

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ON OUR COLONIAL LEGACY: KASHMIR FROM THE INQUISITIVE EYE AND HISTORICAL LENS

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"If I were to look over the whole world to find a country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature could bestow- in some places, a very paradise on Earth- I should point to India." -Friedrich Max Müller

Abstract

When India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947, Kashmir was the ultimate bone of contention for multiple reasons- it was a geopolitical stronghold, placed at in the middle of The People's Republic of China and the two newly independent states of India and Pakistan. Tales of its beauty and fine imagery were already immortalized in literature and culture, and it was fully intended that Kashmir, a majority Muslim State with its Hindu Ruler, would be symbolic of the new secular India that the Indian National Congress and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister, had inherited in a very fragile and communally divided condition from the British Empire.

The Congress took an offensive tack against Kashmir because of the strategic significance of the state. Colonel Webb, the British Resident in Kashmir at the time, declared in 1946 that Nehru had already developed his Kashmir plan. People sometimes assume that Nehru's interest in Kashmir sprang from some sort of sentimental connection to the region because members of his family originally hail from there, but in reality, the region's strategic significance was what really piqued his attention. Kashmir is located on the historic Silk Route and has borders with the former Soviet Union, China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Kashmir may provide India with the benefit of having a scientific frontier while also ensuring the safety of India's North-Western Frontier, which has traditionally left India vulnerable. Furthermore, Nehru's secular nationalist beliefs would be strengthened by the accession of Muslim-majority Kashmir, which is practically a "miniature Pakistan," and would have a "powerful influence on communal forces in India. Given these considerations, Nehru sent a telegram to Mountbatten during the latter's

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visit to Kashmir to impress upon him that the joining of Kashmir in the Constituent Assembly of India was an action against the resistance from Pakistan and promote the communal balance inside the boundary of the State.

One of the major reasons for the communal divide in the country at the time was the Empire's divide-and-rule policy, which used the divisions in the kingdoms of the erstwhile Indian Sub-Continent to play authority over them right into the palm of the Queen. The divide-and-rule policy deeply impacted the Indian people, and Kashmir was no exception.

But it is important to make an inquiry into the divide and rule policy and the communism it fraught and examine how the same birthed communal unrest in Kashmir. It is of essence to endeavor to understand how the British Policy decision of hasty withdrawal from the country left a long-lasting impact on Kashmir.

Keywords

Colonial Legacy, Kashmir, India, Pakistan, Indian National Congress, British Empire.

Divide and Rule in Kashmir

The Partition between India and Pakistan is said to be an intangible one involving destroyed friendships, families, geography, history, tradition, culture, minds, and hearts and Kashmir was the lap of the conflict. This tragedy reached its pinnacle in 1947 with the partition of India into Hindu and Muslim areas, which was the result of the colonial goal of “divide et impera,” which translates to “divide and rule.” The goal of “divide et imperia” was to promote religious antagonisms to maintain imperial control.¹

When ministers from the Indian National Congress resigned in protest of Britain waging war on Germany on India's behalf without consulting them, the British authorities had no trouble filling the seats with unelected members of the Muslim League. They also frequently usurped authority that had been nominally transferred to the government of India. While the League's most prominent opponents were locked away, the members of the Muslim League failed to win the election at the resignation time of the congress members from the parliament. The communal tension started the battle between the members of Congress and the Muslim League.. Dr. Shashi Tharoor, a well-respected authority on the British Empire's lies, claims that the British intentionally stoked political tensions between Hindus and Muslims by portraying the latter as a homogeneous group that they were not before the British came.

Hindus and Muslims were fought together because their only intention to throw away the British from the throne in 1857 and the revolt did not fail due to communalism. An old Roman saying went something like, “Divide et impera”; Lord Elphinstone said that this would be their strategy. The British government openly backed a campaign that aimed to sow discord between the two people groups' levels of understanding. The British established communal electorates so that Muslims could vote solely for Muslims when they were ultimately persuaded to give Indians

some voting rights. The armies were set up for the fight against the British Empire without any communal barrier between Hindus and Muslims..²

