

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS AN ATTEMPT to redefine the Kashmir conflict by breaking away from conventional assumptions about the basic issues and underlining their many facets. The book questions various stereotypes arising from a skewed Hindu-Muslim understanding of the region's antagonisms and history, which suggests the dispute is rooted solely in the idea that a Muslim-majority state had its fate determined by a Hindu maharaja, that Pakistan—the “homeland” of the subcontinent's Muslims—is incomplete without Kashmir's inclusion, or that India's secular credentials depend on Kashmir's continued accession. By turning a blind eye to the local dynamics of Kashmiri politics in pre-partition India and disregarding the political stakes of the Indian National Congress and of the Muslim League in Kashmir, previous analyses have tended to see Kashmir as an immutable zero-sum test of India's and Pakistan's legitimating ideologies—in which one's validity invalidates the other's—which in turn precludes the possibility of *any* reconciliation.

On the surface, it is easy to see why Kashmir is typically understood as a territorial dispute between two belligerent neighbors in South Asia. Jammu and Kashmir is a former princely state partitioned since 1949, yet still regarded as a homogeneous entity. India and Pakistan control almost half of its territory (a small portion is occupied by China), with both claiming jurisdiction over the whole. The line of demarcation is called the Line of Control (see map 1). Nevertheless, developments in the Pakistani part (made up of Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas) simply do not figure in the debates on Kashmir, while stories of Kashmiris seeking to break away from the part administered by India distort reality by overlooking the region's complexities. The political construct of a Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir state pitted against a majoritarian

Hindu India—or of an Islamic bond cementing the relationship between Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas with Pakistan—is, at best, misleading.

With its extraordinary medley of races, tribal groups, languages, and religions, Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most diverse regions in the subcontinent. Even its majority community of Kashmiri Muslims is not a unified, homogeneous entity in terms of its political beliefs, its ideological leanings, or the political goals of the decade-long insurgent movement in the Kashmir Valley. There are sharp divisions between those demanding that Jammu and Kashmir become an independent state, those seeking to merge with Pakistan, and those wanting to reconcile their differences with India through constitutional mechanisms guaranteeing their political rights. Nor does the Kashmiri political leadership necessarily speak for the diverse minorities of the state, including Gujjars, Bakkarwals, Kashmiri Pandits, Dogras, and Ladakhi Buddhists. Across the Line of Control, the Northern Areas also presents a rich mosaic of languages, castes, Islamic sects, and cultures, which cannot be subsumed under the overarching category of “Muslim brotherhood” without distorting the diverse political aspirations of the region’s residents. It is essential to recognize the deeply plural character of Jammu and Kashmir’s society on both sides of the line of control and the political aspirations and choices of its minority communities. The irreducible and homogenizing parameters of ideology and nationalism usually applied in analyzing the Kashmir conflict are clearly at variance with the plural realities and diverse political demands of the region’s various communities, ranging from affirmative discrimination to more autonomy, separate constitutional status within India or Pakistan, and outright secession.

The central argument of this book is that the Kashmir conflict revolves around many complex, and multilayered issues, emanating from equally complex causes. Any hope for creating critical political opportunities that will allow the parties to explore ways to find a just, viable, and lasting solution to the conflict depends on deeper insight into these complexities.

The first chapter delves into the history of pre-partition India and seeks to shift the parameters of the Kashmir debate from the ideological to the political domain. As it points out, Kashmir’s fate in 1947, including its accession to India and eventual division into two parts, was decided not on ideological grounds but on the outcome of the political battle between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Within the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the National Conference, led by Sheikh Abdullah, influenced the course of events at that critical juncture far more than did the Dogra Hindu maharaja, Hari Singh.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the key political and military components of India's and Pakistan's Kashmir strategies. For its part, India has pursued a markedly political strategy in the region, although it erred in retreating from its fundamental commitment to provide a federal, democratic, and secular model of self-governance to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It is now on a corrective course, making amends with constituents who remain alienated from the Indian state. India's leadership does not think militarily about Kashmir, has no offensive military objective to bring Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas back into Jammu and Kashmir state, and accordingly has no aggressive military strategy in Kashmir. Pakistan, in complete contrast, has not evolved a political strategy for arguing its case on Kashmir. Rather, it has persistently tried virtually every instrument of violence to alter the status quo in Kashmir by force—and has failed in all such attempts. Whether it has learned from its mistakes, due mainly to certain systemic flaws in its strategic decisionmaking institutions, is unclear.

Chapter 4 turns to the terms of reference in the “self-determination” debate over Kashmir, which have departed little from those of the UN Security Council debates of the early 1950s. It traces the historical antecedents of the demand for self-determination, first raised by Sheikh Abdullah in the Dogra reign of Maharaja Hari Singh and now nourished by multiple notions of self-determination among the diverse communities of Jammu and Kashmir state. Chapter 5 focuses on the insurgent movement launched in 1989–90 that transformed the dynamics of the Kashmir conflict. Originally an indigenous, mass movement toward *azadi* (independence), it was taken over by a much smaller, well-armed, well-trained, and committed group of militants—mostly non-Kashmiri—who turned it into a *jihad* and proved to be its undoing. In chapter 6 the spotlight is on the forgotten frontiers of Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas, and on the instruments, strategies, and dynamics of Pakistan's colonial-style domination of those regions. Here, too, the local populace and its leadership are engaged in a struggle for their constitutional and political rights.

Chapter 7 moves to the international sphere, to examine the implications of the Kashmir conflict there. The analysis closes in chapter 8 with an overview of the four P's of the ongoing peace process in Kashmir: its parameters, players, policies, and prognosis.