

Introduction

New Directions in the Study of Kashmir

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Kashmir persists as the centre 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 this conflict and the constantly-battling mainstream nationalist-political narratives that drive it (see, for instance, Lamb, 1991; Jha, 1996). The insurgency in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir against the Indian government, which began in 1989 and continues to rage in a different form today, produced a fresh 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 teleology (for a longer discussion, see Zutshi, 2014, esp. ch. 6). 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. When I began my own research on the region in the mid-1990s, there were scarcely a handful of scholarly works on its history, economy, or culture. The enormity of the task ahead dawned on me on my first research visit to Srinagar in 1996, when I was advised to read the well-thumbed *Kashir* by G. M. D. Sufi (1974 [1949]), P. N. Bazaz's *History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir* (1954 [1945]), P. N. K. Bamzai's *A History of Kashmir* (1962) and Mohibbul Hasan's *Kashmir Under the Sultans* (1959). These books, along with Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* (1979 [1900]) and Walter Lawrence's *The Valley of Kashmir* (1996 [1895]), were considered the beginning and the end of scholarship on the region.

Since this was the period at the height of the insurgency, scholarly writings on Kashmir's politics had begun to make their appearance; these works sought to

explain the reasons behind the ostensibly unexpected emergence of the ferocious upsurge against the Indian state in 1989 (Wirsing, 1994; Schofield, 1996, 2000; Ganguly, 1997; Bose, 1997, 2003). For some scholars, at the same time, the insurgency prompted a measure of reflection on Kashmir's past, especially as the dangers of its falling victim to Kashmir's continuously turbulent politics became increasingly apparent. In a recent essay, Mohammad Ishaq Khan (2012) recalled the resistance he met with from his own colleagues at the University of Kashmir during this time, as he was writing his pioneering work on the Rishis of Kashmir – *Kashmir's Transition to Islam* (1994) – which sought to highlight the indigenous influences on the philosophy and practice of Islam in Kashmir.

Other scholars based outside Kashmir, such as myself and Mridu Rai, influenced by the regional turn in South Asian historiography, delved into Kashmir's history and political culture for what it could contribute to our understanding of regions, regionalism, religious affiliations and their relationship to the idea of the nation and nationalism in the South Asian context. Until the late 1990s, Kashmir had been a step-child within South Asian historiography, hampered by its dual status as a princely state in the colonial period and disputed territory in the postcolonial period, and we were determined to bring it into the mainstream of larger historiographical concerns. Combing through hundreds of documents in the state and national archives and unearthing private collections of poetry, letters, pamphlets and manuscripts allowed us to stitch together an understanding of Kashmir's recent past; its changing political economy; the influence of religion on the development of regional identities; the Kashmiri Muslim movement for economic and political rights that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century; and the interconnections in this period between the discourses on religious identities and nationalism in Kashmir and British India.

Although we approached Kashmir as historians, trained in the historical method, the importance of bringing an interdisciplinary lens to bear on the region became apparent very quickly. I found myself using an ethnographic approach early on (and continue to do so) – talking to people and providing a space for them to share their memories of the past and ideas about the present verbally and through their family's textual collections. This approach revealed a hitherto untapped archive in the Kashmiri language – in the form of poetry, short prose compositions, stories and occasional letters – that added new flavour to the debates over decline, loss, belonging and demands for justice that enlivened Kashmiri political discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By introducing interdisciplinary approaches and larger questions that were informing

South Asian historiography as a whole – such as the relationship among ideas of religion, region and nation – to the study of Kashmir, our books (Zutshi, 2003; Rai, 2004) raised ever more questions and opened up new avenues for research into Kashmir's past, its present and their linkages.