Although the majority of the people of Hyderabad were Hindu, their Muslim monarch, Nizam, had absolute power. Nizam battled to protect his State's autonomy. As soon as Mountbatten departed in June 1948, Indian forces marched on Hyderabad. The Nizam's soldiers surrendered, and the State was incorporated into the Indian Union. Quite the reverse was true in Kashmir. It had a Hindu monarch although its population was primarily Muslim. The Maharaja of Kashmir resisted joining either British or Indian control until Pakistani tribal levy troops attacked his state in October 1947. Major portions of the State were retaken by the Indian army when the Maharaja declared his allegiance to India. The majority of Junagadh's residents identified as Hindu. The State's Muslim monarch has recognized Pakistan as its new overlord. The citizens of the State rose up in opposition to the government's action. In October 1947, Indian troops overran the state after its leader had fled to Pakistan.³

In Kashmir, the divide-and-rule policy barely manifested at a time of tensions when there still existed, as some would put it, a despotic Hindu ruler who wished to control Muslim masses in a fashion that was independent of the control of the Muslim majority state that the masses may argue they belonged to or the secular Hindu-majority state the Maharaja would have thought to have been inclined to pledge his allegiance to. However, the communal tension was set up for the decision made by the Indian government and Maharaja of Kashmir due to allegiance, including the recent abrogation of Article 370 from the Constitution- an Article that has sustained the special status of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir through four major wars in the region and through ongoing domestic tensions, multiple terror attacks, and endless dialogue. The colonial hangovers were partly removed over Kashmir by Article 370 and the government has totally come to the hand of the Indian government without any colonial policy. The divide-and-rule policy of the British government was abolished but colonialism remains continued over the province by the government in a democratic way.

Another perspective, however, as presented in a book on British Paramountcy in Kashmir, defends that Kashmir was a state that bordered Russia, Afghanistan and China and as an important frontier state, was not a place that the British would tolerate a ruler who would not toe the line of their thought of thought and action. The claim here is that the installation of the ruler Pratap Singh as the Maharaja of Kashmir upon the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh is evidence of the Britishers' desperation to maintain a stronghold over the region. The late ruler, it is said, had a strong personality, because of which the English could not maintain a stronghold

over the border of Gilgit, which they swooped down upon on the moment of his death by destabilizing the state through engineered intrigues in the Court between Pratap Singh and Amar Singh for the succession of the throne. They deposed Pratap Singh and installed Amar Singh as President of the Council in 1889, which marked the completion of their mission of gaining a stronghold over Kashmir by employing their signature divide and rule policy in the state- a move that has continued to contribute to the significance of the communal discourse on Kashmir's political past in colonial times.⁴

1.3.2 The Hasty Withdrawal from India and Kashmir

Once the crowning achievement of the British Empire, the British Raj rapidly disintegrated during World War II. As a result of the devastation wrought by World War II, the British people elected a Labour administration, which had a history of supporting Indian demands for self-rule. That, together with American demands that Western Imperialism be halted, Japanese expansion, and rising discontent among India's native people, ultimately led to the collapse of British sovereignty. It's quite difficult to attribute the British government's departure to a single factor. The last British Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, came to the country with the intention of making a smooth handover of authority to the Indian government. His efforts resulted in an acceleration of the deadline for the British evacuation from June 1948 to August 1947. The Indian Armed Forces took up law enforcement duties in the last weeks before independence.⁵

The British, indeed, made a rather hasty withdrawal from India, and by extension, from Kashmir. British government withdrew its power from undivided India and divided the country based on religion due to the huge loss and pressure in the Second World War, but the bloody tale of the hasty drawing of the Radcliffe Line by a lawyer who had never before visited India and was indifferent to the INC's one-nation and the All India Muslim League's two-nation policies.⁶

The politics of it all neatly tied together in tensions erupting in the single Muslim-majority stronghold that was yet to pick a side during partition, and with attention concentrated and unfocussed on Kashmir simultaneously, the rapid decline of the British Empire made with it a rapid decline in Kashmir's aspirations for self-determination.

1.3.3 The Rapid Decline of the British Empire Suggested a Quick Withdrawal from India

The giving up of the British Raj by the British Colonial Empire and the Partition of India are today seen as early symptoms in the demise of the once towering

and all-supreme British Empire. During World War II, the British used the resources of India to promote their imperial war effort and further their control of India. They effectively put an end to that effort in 1942, when Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress attempted to persuade them to leave India through various forms of coercion. Despite this, before the conflict, the British government had pledged to provide India with complete autonomy as part of an effort to win support from the Congress. It became immediately evident that Britain “lacked the resources to fight a second mass assault by the Congress” in the months following the conclusion of hostilities. The government was worn out and short on troops.⁷

