandits, whereas the majority of Kashmiri Muslims were cultivators and farmers. While the Maharaja's rule was subject to religious neutrality, apparent socio-economic differences between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims brewed resentment and tensions. In 1931, a nationalist movement arose against Dogra rule, as members of the peasantry and working class demanded greater representation and say in a system that upheld the privilege of the Kashmiri Pandits (Zutshi, 2004). It is important to note this was a peasantry movement against the bourgeoisie (which also included elite Kashmiri Muslims), rather than Kashmiri Muslims against Kashmiri Pandits. Yet, the majority of the peasantry did consist of Kashmiri Muslims.

A commission was formed by the Maharaja to *"enquire into and report on the various complaints of a religious or general nature"*. This commission came to be known as the Glancy Commission, after the British official Sir G.B. Glancy who headed it, and it found the grievances of the Kashmiri Muslims well-founded. Thus, the commission recommended various reforms, and highlighted the need for equality and greater political representation of Kashmiri Muslims. While the Maharaja accepted these reforms, their implementation was delayed.

These events played a significant role in entrenching deeper division between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits.

After the bifurcation of the Princely State, the majority of the Kashmir Valley became part of Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir. The following decades were marked with turbulence and later on violence, with various movements demanding self-determination, autonomy, accession to Pakistan and/or Islamic rule. This turbulence reached boiling point in 1987, after the defeat of the popular Muslim United Front in the elections which resulted in the loss of faith in the democratic process in the Kashmir Valley, and a wave of Kashmiri Muslim youth and separatist leaders resolved to crossing the LoC to obtain training in Pakistan and Pakistan Administered J&K in order to initiate an insurgency in Indian Administered J&K (Times Now, 2019).

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir entered a new wave in the 1990s, when religious radicalisation and terrorism became a new weapon in a full-blown insurgency against the Indian State. The Kashmir Valley, once the cultural centre point of J&K, had now become the focal point of a proxy war. Indeed, Pakistan's premier Intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) sponsored notorious terror organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul-Mujahideen, providing them with weapons, logistical support and training facilities in so-called '*Azad*' (*'free'*) Kashmir. The objective was to annex the Kashmir Valley, and cleanse it of non-Muslim minorities. As such, the tragic event that came to be known as the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits unfolded when scores of Pandits, as well as secular Kashmiri Muslims, were killed by Kashmiris who had been indoctrinated by the anti-Hindu, anti-India propaganda disseminated from the Pakistani side of the LoC. It is estimated that 350,000 Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave their ancestral homes in the Valley and had to settle in refugee camps in Jammu and other parts of India (Ramachandran, 2020). The terrorists had achieved the demographic change they had set out to do, and from there undertook further campaigns of religious persecution in Jammu.

Despite their adherence to different faiths, the inhabitants of the Valley naturally share common cultural characteristic traits that are unique to their region and history. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are the prevalent speakers of Kashmiri, a language that originates in the Valley. Traditional food and clothing are also shared between practitioners of both these faiths, and the Kashmir Valley remains one of the only places in the South Asian continent where it is nearly impossible to distinguish between a Hindu and a Muslim by solely examining the last name. Even after conversion from one faith to another, families retained their original names, which were associated with the original trade and craftsmanship of their ancestors. Religious tolerance based on shared characteristics was heavily preached and influential in the Valley, as it was the birthplace of Kashmiriyat. It is important to note that when tensions between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits started to arise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was chiefly done on socio-economic grounds rather than religious ones, as many Kashmiri Pandits had an elevated economic status compared to their Muslim counterparts.

## Jammu

Jammu lies on the south-western side of J&K and has close cultural ties to the region of Punjab. It is a majority Hindu area, with Muslim and Sikh minorities also present. The territory came under the rule of Gulab Singh in 1820, who had been made Raja of Jammu, which marked the beginning of the Dogra Dynasty, which then expanded towards the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. Jammu is currently home to the winter capital of the Union Territory of J&K, and Srinagar in the Valley is the summer capital.