While the conflict in and over Kashmir has informed the scholarship that followed in the last decade, it has been far more concerned with destabilizing the notion of Kashmir as merely a disputed territory and branching out from the high politics of the conflict to consider less well-known aspects and areas of Kashmir. For instance, it utilizes multidisciplinary tools to study Kashmir over the *longue duree*, interrogate the idea of Kashmir itself and illuminate indigenous voices from the fourteenth century all the way into the present (Accardi, 2014; Zutshi, 2014). Furthermore, these new perspectives transcend the competing nationalist narratives on Kashmir, even as they trace the genealogy of these ideas within the Indian and Pakistani nationalist imaginations, such as in Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Territory of Desire* (2009). They probe the concepts that have informed and continue to inform our understanding of Kashmir, such as *Kashmiriyat*, *aazadi*, paradise on earth, borderland, among others, and what meanings they hold for Kashmiris themselves (Inden, 2008; Zutshi, 2010; Gangahar, 2013; Hussain, 2014).

At the same time, the scholarship that focuses on politics deploys sociological, ethnographic and literary perspectives to re-evaluate past and contemporary political scenarios and conflicts from the perspective of gender; economic and political marginality; everyday experiences of violence and resistance; and governance (Whitehead, 2007; Kazi, 2009; Duschinski and Hoffman, 2011; Tremblay and Bhatia, 2015; Kaul, 2015). It thus transcends the meta-narrative of political conflict to probe other, equally significant, arenas of conflict that inform the Kashmir dispute.

This 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 state 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, such as Ravina Aggarwal (2004), Christopher Snedden (2012), Cabeiri Robinson (2013) and Martin Sökefeld (2005, 2015), have sought to re-centre 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 interconnection) 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.

Despite this burgeoning literature on the region, there have been few edited collections on Kashmir's history, politics, or culture in the past two decades. The three noteworthy exceptions, deeply concerned with the insurgency and its aftermath, focus on the Kashmir Valley and the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Aparna Rao and T. N. Madan's *The Valley of Kashmir* (2008) assembled a number 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 disappearance. Nyla Ali Khan's volume, *The Parchment of Kashmir* (2012), too, is pre-occupied with capturing what has been lost in the decades since the insurgency, this time through the voices and particular subject positions of indigenous Kashmiri scholars. *Until My Freedom Has Come*, edited by Sanjay Kak (2011), focuses attention on the unrest against the Indian authorities that began in the summer of 2010 in Jammu and Kashmir and collects varied responses to it from journalists, activists, scholars, musicians and filmmakers. The disputed nature of Kashmir and the conflict over and in Indian Jammu and Kashmir loom large in these volumes.

This volume, by contrast, is spurred by the fresh scholarly voices on the entire region of Kashmir that have emerged in the past two decades and brings together a cross-section of the most original of this current research. These voices are concerned as much with Kashmir as place/region as with Kashmir as dispute/conflict, and question the teleology of conflict in this region by illustrating its historical and political contingencies. The volume thus elucidates why and how Kashmir became one of the central failures of postcolonial state-building in South Asia. At the same time, the collection covers Kashmir temporally from the early modern period to the contemporary moment, and introduces readers to recent multidisciplinary methodologies that have been brought to bear to study the undivided region as it existed at multiple historical moments, as well as the varied sources that have been uncovered in the process.

The fourteen essays collected here are a result of intensive ethnographic fieldwork in different areas of Kashmir; extensive interviews on both sides of the Line of Control; an in-depth study of manuscripts in several different languages; a deep analysis of films, poetry, newspapers and journals; and a scouring of government archives. They cover a long chronological scope and a

wide geographical range to give readers a comprehensive insight into the multiple aspects of Kashmir in its larger regional, national and global contexts.

Since Kashmir is by no means unique in either its past or its present situation (the examples of Kurdistan/Kurds and Palestine/Palestinians come to mind), one of the objectives of this volume is to raise broader questions about how regions and people of the borderlands – that are a part of more than one national entity by their geographical location, interconnected histories and political affiliations – are understood and defined. How are these regions represented through a constant dialogue between their past histories and contemporary politics? How do religious identities, political grievances, socio-economic anxieties and collective memories intertwine to produce narratives of protest and resistance within regional-nationalist movements? How are such regions, their nationalist movements and their people's interests to be accommodated within states rather than being seen as threats to the national interest? While the volume does not necessarily claim to provide all the answers to these complex questions, its essays do offer interdisciplinary methodologies, eclectic sources and suggest potential lines of inquiry through which to more fruitfully approach the study of regions in general, and disputed regions in particular, in South Asia and beyond.

