
Scanning the Recent Trends and Writings in the Historiography of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Jammu and Kashmir persists as the center of one of the most significant and ongoing conflicts in the world that cuts across several nationalities and regional borders. The voluminous writings on the region have been shaped by the intricacies of this conflict and the constantly battling mainstream nationalist political narratives that drive it. This article is basically an attempt to review the recent historiographical trends on Jammu and Kashmir. This article analyzes the writings on Jammu and Kashmir with emphasis on independence and partition and the shifts to escape this overemphasis in relocating itself free from the historiographies of Indian and Pakistani perspective. Thus this paper makes a survey of both the existing history writing on Jammu and Kashmir as well as the recent writings on the subject.

Keywords: *Historiography, Jammu, Kashmir, Tradition, History-Writing, etc.*

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir persists as the center of one of the most significant and ongoing conflicts in the world that cuts across several national and regional borders. The voluminous writing on the region has been shaped by the intricacies of conflict and the constantly battling mainstream nationalist political narratives that derive it. The insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir against the Indian government produced afresh spate of partisan writings that interpret Kashmir's past and present through the prism of divisive ideological agendas, thus presenting Kashmir's current situation as the outcome of an inevitable ideology. The deeply contested nature of these claims and counter claims have ensured that Kashmir's history, society, politics and people remain shrouded in the multiple disputes that have plagued the region in the 70 years since Indian independence, partition and the creation of Pakistan.

Scholarly writing that challenges and transcends these ideologically driven narratives on Kashmir however has come a long way in the past two decades. Earlier there was scarcely handful of scholarly works on its history, economy and culture like *Kashir* by G. M. D. Sufi, P. N. Bazaz's *History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, P. N. K. Bamzai's *A History of Kashmir* and Mohibul Hasan's *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* (1979) and Walter Lawrence's *The Valley of Kashmir* (1966). Ultimately in the existing historiography these books were generally considered as the beginning and the end of scholarship on the region.

Until the mid-1990s, the dominant trend in the Kashmir historiography consisted of an analysis of 'who did what to whom and where' between August and October 1947. Accordingly two different schools of historiography had emerged by the late 1980's, those

who defended the Indian position and those who supported Pakistani demands for the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The arguments advanced focused on several key issues to the genesis of the crisis. On one hand the central theme of pro-Indian historiography was to legitimate the process wherein princely States had been required to join either with India or Pakistan. Such narratives stressed the centrality of instrument of accession, a document devised by the British to entitle the prince of a specific state to join India or Pakistan, subjected to territorial proximity to the two newly created dominions and other factors short hand for whether such territory was dominated by Hindus or Muslims. On the other hand Pakistani and later Kashmiri historians disputed the process in which an autocratic prince was allowed to sign away the territory while questioning the logic and objectivity of the boundary commission that created the two states.

The existing literature on Kashmir can be divided into three broad categories. The first include books written in an international relations framework, examining the India-Pakistan conflict on Kashmir, and as a fallout, the secessionist movement of Kashmiri's is explained either from the Indian standpoint of a proxy-war being waged by Pakistan or an uprising movement for self-determination by Kashmiri's as propounded by Pakistan. These explanations are atheoretical and mostly partisan as they attempt to justify a particular government point of view. Books presenting historical accounts and narratives of political developments, particularly those of the Kashmiri insurgency in the 1990s by players directly involved or affected by the movement, social scientists and journalist falls in the second category. Most of these also lack a theoretical perspective and invariably focus on the Kashmir valley ignoring altogether the politics of Jammu and Ladakh. Third some recent publications especially those of Sumit Ganguly and Sumantra Bose, have sought to provide a theoretical explanation of the secessionist movement of Kashmiris.

A formidable body of scholarship has emerged, produced predominantly by political scientists and journalist on the question of Kashmir. Written in crisis mode, the bulk of these works has been concerned with narrow legalistic question of the validity or otherwise Kashmir's accession to India in 1947. The preoccupation of this literature has largely been explaining the three wars fought over Kashmir between India and Pakistan since 1947. Reviving a venerable tradition of deliberating about Kashmir with Kashmiri's left out of picture, Alastair Lamb suggested that "At the very heart of matter was the decision made by the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947 to accede to India. From this all else has flowed; and its consequences are still with us".

Lamb's work is merely one in an entire academic genre that has made only an attempt to examine the colonial past in Kashmir and consequently has ended up demarcating 1947 as an obvious point of departure. Comprehending the Kashmir problem in this approach, reduced to isolating structural factors, all external to Kashmir, that have impeded state's full integration with India. Explanations are sought, on one hand, in post-1947 foreign policies of Indian and Pakistani states. On the other hand, scholars examining the domestic policies of Indian state see the Kashmir dilemma as merely the result of unsuccessful or unwise dealing with pro-accession parties and personnel in the valley since 1947. The reluctance to draw

links with prior history, in the two decades immediately preceding accession, leads even such erudite others to overdramatize late 20th century developments in Kashmir.