Similarly to the Valley, Jammu also harboured a long tradition of tolerance and coexistence between members of different faiths. Various ethnic groups settled in Jammu, such as the Dogras, Gujjars and Bakarwals, and Dogri, Hindi, Punjabi and Pahari are commonly spoken languages. The dominant Dogra culture, while closely tied to Hinduism, has a long-established pillar of tolerance and devotion to humanity, and its heritage has been influenced by the teachings of both Hindu and Muslim Saints. On cultural and ethnolinguistic grounds, the inhabitants of Jammu, be they Muslim or Hindu, share more commonalities among each other than with Kashmiri Muslims or Pandits, despite sharing respective religions with them.

Following the partition of British India, its neighbour to the west, Punjab, was split into two. Western Punjab went to Pakistan and Eastern Punjab to India and as was tragically seen during the partition, mass migration and communal violence ravaged the subcontinent. Jammu was the scene of such communal violence, when approximately 100,000 Sikhs and Hindus from Sialkot (now in Punjab, Pakistan) found refuge in Jammu. The tales of the atrocities committed against them at the hands of Muslims in newly formed Pakistan ignited anti-Muslim sentiments in Jammu. As such, widespread killings of Muslims in Jammu city occurred, permanently altering its demographics. Similarly, Hindus and Sikhs residing in Mirpur and Muzaffarabad (then part of Jammu) were massacred and the shock of the atrocities of the partition witnessed in Jammu altered the political outlook of its residents. As Hindu-based groups were able to gain more socio-political space, religion-based politics strongly dominated the scene in Jammu, to the detriment of progressive and secular currents (Tremblay and Bhatia 2020).

It is important to note that the Muslims of Jammu were closer to Punjab than the Kashmir Valley and it is believed that they harboured a pro-Pakistan sentiment, rather than secularity as was proclaimed by Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference in the Kashmir Valley. Indeed, the Muslims of Jammu had parted way with Sheikh Abdullah when he replaced the name of his Muslim Conference with the name National Conference (in his attempt to rally the people of J&K across religious lines), and they revived the Muslim Conference in Jammu (Tremblay and Bhatia 2020).

Decades later, Jammu became a destination for Kashmiri Pandits following their exodus from the Kashmir Valley. This may have further reinforced the idea that the Valley is for Muslims whereas Jammu is for Hindus. Hence, the sectarian divide which marked the abrupt departure from the teachings of peaceful coexistence was further consolidated not only in the Valley, but in Jammu as well.

## Ladakh

While Ladakh extends over a sizable territory, approximately 100,000 square kilometres (Leh Ladakh Tourism, n.d), it has a low population density, accounting for less than 3% of the population of J&K (Jammu & Kashmir official portal, n.d). This is partly due to its remote terrain; being a mountainous, high-altitude desert plateau, it is difficult to access by road, as infrastructure is limited. It is currently divided into two districts- Leh and Kargil.

The unique history of Ladakh has naturally shaped the political, linguistic and cultural ethos of the Ladakhi population. The ancient inhabitants of Ladakh were Dards, an ethnic branch on the Indo-Aryan family tree. Immigrants from neighbouring regions, such as Tibet, also settled in Ladakh; their cultural and ethnic characters being inherently similar to the indigenous population made for an organic integration. The Hindu ruler of Kashmir in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Lalitaditya, incorporated the region of Ladakh into his domains (Ramirez-Faria, 2007). Yet, upon the arrival of Skitde Nemagon, a Tibetan lord, in 975, Ladakh was made autonomous (ibid). This autonomy was subject to the ebb and flow of invasions and annexations, but from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards Ladakh prospered under the rulers of the Namgyal dynasty. One of its most famous rulers, Sengge Namgyal, also known as the Lion King, united Ladakh and consolidated his power. His rule saw an increase in construction of monasteries, palaces and shrines, most famously the Leh Palace. In 1841, Ranjit Singh annexed Ladakh, and the Treaty of Amristar in 1846 formally included it into the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir.