Defining Kashmir

Much like other regions of the subcontinent, the subcontinent itself, or even a continent such as Europe, Kashmir is not only an actual geographical entity, but also an idea. Even as its geographical contours have constantly shifted through the centuries, it has at the same time been defined in multiple ways within its vibrant narrative tradition. Moreover, its geographical location and landscape have been central to its many definitions, which are the product of an intermingling of local, regional and universal ideas.

In Sanskrit texts such as the seventh-century *Nilamata Purana* and the twelfth-century *Rajatarangini*, Kashmir appeared as a sacred kingdom created through divine intervention and the auspicious centre of a larger cosmological universe defined by Shaivism. Sufi hagiographical narratives in Persian from the fourteenth century onwards embraced this idea of Kashmir as a sacred space, claiming its especially blessed landscape for Islam. In the process, the landscape was rendered more auspicious still through the peregrinations of Sufi mystics, as evident in their shrines now dotting the landscape. Starting in the late sixteenth century, Persian historical narratives drew on their Sanskrit predecessors to define Kashmir as a paradise on earth, as well as a territory whose past – first recorded

in the *Rajatarangini* narratives – had to be narrated and continued in a different way. By the eighteenth century, Kashmir was being described as a *mulk*, or a homeland for its inhabitants, who were for the first time defined as a people, or a *quom*. For late-nineteenth-century narratives, Kashmir was a polity with a distinct historical record that set it apart from other *mulks*, and thus an exceptional space in the global sphere.

The Sanskrit and Persian narratives in a variety of genres, including prose and poetry, were deeply connected to the Kashmiri oral tradition, which in turn drew on Sanskrit and Persian texts to narrate and disseminate the idea of Kashmir as place. Kashmir was given voice to and performed in the regional vernacular, Kashmiri, by wandering minstrels and storytellers as a palimpsest – a layered and shared space produced through the creative, sometimes conflictual, interaction among languages, ideas, religions and groups of people, both divine and human. In their stories and songs, Nagas, Brahmans, Buddhists, Sufi mystics, religious mendicants, rulers, administrators and ordinary men and women played an equally important role in defining and narrating the idea of Kashmir.

These definitions of Kashmir as sacred space, kingdom, territory, *mulk* and place, among many others, were anchored to the larger political and institutional contexts in which they were articulated, and not only reflected, but also shaped Kashmir's state structures, its political culture and the religious affiliations of its people. For instance, the Sufi hagiographical narratives allowed the Kashmiri Sultanate to consolidate its control over Kashmir in the name of Islam by cementing the nexus between Sufi mystics and the rulers. Persian historical narratives embodied within them assertions of uniqueness because they were composed as Kashmir became part of larger imperial entities such as the Mughal Empire, followed by the Afghan Empire and later the Sikh Kingdom, and were aimed at negotiating a level of autonomy for Kashmir and Kashmiris. At the same time, the jeremiad that characterized Persian narratives such as *Bagh-i Sulaiman*, written in 1778, captured Kashmiris' frustration at their inability to protect their *mulk* from the depredations of outsiders, as Kashmir was incorporated into the Afghan Empire.

The nineteenth-century narratives were produced in the context of Kashmir's incorporation into the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, as Kashmiris grappled with the reality of yet another empire. The British Indian Empire, and its subsidiary, the Dogra dynasty, ushered in vast political, economic and socio-cultural transformations in Kashmir, while heightening its claims to exceptionality as orientalist scholars and administrators began their studies of the region. New

ideas, discourses and concerns from British India mingled with the indigenous tradition within the historical narratives as they struggled in this radically transformed socio-political scenario to reposition Kashmir as a polity, and its inhabitants – particularly Kashmiri Muslims – as a community.