A recent work by Sumit Ganguly is concerned with explaining the emergence of present day popular insurgency in the valley by the linked process of political mobilization and institutional decay. It suggests that this was a result of a paradoxical exercise engaged in by the Indian state since 1947 wherein on one side the effort was on one hand to entice the Muslims of Kashmir into the fuller integration by providing them with every opportunity for full political education and mobilization while on other to stem such trends by muffling the institutions that endangered popular political functioning. The central argument presented is that modernization exposed young Kashmiri's to the possibilities of alternative futures but the political process largely choked of such opportunities. As a result of these contradictory agendas there was purposeful institutional decay and therefore unable to fulfill their aspirations or even express their discontent and dissent in an institutional manner, the new generation of Kashmiri's resorted to violence.

Ganguly's study also raises the important issue of why Kashmiri 'mobilization took place along ethno religious lines' and he analyzed that ethno religious mobilization in Kashmir was the result of failure of secular politics. Not only does this view take for granted the secular religious dichotomy, it also assumes that secularism as defined by the strand of congress dominated nationalism that came in power in 1947, had a predestined normative trajectory in Kashmir. However this is a view that can only be sustained by an analysis that ignores the pre-1947 past of political mobilization in Kashmir. Because as early as 1930's, Kashmiri Muslim resistance was leveled against a Dogra state that had publically declared and made manifest its Hindu-ness at the same time as it identified its subject by their religious affiliations. Given the nature of this state a religious sensibility informing political mobilization by its subject should not be surprising.

However Ganguly made a series of important contributions to the literature, by linking the debates about the de-institutionalization of Indian politics to the dynamics of Indian foreign policy, especially with reference to the links between insurgency and resurrection. There after scholars such as Cohen and Malik identified the extent to which Kashmir dominated Pakistani politics because of the links between Kashmir as a Muslim issue and the unfinished process of Pakistan after partition. No Pakistan leader could afford to be indifferent to the fate of Kashmir because the issue was inherently linked to his or her survival.

Of the corpus of works produced on Kashmir produced by political scientists, Sumantra Bose work is explicitly concerned with and sensitive to religious dimension in the valley. He states that Islamic consciousness had always been a prominent and integral component, along with other political ideals and forms of identity, of Kashmiri nationalism and its democratic struggle. Bose suggest that upsurge of 1931 was to a significant degree 'the revolt of politicized elements of a subjugated Muslim population against a Hindu, autocrat, bureaucracy and military.' However a mere difference in the ruler's religious affiliations than the ruled subjects barely refers to the reality of problem. After all, the Indian subcontinent witnessed nearly 700 years of Muslim rule based in Delhi, similarly separated

by their faith from their non-Muslim subjects. Yet Muslim rule in India was characterized by a religious accommodation and not by religious conflicts. Then what specifically was different in their resistance against Hindu rulers by their Muslim subjects in Kashmir.

Furthermore Bose suggests that in the present context mosques has emerged as focal points of popular mobilization because of the total absence of any other alternative channel of collective protest. However this is debatable because if Islamic sensibility was always part of Kashmiri Muslim democratic struggles, then use of mosques would have been integral to political mobilization, irrespective of the availability or non-availability of alternative channels of protest. This is also evident by the acrimonious battles fought between rival groups of Muslims to ride a new political wave through control over mosques and religious shrines.

Furhermore these historiographical trends lacked a theoretical perspective and invariably focus on the Kashmir valley ignoring altogether politics of Jammu and Ladakh. Also these trends do not explained why the same process produced a radically different response in Jammu and Ladakh, which vehemently opposed the valley demand for accession. These writings focused only on the dimension of Kashmir conflict and ignored the politics of Jammu and Ladakh region. Ganguly argument is linked to the India-Pakistan dimension of the Kashmir conflict and doesn't address the Jammu and Ladakh factor at all. He also doesn't take into account the divide between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri pandit. As a result his strategy and measures to resolve the crisis in Kashmir addresses the political concerns of only the majority community, that is, the Kashmiri Muslims. Bose briefly touches it but blames successive government in New Delhi for not addressing Jammu grievances. Also to argue that Jammu and Kashmir is unified political fallacy and any remedial measure that do not takes into account the political aspirations of all the communities in the state is doomed to failure.

Kashmiri's found a voice in the 1970's, not just as either pro-Pakistan or pro Indian pawns, but as a growing set of critiques of both Indian and Pakistan policies on either side of boundary. Kashmiri voices emerged as part of strand of revisionism that was less high politics in its orientation, and more focused on the specifics of socio-economic forces within the Dogra state on the run up to 1947. Although more sophisticated, such historiography was not entirely subaltern in that it remained confined within the wider debates over the legitimacy of the Indian claim and still by the act of partition itself. In identifying a series of levels through which the Kashmir crisis operated, scholars noted the increasing internal differentiation going on within the former territories of the Dogra kingdom post 1989. In the context of the a literal interfada within Kashmir from 1989 and the dramatic exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus from their ancestral houses to become refugees in Jammu in the wake of Kashmiri violence, scholarship during 1989-2002 has sought to set out and debate the causes and solutions of the crisis afresh, often uncritically reiterating the earlier historiography mapped out by the pro-Indian or pro-Pakistani discourses.

