

## Conflict Management in Kashmir

The book examines the intersections of political violence, deprivation and conflict and explores the prospects of conflict management by studying one of the world's most multifaceted and complex political turmoils – Kashmir. This work closely investigates the vertical aspect of the conflict, in which the Indian state and a section of Kashmiris are engaged in a turbulent relationship, and explores novel ways to stimulate conflict management. By employing the Protracted Social Conflict theory, the author argues that a conflict between a state and a social group ensues when the political elite fail to address the non-material needs of the marginalized. He demonstrates that the state, which is endowed with the authority to govern, has to foster a sense of security to the governed who are situated on the fringes of the existing political arrangements.

The author suggests that deprivation of core non-material needs, like political participation, played a major role in the rise of the violent separatist movement in Kashmir in the 1980s. During the 1990s, a positive transformation appeared as New Delhi initiated a peace process. The later opening of the two intra-Kashmir roads for travel and trade was a major step towards peace. The book transcends traditional conflict discourse to argue that it is essential not only to recognize root causes of a conflict but also to frame genuine policies towards its management.

By documenting narratives of the Kashmiri traders and the state officials, the book emphasizes the need to focus on the 'gainers', rather than on the 'spoilers', and the significance of accommodation and engagement to address a state–people conflict.

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## State–People Relations and Peace

Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra



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## Preface

The book emerges from an indomitable optimism that conflicts emerge to be solved. This is a novel attempt to search for alternative solutions to address state–people conflicts in general and the Kashmir conflict in particular. There is ample literature on the Kashmir conflict, covering its interstate and intrastate dimensions. While acknowledging the significance of these studies, this book goes a step further to identify a core factor that propels the internal and external dimensions of the conflict and makes it protracted.

The post-Cold War world witnessed the rise of state–people conflicts with severe humanitarian consequences. There is more loss of civilian life in these conflicts than in interstate wars. Whether in the Middle East, Eurasia or South Asia, such conflicts have not only affected state–people relations, but also surrounding regions. These conflicts share commonalities, which this book has amply demonstrated. First, there is an intermingling of external and internal dimensions. The linkages between these two dimensions need to be identified. The two cannot be isolated as they operate in the same social milieu. Second, fissures within the society, multicomunal cleavages, sharpened by discriminatory policies, are prominent. Third, the state and its people are engaged in a conflictual relationship with cycles of violence becoming a regular feature. Fourth, there is no precise start or end of the conflict, though there may be spurs in terms of wars, episodes of violent protests, etc. Fifth, people and society are conflict-habituated and spoilers engage in activities to sustain the conflict atmosphere; hence, they oppose initiatives for peace. Sixth, conflict management is a difficult process and it requires a multi-pronged approach.

The book is not only interested in identifying the commonalities of state–people conflicts and the intersection of inter and intrastate dimensions, but also in exploring the roots of conflict and suggesting ways to address it, by focusing on a South Asian conflict – Kashmir. This region is well known in conflict lexicon, drawing attention of scholars from all over the world. The region has witnessed wars, border clashes, war scares and militancy – producing several consequences, intended and unintended, immediate and long-term. As I have demonstrated in my earlier writings, its humanitarian consequences are

far-reaching, the foremost being the loss of thousands of lives. The contested region has been both a cause and effect of the India–Pakistan animosity. How and why India and Pakistan engaged in the conflict and how and why the militancy started, have been the subject of many studies. Practical suggestions for moving forward, however, are not forthcoming. This is particularly evident if one looks at the existing work on the internal dimension of the conflict. The book engages with critical questions regarding how the obsession with state security undermines concerns of human security and how the resultant political deprivation leads to state–people conflict and offers practical suggestions to manage this conflict.

Protracted social conflicts are deeply rooted in the structure of a society and amplified by a state's discriminatory policies, perceived or real. In either case, a community deprived of its basic security needs nurtures discontent, which may reach dangerous proportions with external support. When a state fails to perform its duty in ensuring a dignified community life, a group may rise in protest. In a democratic state, non-violent methods of protest are acceptable. When the state's failure is countered with violent methods, a situation of conflictual relationship emerges. Among basic needs of a community, political participation and secure identity are crucial. Their deprivation produces discontent. The state, which has authority to govern and the capacity to deliver, has to take constructive steps to formulate and implement corrective policies to address grievances of the people. Making use of the protracted social conflict framework, the book argues conflict in Kashmir is amenable to a solution, or at least its management is possible. In this context, nurturing a constituency of gainers, through accommodative policies, as against solely focusing on the spoilers, who gain from the conflict situation, is significant.

The contention of this study is essentially two-fold. First, accommodating the core needs of an alienated group is crucial to addressing a protracted conflict. Material needs such as employment opportunity and economic development are important, but their absence may not necessarily lead to a conflict. Second, community needs, such as political participation, recognition, security, etc., are more critical and even non-negotiable. Deprivation of these needs is more likely to lead to a conflict than the lack of employment opportunities or basic amenities. Their absence is felt more acutely than their presence. The deprivation of these ontological needs contributed to the protracted nature of the conflict in Kashmir.

The study revolves around a key development in the region – the opening of the intra-Kashmir roads in 2005 and 2006 and cross-border economic exchange through them since 2008. Why is this initiative crucial? Is it addressing the alienation? Is it contributing to conflict management? Are the gainers merely interested in economic gains? Is this initiative leading to accommodation? Has the involvement in this cross-border economic exchange empowered a section of the marginalized? These questions inform the study. Some of these questions are relevant not only to Kashmir. They are well suited to any of the social conflict situations scattered across the globe. The answers to them would determine the nature and scope of conflict management for such conflict situations.

Initially my interest in Kashmir emerged as an academic exercise, as a researcher based in New Delhi. I focused on the Kashmir conflict from a foreign policy perspective, examining how the Cold War and the post-Cold War dynamics shaped the South Asian conflict. I focused especially on Soviet/Russian foreign policy towards Kashmir and its configuration by the super power rivalry. This study was in line with the scholarship that emphasized on external factors shaping the conflict, according secondary importance to internal dimensions. I inculcated a sense of belonging and interest over the years, with residence in the region for more than two years and frequent field visits thereafter. As I interacted with common people and witnessed their conflict-habituated daily lives, the internal dimension gained centre stage in my writings. This close encounter with the conflict situation provided the necessary grounding for this book. The idea was conceived then and took years to materialize. A significant part of this study was drafted during my doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

This research could not have been possible without the help and support of so many generous people. I am thankful to Darren Kew, J. Samuel Barkin, Craig N. Murphy and Betty C. Hanson for their intellectual support. I am also thankful to Winston Langley for his continued encouragement. Thanks are also due to the staff of Healey Library for their support and for promptly arranging the required research material. I am thankful to the administration of the University of Massachusetts, Boston for generously supporting my research.

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