However, The expectations of the Congress leaders were not fulfilled but the British government suddenly withdrew their rule from the country. An army was required to form an independent country and the government did not agree to give any help to the Indian government. Two free countries were made and the boundary was set up based on religion and administration also divided among the leaders of the Muslim League and Indian National Congress, “Lord Louis Mountbatten”, arrived in India. Mountbatten was responsible for the speedy transition to two new administrations (India and Pakistan) once the imperial borders had been drawn up.⁸

1.3.4 The British Attitude towards Kashmir

The stance the British had towards India and Pakistan in the post-colonial era was a major factor in the development of events in Kashmir. Both a Commonwealth defense agreement and a bilateral treaty were negotiated by London to maintain its sway in both nations. The British viewed in New Delhi as a “possible political, economic, and military ally in Asia.” On the other side, British officials saw Pakistan as a key ally in their efforts to strengthen connections with the Muslim world.⁹ The result of the 1947–48 war in Kashmir was heavily influenced by the decisions made by the British, despite the fact that London received distinct and “frequently conflicting advice from its troops in Karachi and New Delhi on how it should deal with the two new dominions.”¹⁰ Sir Lawrence Grafftey-Smith, the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, made a significant impact with his remarks about his country’s “battle for existence” in the British capital. Grafftey-Smith believed that the accession of Kashmir to India posed a significant danger to Pakistan’s irrigation infrastructure, hydroelectric projects, and others. He also brought up the decades-old British concern that Russian involvement in Afghanistan would have negative repercussions for India and, more recently, Pakistan. Grafftey-Smith warned London that “If India were to obtain access to the North-west Frontier and the tribal districts, unlimited mischief can be produced with ‘Pathanistan’ or other slogans,” as they put it in a telegraph. As a result, “disturbances and disorders in Gilgit and

the North West Frontier zone generally may...excite Russia's interest and appetites," and "Afghanistan policy will almost probably shift for the worse."

Despite the immediate and urgent nature of the situation in Kashmir, "British service chiefs did not assign it a higher priority than developing situations in Hyderabad or Punjab," as pointed out by C. Dasgupta in his book. This is despite the fact that the British were "eager to limit and contain the inter-dominion conflict." During this period, Nehru and other top political leaders had different goals for the Indian military strategy than the British. As just one example, there were significant disagreements about "how many Indian troops and battalions should be stationed in Jammu and Kashmir throughout the winter of 1947. Nehru believed the army should go on to Domel rather than stop at Uri, but the British military commanders, led by Chief of the Defense Staff General Lockhart, disagreed."¹¹ They said that supplying and sustaining a big army over the winter would be extremely difficult, and that extending an already overstretched line of communication would be extremely difficult as well.¹² The British and India's political leaders were at odds over whether or not to deploy an air force.¹³ Lord Mountbatten, India's last Viceroy, disagreed with Nehru's call for air strikes against infiltrators from Pakistan. Concerned that their "whole position in northern Kashmir would be jeopardized if they lost the Gilgit base, Pakistan had decided to deploy fighter escorts for its supply-dropping aircraft to the region." To avoid an "aviation clash between India and Pakistan in the northern theatre, the British persuaded Nehru to overlook supply-dropping planes from Pakistan over Gilgit."

Concluding Notes

It is clear that the British had a lax attitude towards Kashmir and the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination created a domino effect and led to a continued negligence of such rights of the Kashmiri people on the part of the various administrations that have attempted to forcefully take over and govern Kashmir since 1947. Alongside this, conflicts in Kashmir since 1947 have also been colored by communalism and an opposition of those abiding by the Hindu faith against those abiding by Mohammedan principles. These have, needless to say, continued to reflect on our discourses on Kashmir in the 21st century, especially with the abrogation of Article 370, the continuing tensions between India and Pakistan that are centered on Kashmir and fought on war lines along the borders of "Pakistan-occupied," "India-occupied," and "China-occupied" Kashmir. Throughout these discourses, the voice of the Kashmiri- the Kashmiri pundit, the Kashmiri Muslim, the Kashmiri woman, the Kashmiri child, the Kashmiri unionist, and the Kashmiri separatist remain often unheard.

All the requirements of the Kashmir policy were not fulfilled by the British government and the division of the states clearly told based on communalism it is not totally communalism but it has some political influence made by the British government. As Kashmir is brought on the global stage with India holding the G20 presidency in 2023, it is important to take this opportunity to lend the mike to Kashmir and break generations and decades of imposed silence that the state has been faced with.

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