It is evident from Ladakh's architecture and culture that the region was strongly influenced by Buddhism over the centuries, and holds the remnants of Buddhist Kashmir, which was once the centre from which various schools of Buddhism, Sanskrit, Yogachara and Vajrayana for example, disseminated throughout Asia. Ladakh's monasteries played an important role in sustaining and further developing Buddhist philosophy, literature and artwork, until the fall of the Namgyal dynasty, when financial and material support from rulers to monasteries ended. A number of Lamas (spiritual leaders) thus left Ladakh to pursue their education in Tibet. Yet, when China took control of Tibet in 1959, and the Indo-Tibetan border closed (hence cutting Ladakh off from its Buddhist source in Tibet), the Head Lamas of Ladakh took it upon themselves to establish a new Buddhist institute in Leh, as to ensure the continuance of Buddhist philosophy and thought in the region (Tsering, 2009).

While Ladakh's character was strongly shaped by Tibetan and Buddhist influence, the region is also an ancestral home to Baltis. This group is ethnically and linguistically related to Tibetans, but they are followers of Shia Islam. The peaceful coexistence between both Ladakhi Buddhists and Balti Shias could perhaps be pinpointed to the interfaith marriage of King Jamyang Namgyal and the Balti Shia Princess Gyal Khatun in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This union spurred an influx of Baltis in Ladakh (Varagur, 2018), and today most Balti Shias are settled in the Kargil district of Ladakh.

Following the first Indo-Pak war and the establishment of the constitutional provisions of the State of Jammu and Kashmir by India, Ladakhis were governed by the same regime as their counterparts in the Kashmir Valley and Jammu. However, the voices to make Ladakh a separate Union Territory arose long before the 2019 nullification of Article 370 and 35A. The

argument was made that Ladakh had been marginalised and isolated by the local government in Srinagar and Jammu (prior to the abrogation of article 370 and 35A). Ladakh had only 4 seats in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Council, whereas the Valley had 46 and Jammu had 37. This is of course proportionate to their population, but the significant difference in seat numbers perhaps contributed to feelings of being “*oppressed*” by the political centre in the Kashmir Valley. In addition, Urdu, rather than Bothi or Balti, had also been imposed as an official language.

It is important to note that the wish to make Ladakh a Union Territory of India was not equally shared by all the people of Ladakh. Indeed, the idea was met with contestation from Kargil’s majority Muslim population and while Kargil had not seen as much anti-India agitation as in the Valley, its Muslim population culturally identifies itself with the Muslim population of the Valley, despite the Shia/Sunni divide. Furthermore, Kargil is strongly connected to the Valley in terms of trade and commerce, as is the rest of Ladakh whereas Leh’s infrastructure remains more developed than Kargil’s (Donthi, 2019). Kargilis hold a concern that with the formation of the Union Territory, without legislature, the Leh district will disproportionately benefit from development ventures (ibid).

### Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir

Islamabad also adopted legal provisions to govern the portion of J&K territory under its control, however, the question of autonomy was very quickly discarded. The Pakistani Constitution contains a provision relating to the entirety of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, article 257. The provision states that: “*When the people of the State of Jammu & Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, the relationship between Pakistan and the State shall be determined in accordance with the wishes of the people of that State*”. However, the ‘Azad’ Jammu & Kashmir Act of 1974 states that no person or political party in ‘Azad’ Jammu & Kashmir is permitted to propagate against, or take part in activities prejudicial or detrimental to, the ideology of the State’s accession to Pakistan. Furthermore, no person can assume office unless he/she takes the oath of Jammu & Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan and nobody can be appointed to any government job unless he/she expresses loyalty to the concept of Jammu & Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan. Thus, it seems that the Interim Constitution directly contradicts the Pakistani Constitution, as the free will of the population is conditional to their acceptance of J&K’s accession to Pakistan.

