

the HISTORY of the KASHMIR CONFLICT



Ancient Kashmir was home to a majority Hindu and Buddhist population for thousands of years and renowned as a center for Hindu and Buddhist learning. Islamic invaders from Central Asia took control in the 14th century. Under Islamic rule, Hindus faced periods of persecution, resulting in mass migrations from the region roughly once a century, until the late 1700s. In the early 1800s, Sikh rulers controlled the region, followed by a Hindu dynasty from the mid-1800s through 1947.

DEMOGRAPHICS/GEOGRAPHY OF KASHMIR

The historic region of Kashmir has a total area of 85,807 sq. miles and is now divided between three countries. Pakistan occupies approximately 30,160 sq. miles, known as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and the Northern Areas. China controls 16,500 sq. miles of Kashmir (through a boundary settlement with Pakistan and occupation of land during the 1962 Indo-China War), while the remaining territory forms the Indian Union Territories (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

The total population of Jammu and Kashmir UT is 12,267,013. Muslims comprise a majority in the Kashmir Valley, while Hindus are a majority in Jammu. In the Ladakh UT, the population is 274,289. Muslims account for a slight majority with a significant Buddhist population and a smaller number of Hindus.

1947: KASHMIR BECOMES PART OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA

In 1947, the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir became part of the Republic of India. Shortly thereafter, Pakistani armed forces and Pashtun tribesmen invaded the area, forcing the largest Kashmiri political party to approve the accession. Indian forces were deployed to counter the attacks by Pakistan. In 1948, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 47 requiring all Pakistani military personnel to be withdrawn from the region before a plebiscite—which would have confirmed the people’s wishes to join India—could be called. Instead, Pakistan increased its military presence, and no plebiscite was held. In the areas of Kashmir which remained outside of India, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, 41,000 Hindu families were forced to flee Pashtun tribesmen.

1989 TO TODAY: PAKISTAN'S PROXY WAR IN KASHMIR

In 1989, an insurgency sponsored by Pakistan’s military and intelligence service engulfed the Kashmir Valley. Former Pakistani ambassador to the US, Husain Haqqani, said the ISI-supported jihad in Kashmir was “rooted in the ideology of Pakistani Islamists, carefully nurtured for decades by the Pakistani military.” Since then, nearly 15,000 civilians have been killed in militant-related violence. In combating militants, the Indian army and state police have also committed abuses. Today, militant groups active in Kashmir, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), now designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the United States, have launched terror attacks in other parts of India. LeT was responsible for the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, and JeM was responsible for the September 18, 2016 attack on an Indian army base, leading to an escalation in tensions between India and Pakistan.

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1989 TO 1991: ETHNIC CLEANSING OF KASHMIRI HINDU PANDITS

The Pakistan-sponsored insurgency included plans to communally cleanse Kashmir of non-Muslims in order to change the state's demographics. Between 1989 and 1991, over 350,000 Kashmiri Pandits were ethnically cleansed from the Valley (over 95% of the Valley's indigenous Hindu population) in a campaign of targeted killings, rape, threats, and destruction of properties and religious sites. One elderly Kashmiri Hindu told the BBC, "Our people were killed. I saw a girl tortured with cigarette butts. Another man had his eyes pulled out and his body hung on a tree..." For the past 30 years, thousands of displaced Pandits have lived in camps in Jammu and New Delhi, while successive governments have failed to safely rehabilitate them to the Valley.

2001 TO 2012: VIOLENCE DECLINES, TOURISM RETURNS

Militant violence reached its peak in 2001, and then drastically declined in subsequent years, leading to an upsurge in tourism, which brought an estimated 1.5 million tourists to Kashmir in 2012 alone. At the same time, support for the insurgency started waning, as voter participation in panchayat (village councils) and statewide elections significantly increased. Many former militants were rehabilitated and reintegrated into society, with some entering politics, such as Farooq Ahmed Dar, known as Bitta Karate or the "Butcher of Pandits". Throughout the period, Pakistan continued to foment violence in the state and launch cross-border attacks.

2016: UNREST RETURNS TO KASHMIR

In 2016, unrest in the Kashmir Valley was sparked by the death of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) commander Burhan Wahi, who was killed in a gunbattle with Indian security forces. Over 11,000 people were injured (7000 civilians and 4000 security personnel)

and 82 people killed in clashes between protesters, led by separatist groups, and Indian security forces. HM has since been designated as a terrorist organization by the US, European Union, and India. During the violence, mobs also attacked Pandit migrant camps in six cities in the Valley. In Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, Kashmiris held protests against alleged human rights violations by Pakistan's military and ISI—including extrajudicial killings of at least 100 Kashmiri activists in the past two years, rigged elections, and repression of Kashmiri political activists. These concerns were echoed by the US State Department.

2019: PULWAMA AND THE ABROGATION OF ARTICLES 370/35A

On February 14, 2019, a suicide bombing in the Kashmir town of Pulwama by the Pakistan-sponsored terrorist group, JeM, killed 41 Indian security officers, escalating tensions between India and Pakistan. India launched retaliatory airstrikes on a JeM terror camp in Pakistan and the UN Security Council designated JeM founder Masood Azhar as an international terrorist.

In August, the Indian government legally and democratically abrogated Articles 370 and 35A of India's Constitution, temporary provisions that conferred special status on the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The move sought to better integrate the residents of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh into the rest of India, ensuring that they enjoy equal protection under the law and all the rights afforded other Indian citizens, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religion, or social class, and have access to better educational and economic opportunities. It is also expected to create conditions for the rehabilitation and resettlement of Kashmiri Pandits in the Kashmir Valley. At the same time, Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two new Union Territories: one for Jammu and Kashmir, and one for Ladakh. Religious and political leaders in Ladakh had long called for separate UT status for Ladakh and complained of being socially and economically marginalized by state policies that favored the Kashmir Valley.

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