As the Kashmiri nationalist movement gathered force in the 1940s, and drew ever closer to Indian nationalist discourse, it articulated the narrative of a unique Kashmiri identity, known as *Kashmiriyat*. Drawing on the orientalist ideas of Kashmir as an exceptional space, this narrative drew Kashmir into the ambit of a secular India, while still maintaining its distance from it. The idea of *Kashmiriyat* as the defining feature of Kashmiri identities is under fierce attack in the context of the contemporary conflict, especially between India and Kashmir, as Kashmiris seek to distance themselves from India and claim a greater identification of Kashmir with the Islamic world, defined increasingly in West Asian rather than South Asian terms. As the essays in this volume demonstrate so well, ideas of what constitutes Kashmir – and how Kashmiris are to be defined as a group – are part of an ongoing conversation that rages on into the contemporary moment.

History

One can argue that Kashmir's modern history begins in 1846, when the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was created through the Treaty of Amritsar and its reins handed over to the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh, and his successors. The far-reaching impact of the creation of the princely state, to which the Kashmir issue remains wedded even today, cannot be overemphasized. This is not only because the princely state was a novel polity that brought together disparate areas such as Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, Ladakh and the Frontier Territories,¹ but more significantly because it created an entirely new bureaucratic state structure to administer them as integral parts of one entity. The rise of a Kashmiri nationalist movement in the early twentieth century was intimately tied to the policies undertaken by this state and its resultant relationship to its subjects. For the Kashmiri nationalist consciousness, moreover, the moment of the creation of the princely state was (and remains) a powerfully memorialized symbol of Kashmir's past and present enslavement.

The ways in which Kashmiri Muslims negotiated the Dogra state structure and its Hindu narratives of legitimacy forms the subject of the chapters by Mridu Rai and Chitralkha Zutshi. Rai's essay focuses on the colonial archeological project in Kashmir as undertaken by the Dogra state in the early twentieth century to buttress its own sovereignty, and the responses of its Kashmiri Muslim subjects

as they utilized the same project to demand control over their own religious spaces, and through that, their political rights as a community. The drawing of the contours of Kashmiri Muslim community itself is the subject of Zutshi's essay, which examines urban shrines as the site on which the debates over what it meant to be Kashmiri Muslim were played out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues that these contests over urban space were about far more than religion and shaped not just internal Kashmiri Muslim tussles over community leadership, but also informed the nature of their political negotiation with, and protest against, the Dogra state and later the Indian state as well.

Both these essays illustrate that in Kashmir, changing relationships between the state and society, and between institutions such as shrines and the emergence of political and national identities, were not only linked to larger socio-political developments in British India, but also followed similar trajectories as in other regions of South Asia.

The essays by Andrew Whitehead and Shahla Hussain take these early protests against the Dogra state forward to examine their full fruition into a nationalist movement in the 1930s, 1940s and beyond. Whitehead enquires into the content of Kashmiri nationalism, how it defined the Kashmiri nation and its convergence with and eventual divergence from Indian nationalism. He concludes that the conflicting nationalisms in play in Kashmir and India in the late 1940s and 1950s account for the failure to achieve an enduring constitutional settlement based on a mature political pluralism. Hussain's essay analyses Kashmiri nationalism through the shifting meanings of the word *aazadi* (freedom), tracing its trajectory in Kashmiri political discourse from the 1930s to the present. It dispels the notion of freedom as a recent construct and emphasizes that Kashmiri imaginings of freedom in different temporal frames were not confined to political freedom, but also included concepts such as human dignity, economic equity and social justice.

The essays in this section, and the next, reveal the powerful interconnection between the past and the present in the context of Kashmir, especially in the persistence of narratives of protest, freedom and nationalism (Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani) across the decades and the institutions that buttress them, such as shrines, political organizations and the state. The princely state was – and although long gone – remains the reference point for regional identities, subjecthood and the movement for self-determination in multiple sub-regions of Kashmir. Contemporary discourse in Indian Kashmir spontaneously links violent episodes with the Indian authorities to historical wrongs committed at particular historical moments, such as 1846 or July 1931, thus reinforcing divisions along familiar

lines. Kashmiri nationalism, which at one time seemed perfectly aligned with the narrative of Indian nationalism, now seems irreconcilable with it. As a result, the chapters also remind us of the historical bonds among groups of people, entities and ideas that seem today to be separated by unbridgeable gulfs.