The Karachi Agreement of 1949 became the legal basis for Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir. The agreement was signed between representatives of the Pakistani government and the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, which had assumed power in ‘Azad’ Kashmir in 1947, and gave control of important political affairs such as defence, foreign policy, and negotiations with the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to Islamabad. One of the more shocking aspects of this agreement is that it handed over the entirety of Gilgit-Baltistan affairs to Islamabad, thus formally and politically separating GilgitBaltistan from ‘Azad’ Kashmir (and the State of Jammu & Kashmir), without consent or representation from the population of the region.

Despite the fact that the Karachi Agreement became obsolete following the adoption of the 1974 Interim Constitution Act of Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan continued to be administered separately from 'Azad' Kashmir. As of today, Gilgit-Baltistan is administered by the Gilgit-Baltistan order 2009 which was issued by the President of Pakistan following informal consultations with local leaders. Yet, the region is not integrated in Pakistan's constitutional system, and is controlled by an Islamabad-based council with its Chairman being the Prime Minister of Pakistan. 'Azad' Kashmir is controlled by the Kashmir Council, which is also based in Islamabad and is also headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. While the Interim Constitution grants 'Azad' Kashmir the right to form its own government, known as the 'Azad' Kashmir government, and other self-governing structures, such as an elected legislative assembly, a President, a judiciary and local government institutions, its selfgovernance and autonomy does not exist as the Kashmir Council retains legislative competence over the affairs of 'Azad' Kashmir and is able to dismiss any elected government.

It is important to note that the State Subject rule was quickly abrogated in Pakistan Administered J&K. This rule, instated by the Maharaja at the demand of elite Kashmiris, protected the status of natives rendering them the only individuals eligible for citizenship of the state. Pakistan's decision to change this resulted in major demographic shifts.

### 'Azad' Kashmir

The present-day region of 'Azad' Kashmir consists of parts of the Kashmir Valley and Jammu. Following the Pakistani invasion of J&K in 1947 and the 1949 ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan, the districts of Mirpur, Kotli and a part of Poonch came into possession of Pakistan.

While the inhabitants of 'Azad' Kashmir are majority Muslim, they have few commonalities with the Muslims of the Kashmir Valley. It is estimated that only 5% of the population of 'Azad' Kashmir speaks Kashmiri and though Urdu is an official language, other languages commonly spoken are Pahari, Gojri and Punjabi. The communities living in this part of J&K are Gurhar, Jat, Awan, Abasi, Sudhan and other ethnic Kashmiri populations from and around the Valleys of Neelam and Leepa respectively. The cultural aspects of 'Azad' Kashmir bear closer resemblance to Northern Punjab and social bonds are strongly defined by *biraderi*, a tribal system meaning 'brotherhood', which implies clan networks. This system greatly influences social dynamics, including voting behaviours, and has also been observed within the diaspora.

A notable example of demographic shifts in 'Azad' Kashmir are the consequences of the construction of the Mangla Dam in Mirpur in the 1960s. The dam was built to produce highquality electricity for industrial purposes but resulted in several thousand natives having to vacate their ancestral lands due to flooding. As this development coincided with the increased demand for manpower in the textile industry in UK, mass emigration consequently occurred and it is estimated that 70% of the diaspora in UK can trace their origins to Mirpur.

The lack of infrastructure and development in the region of 'Azad' Kashmir has also contributed to demographic shifts, as locals have had to migrate to regions in Pakistan to find

work or enjoy (higher) education. Considering this as well as the Pakistani government's endeavour for homogeneity, which is demonstrated by its actions against ethnic and religious minorities, and its suppression of political opposition in 'Azad' Kashmir (as written in the Interim Constitution), the assumption could be made that the distinct "Kashmiri" identity of the people of 'Azad' Kashmir is being suppressed in exchange for a "Pakistani" one.