Although despite this burgeoning literature on the region, there have been only few edited collections on Kashmir's history, politics, or culture in the past two decade. By the late 1980,s new scholarship inspired by a invigorated interest in culture and identity and more critical

of the wider context in which nationalist and regional identity has been fixed or historicized, scrutinized local and regional identities within the former Dogra state, as well as such concepts as the Kashmiriyat and found many of them wanting. Critical scholarship reveals the extent to which this term was used as a socio-cultural identity and was limited to the vale of Kashmir only. Even within the vale it didn't necessarily outcome separate religious identity, as revealed in the work of Aparna Rao and T. N. Madan's *The valley of Kashmir*. However this pioneer work assembled a lot of scholars to comment on a variety of aspects of Kashmir's history, culture and politics with the aim of celebrating its rich, composite culture in the face of its steady appearance.

More recent scholarship has continued utilizing the subaltern turn to generate fresh insights into Kashmir and to rework the actual outlines and nature of problem itself. One of the most important contributions has been made by C. Zutshi's innovative work entitled *Language of Belongings*, This book sets out to investigate the emergence of Kashmiri identities through public discourses in the longue duree, starting with the mystics Lal Ded and Nund Rishi in the medieval period, the coming of Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs, and Dogra and then eventually the onset of British colonization. Zutshi seeks to identify a continuing tension between religious and regional language of belonging, which in specific context of the Dogra state, British colonial intervention and the emergence of a newly educated Kashmiri Muslim leadership, created the origins of the current Kashmir impasse. Only if these languages are understood historically and successfully located within the public domain can the current crisis be analyzed free of tautology or essentialism. In this reflective and open ended scholarship the Kashmir crisis is not about the politics of India or Pakistan, or indeed the actual transfer of power, but about culture, identity and belongings. This book succeeds in removing the great divide as some sort of objectified starting line for Kashmir crisis and in keeping with other subaltern scholarship, seeks to understand 'the invention of communally defined political categories in the early 20th century, or the historically dynamic dialectic between communal as well as provincial as religious and linguistic identities.

One of the starkest contributions made by this new politics of ethnicity approach was to reiterate to a new generation of Kashmiri watchers the entire fiction of treating the former Dogra state as a whole. Indian Pakistani and Kashmiri scholars have continually stood by the instance that Kashmir cannot be divided. Yet by the late 1980's, various ethnic identities mobilized by language and increasingly by religion, showed that the kingdom had always been historicized. Probing the role of religion, thus locating the issue in religious tint, Mridu Rai in his book, *Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects* argues that the origins of present political problem lie in the hundred year period preceding the creation of India and Pakistan, when Kashmir was ruled by a succession of Hindu Dogra kings. By focusing on themes of sovereignty, legitimacy and rights, this book aims at understanding how and why religion and politics became inextricably intertwined in defining and expressing the protest of Kashmiri Muslims against their rulers.

Another significant and fascinating contribution to the existing scholarship on Kashmir which provides a fresh approach to the question of Kashmir is Ananya Kabir's work *Territory of Desire* because it asks and attempts to understand why and how Kashmir came to

be so intensely desired within Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri nationalist imaginations, because of its repeated portrayal as the special place that is missing piece of both India and Pakistan. She analyzes the conversion- through photography, literature, cinema, and art and souvenir production- of natural beauty into collective desire. Representation of Kashmir as a space of desire emerges in contemporary film, the taming of the valley, through 19th century colonial travelogues. Furthermore she exposes the links between colonialism, modernity, and conflict within the postcolonial nation. Linking violent modernity to fantasies of nationhood, Kabir proposes nonmilitaristic ways in which such desires may be overcome while offering an innovative approach to complex and protracted conflict and ultimately its resolution.

Therefore although innovative corpus of work has made great strides in redressing the scholarly marginalization of Kashmir as a whole, however even within this scholarship, Kashmir continues to be equated largely with the Kashmir valley, thus eliding vast areas of the erstwhile princely states that are not only historically connected to the region but also very much a part of the Kashmir dispute. In the past few years some scholars have sought to re-center these marginal areas to our understanding of Kashmir as a region, as well as a political issue. By focusing on areas such as Ladakh, Pakistani Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Jammu, this scholarship traces the historical roots of the conflict and also points out that the lines of division and inter-connection are etched not just between India and Pakistan, but rather along multiple other entities, and therefore any solution to the Kashmir problem requires a multipronged approach.

Conclusion

The historiographical trends on the history of Jammu and Kashmir have long been political prisoner to the wider process of Indian and Pakistani state formation and their official nationalist discourses. The historiographical writings on the princely state of J&K have been hostage to a process of partition, in obscuring broader social and cultural trends at work since 19th century. These events although important need to be re-examined in a wider decentered historical context, away from the artifice of 1947 divide. One real drawback to all historiography, ironically underplayed by subaltern scholars is the lack of reliable primary sources or even memoirs and secrecy over official papers. There is a possibility that new scholarship on Kashmir may return, in a different form, to a more generalized debate on Kashmir, informed by the subaltern turn, which all its richness and insight. The process is controversial as well as problematic in terms of sources and evidence but recent contributions show that crossing the divide is fruitful and may help facilitate a political solution.

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