Politics

As the eminent political commentator on Kashmir, Balraj Puri, rightly noted, ‘Kashmiri politics is a prisoner of Kashmir’s past’ (Puri, 2010). This is true not just in the sense that the continuous invocation of competing visions of Kashmir’s history in discussions of contemporary politics makes any movement towards resolution almost impossible, but equally importantly because Kashmir’s past quite literally impinges on its present.

The princely state, established in 1846 and dismantled in 1947, continues to provide the framework for nationalist and other movements in the region, and Indian and Pakistani state responses to them. The partitions of this entity and the constituent parts that resulted from the withdrawal of British paramountcy in 1947 determine the nature of interstate relations and the relationships between states and their citizens. These ongoing partitions – between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir; between Indian Kashmir and India; among the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh; between Pakistani Kashmir and Pakistan; and between Pakistani Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan – many of which are officially unrecognized, contribute to the deep sense of uncertainty and the near perpetual state of war that characterizes the lives of the people who call this region home (see Zutshi, 2015). One can argue, thus, that the region is still in the throes of a long process of decolonization.

While the 1989 upsurge against the Indian state and its military response prompted a scholarly examination of the nature of politics in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir since 1947, the regions of Kashmir on the Pakistani side of the 1949 ceasefire line have remained relatively unexamined until very recently. The essays in this section by Christopher Snedden and Martin Sökefeld thus make a significant contribution towards unravelling the entangled histories and complex politics of these areas. In the process, they illustrate the multiple contestations over identity, belonging, nationalism, and citizenship that both connect and separate the people of these areas with each other, and with the people across the borders in Indian Jammu and Kashmir.

Snedden’s essay re-centres the entity known as Azad Kashmir within our understanding of the Kashmir dispute as the area that instigated the battle over

the princely state in 1947, which led to the eventual partition of the state. A wide-ranging account of the area's history, economy and politics, the essay argues that despite its contested status and claims to the contrary, Azad Kashmir lacks integrity as a viable and fully functioning political entity because of its de facto relationship with Pakistan. Its 'freedom' is defined as not much more than its freedom from India. Sökefeld's essay traces the history and politics of the area that was part of the Frontier Territories of the princely state, then became known as the Northern Areas, and has recently been renamed Gilgit-Baltistan, as a region suspended between the claims of India and Pakistan. Although Gilgit-Baltistan is effectively a part of Pakistan, most people in the region want Pakistan to constitutionally and legally integrate the region as a province. At the same time, its nationalists claim a distinct identity for the region by arguing that it is rightfully neither a part of India nor of Pakistan, and, although it is a part of the Kashmir dispute, it is not a part of Kashmir.

The rest of the essays in this section probe the politics of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir from a variety of perspectives. Seema Kazi's essay examines the gender dimension of governance practice in the state, particularly in the context of the insurgency. Through an examination of landmark cases that encapsulate institutional responses to gender crimes against Kashmiri women by state personnel, it foregrounds the link between enduring insecurity and injustice for women on the one hand and the privileging of executive and military authority on the other, as defining features of governance in Jammu and Kashmir. Although the essay focuses on the experiences of women in the Kashmir Valley in the past two decades, it is also important to remember that women in border areas, such as Kargil, are even further marginalized and have borne the brunt of the violence and displacement caused by the Kashmir conflict almost continuously since 1948 (see Hans, 2004).

Displacement has defined the experience of another group in Jammu and Kashmir, the Kashmiri Pandits, whose responses to their involuntary migration in the wake of the insurgency form the subject of Haley Duschinski's essay. Tracing the relationship of this migration to national debates about secularism, governance and the state's responsibility to its citizens, the essay considers the construction of Kashmiri Hindu collective identity through community discourse in the 1990s, with special attention to the way in which this discourse framed the issue of return to the homeland and the heterogeneity of voices within it. An examination of the roots of this issue is particularly important given the recent re-emergence of the idea of the return and resettlement of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir in the context