### Gilgit-Baltistan

Once part of Greater Ladakh, the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan has been administered by Pakistan since 1947. The region extends over nearly 80,000 square kilometres and is home to approximately 2 million people. It has three administrative divisions, namely Gilgit, Diamer and Baltistan, which are further divided into multiple districts. The strategic location of Gilgit-Baltistan, bordering Afghanistan to the north-west and China to the north-east, naturally attracted the development of trade routes and marked it as a stop along the ancient Silk Road. Yet, it has also been a contentious flashpoint on numerous occasions and successive powers in history, such as the Tibetan, Mongol and Chinese empires, all of which have engaged in the region in attempts to consolidate it under their name. More recently, Gilgit-Baltistan was of high strategic importance for the British during the 'Great Game' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Maharaja Hari Singh was prompted to lease this territory in 1935 to the British, as they hoped to gain strategic outposts in order to counter any possible Soviet advances. This arrangement was terminated two weeks prior to the partition of British India.

Gilgit-Baltistan's strong cultural and historical ties to Tibet previously earned it the nickname of "Little Tibet". Throughout different periods of history, Tibetan tribes, nomads and farmers settled in Baltistan. Prior to the arrival of Tibetan immigrants, numerous ethnic groups had already established roots in the region, like the Mongols, Scythians, Mons, Dards and Gilgit-Baltistan, although being predominantly Shia Muslim, became an ethno-cultural melting pot.

Prior to the Gilgit-Baltistan order 2009, the region was known as the "Federally Administered Northern Areas" and legislated by the draconian, colonial era Frontier Crimes Regulation Act of 1901. Furthermore, the State Subject rule in Gilgit-Baltistan was abrogated in 1974, thus paving the way for significant demographic changes. Recalling that Gilgit-Baltistan is a majority Shia Muslim territory, this did not sit well with majority Sunni Muslim Pakistan and thus it was argued that demographic changes were necessary to consolidate allegiance to Islamabad, and was encouraged by the government grants given to those who supported this allegiance. Cultural oppression accompanied this shift, as Gilgit-Baltistan's diversity and traditions of tolerance and peaceful coexistence did not resonate with the narrative of the Pakistani State. For example, Balti script has been replaced by Urdu script, which restricts accurate pronunciation (Sering, 2014). And local beliefs and cultural rites are omitted from school syllabi, thus preventing younger generations from preserving the cultural particularities of their ancestors (ibid). Indigenous industries such as handlooms, cap-making and shoemaking are declining (ibid). The rich, diverse and ancient history of Gilgit-Baltistan is

slowly being erased in the name of national conformity, yet the irony lies in the fact that Gilgit-Baltistan has not been granted any constitutional status. Thus, yet another argument is added in the rhetoric that Gilgit-Baltistan is not part of Pakistan, and the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have engaged in a struggle to preserve their cultural identity in the face of what they perceive as colonisation by Pakistan.

Just as it was at the time of the British empire, Gilgit-Baltistan remains a strategic location, but in this century, it is China and Pakistan that have their mind set on it, as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (a branch of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative amounting to \$60 billion in construction fees) runs through part of the region. This project has ignited tensions and resentment, from the side of locals as they see it once again as an exploitation of their natural resources, and from the side of India, which argues that Pakistan does not have the legal authority to negotiate such projects in a disputed region.

### Political Divisions and Conflict

The violent bifurcation of the erstwhile Princely State in 1947 has left it in limbo. The status quo imposed after the first Indo-Pak war has been adhered to for decades, and the numerous attempts to resolve the issue once and for all have only succeeded in increasing tensions. The people of J&K have, as is always the case when it comes to wars, heavily suffered the brunt of the violence.

Before delving deeper in matters of discord, it is important to recognise the attempts to create unity in the face of the tumultuous events of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. One such attempt was Sheikh Abdullah's effort to consolidate the people of J&K around a national identity, based on Kashmiriyat. However, it must be noted that the political context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did place a lot of emphasis on belonging to a religious community as communal lines drawn on the basis of religious affiliation was a prominent policy of the British Raj. In the case of J&K, the need to elevate the standing of a religious community can be explained by the fact that Dogra rule significantly favoured the Hindu communities, and the grievances and disadvantageous socio-economic status of the Muslim community were not adequately addressed by the leadership.

The All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference spearheaded by Sheikh Abdullah was formed in 1932 with the idea to create suitable representation for the Muslim community, to express political demands and to claim rights for Kashmiri Muslims. An additional goal of the Muslim Conference was to replace Dogra rule with Kashmiri self-rule. Yet, if the Muslim Conference hoped to achieve this by disregarding the particularities of religious, ethnic and cultural pluralism of J&K it would have made for shaky foundations of a nascent Nation-State.

One of the major contradictions of Sheikh Abdullah's party was that, while it claimed to be non-communal, it was strongly centred around using Islam as a focus of community organisation (Zutshi, 2004). Furthermore, Abdullah's rhetoric was firstly directed at uniting Kashmiri Muslims under the same political umbrella, but by doing so alienated Muslims from outside the Valley. When Abdullah finally realised the risks associated to branding a

supposedly national party with the name of only one of said nation's religions, he re-branded the Muslim Conference as the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939.

From there the politicised narrative of Kashmiriyat was used to prove the legitimacy of the National Conference as a representative of all Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus and Kashmiriyat as a means to establish a common identity, with a particular emphasis on the harmonious coexistence of the Kashmiri people seemed to be a logical and simple solution to secure support. However, Kashmiriyat is very centric to the Valley; the National Conference's narrative did not extend to include the concerns of Hindus, Shia Muslims, or Buddhists in other regions. Moreover, the concept pushed forward by the National Conference was vague and controversial and was thus perceived by these communities as a mere socio-political tool.

Following the violent bifurcation of the State of J&K, Sheikh Abdullah became Prime Minister. Yet, at this point, his original goals of rallying the people of J&K around nationalistic ideals were fundamentally infringed by the intervention of both Pakistan and India, and the events that had led up to this intervention. As both countries continued to make significant sociopolitical and legal changes to the regions of J&K under their respective administrations, the perceived unity of the people of J&K was steadily being replaced with palpable discord. Moreover, Sheikh Abdullah had been dismissed as Prime Minister in 1953 and his increasing demands for J&K's autonomy from New Delhi, as well as his inconsistent stance of sometimes favouring a plebiscite to settle the dispute, eventually led to his arrest and imprisonment on the grounds of conspiring to overthrow the J&K government.

The National Conference also has a significant role in the catalyst event of the 1987 Legislative Assembly elections, which preceded the outbreak of violence when the popular Muslim United Front, which was formed to safeguard the interest of Muslims, their focus being Islamic solidarity and restoration of religious and political rights, and acquired support from various fundamentalist groups, was defeated by it in an election that was widely perceived as rigged. Indeed, the people of J&K (especially the youth) had been disillusioned by the National Conference's inability to translate Kashmiriyat into effective policies that would satisfy the interests of J&K's various communities. Unfortunately, this loss of faith in democracy resulted in a number of young Kashmiris taking up an insurgency against the Indian state. They had decided that, in the words of Professor Abdul Ghani Bhat: "*not the ballot, but the bullet should now decide*". Another leader, Abdul Ghani Lone, despite being a long-time mainstream politician invited the Afghan Taliban to resolve the J&K dispute in the late 1990s. These examples sadly demonstrate the abandonment of democratic mechanisms and the turn towards religious extremism.

It is important to note that the insurgency in the Kashmir Valley could not have taken place to such extent without the logistical and material support of Pakistan premier intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). After losing two wars over J&K to India, the Pakistani military leadership preferred to resort to non-conventional warfare, that is to say proxy warfare. An additional factor that may have fuelled the desire to undertake a proxy war against India was the recent success of the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet Union. It is no secret that the US, through Pakistan, funded the insurgency in Afghanistan and that

Pakistan played a strategic role in training Mujahideen militants and once the war was over, was left with a surplus of militants, training camps and weaponry that it chose to divert to the Kashmir Valley front. Hence, secessionist leaders and disenchanted Kashmiri youth crossed the LoC into Pakistan Administered J&K and Pakistan to receive training for a full-blown anti-India insurgency.

The ISI's connivance in the organisation of insurgency was a plan that had been elaborated in 1984, under the name Operation Topac. The objectives of the operation were three-fold: firstly, youth from Indian Administered J&K were to cross the LoC to seek weapon training. Secondly, the trained youth were expected to indulge in large scale subversive activities to create an atmosphere of terror and demoralise the administration. Thirdly, and lastly, the Muslim majority in the Kashmir Valley was to be "*liberated*" and an independent Islamic State was to be established. In order to achieve this, the ISI at first used groups such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), founded in 1976 in the United Kingdom. However, the JKLF's apparent secular nature did not adhere to the Pakistani vision of J&K as an Islamic State and hard-line Islamist extremist terror organisations such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) entered the scene. Their agendas advocated for the annexation of the entirety of J&K to be annexed to Pakistan and the subsequent creation of an Islamic Caliphate, and as such violently pursued the vision of the Pakistani leadership.

With the erstwhile Princely State already heavily divided, not only geographically but religiously as well, the narratives that have been sustained since the 1990s have succeeded in further aggravating the divide and estrangement of the Kashmiri people. The devastating proxy war in the Kashmir Valley took a central role in Kashmiri politics, and perhaps generated further frustrations from Jammu and Ladakh, whose own grievances were being overshadowed. The transformations in Gilgit-Baltistan and 'Azad' Kashmir likewise estranged them from each other and the other regions of J&K across the LoC.

The pillars and ideals of Kashmiriyat as a rallying point for Kashmiri nationalism crumbled in the advent of religious extremism, armed with not only words but also AK-47s and grenades. The principle of shared commonalities expressed in Kashmiriyat eclipsed religious affiliations, and as such, Kashmiriyat could not be the viable solution when religious sentiments had taken a larger part in forming communal identities, and when pan-Islamism was threatening the multi-cultural heritage and religious plurality of J&K. As can be expected, the emergence of Pakistan sponsored Islamist terror groups and the religious radicalisation of Kashmiri youth generated opposing reactions from other religious groups, thus contributing to the interreligious discord, which on this scale was a first in the history of the region.

## Conclusion

As the pieces of J&K were carved out and transformed by India and Pakistan, the local inhabitants were left to survive in the turmoil of the aftermath of the geographical division of J&K. Unsurprisingly, the conflict has fuelled political divisions as the population was faced with political decisions that were made without prior consultations. Furthermore, the narratives

being pushed into the region by both India and Pakistan, and the actions taken by India and Pakistan against each other in their proxy warfare, have had a considerable impact on the political outlook of different societies.

As mentioned above, the people of J&K have been divided for nearly as long as they were united as a State and the tumultuous proxy war in the Kashmir Valley has perhaps evoked the estrangement of Ladakh and Jammu and could potentially explain the relatively well-received reaction in these regions of the constitutional changes made by the Indian government on 5 August 2019. However, in a bid to endanger New Delhi's promised vision to halt political violence and extremism, and hence pave the way for prosperity and peace, terror organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed have picked up their violent activities and other terrorist factions have been looking to step into the already complex scene. For example, the attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul, Afghanistan in March 2020 was claimed by the Islamic State- Khorasan province as retaliation for the Indian Government's actions in J&K.

The norms of peaceful coexistence and of finding commonalities despite different faiths inscribed in the concept of Kashmiriyat have been lost in seven decades of conflict. Moreover, the attempt to rally the people of J&K around nationalism through politicised Kashmiriyat was vanquished when terrorism formed itself along religious lines and subsequently into PanIslamism. With the advent of religiously motivated conflict, peaceful religious diversity was replaced with violent religious divisions and the rise of gun culture replaced deeply rooted composite cultures.

It can be concluded that in the case of the erstwhile Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, the place that at one point may have only been conquered by the force of spiritual merit rather than the force of soldiers, the gun brought about the death of Kashmiriyat by killing its unique ideals of unity within diversity.

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