

The Postcolonial Faultlines of a Composite State: History, Identity, and the Politics of Fragmentation of Kashmir.

Abstract

This article examines the postcolonial formation of Jammu and Kashmir as a composite state shaped by the violent transition of 1947 and its enduring internal fault-lines. It argues that the simultaneity of invasion, mass violence, and hurried accession produced a political entity marked by uneven legitimacy, divergent regional memories, and unresolved questions of representation. Drawing on a historically grounded interpretive approach, the article traces how these foundational tensions evolved into competing regional identities and contemporary fragmentation. It highlights the interplay between internal dynamics and external influences, including Pakistan's role, and concludes that any sustainable political future must engage with these layered histories rather than bypass them.

Introduction

The Kashmir question, often presumed to have receded into diplomatic inertia, has in recent years returned to analytical relevance through a series of subtle but consequential developments. Competing cartographic assertions in the region's neighbourhood, renewed geopolitical engagements involving Pakistan, and the persistent symbolic invocation of Kashmir within transnational political discourse have collectively unsettled the perception of closure. These developments, though varied in form, point to a deeper reality: the Kashmir question remains unresolved not only in territorial or diplomatic terms but within its internal political and historical architecture.

This article argues that any serious engagement with the present must return to the formative moment of 1947, when Jammu and Kashmir transitioned from a princely state into a postcolonial political entity under conditions of extraordinary violence and uncertainty. That transition did not produce a coherent or consensual state. Instead, it generated a composite formation marked by uneven legitimacy, differentiated experiences of violence, and competing regional aspirations. These structural tensions have persisted across decades, shaping political behaviour, identity formation, and contemporary debates on fragmentation.

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive methodological framework grounded in historical analysis. It relies primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly works, historical accounts, and analytical literature on Jammu and Kashmir. The approach does not seek to produce quantitative measurement but rather to interpret patterns of political development, regional divergence, and identity formation over time. The method involves close reading of key historical moments, particularly the events of 1947, the early post accession period, the insurgency of the 1990s, and subsequent political developments. These are examined not as isolated incidents but as interconnected processes that have shaped the region's political trajectory.

40 This approach is particularly suited to the subject matter, where the central questions concern
41 legitimacy, memory, identity, and structural contradiction, all of which resist purely empirical
42 quantification and require interpretive engagement.

43 Review of Literature

44 The academic literature on Kashmir is extensive and multidisciplinary, encompassing history,
45 political science, international relations, and sociology. Scholars such as Sumantra Bose have
46 examined conflict dynamics and possible pathways to resolution, while Victoria Schofield
47 has provided detailed historical narratives of the region's political evolution. Chitrlekha
48 Zutshi's work on identity formation has been particularly influential in understanding the
49 cultural and regional dimensions of Kashmiri consciousness. Christopher Snedden has
50 explored the diversity of political opinion within the broader region.

51 Much of this literature has focused on the external dimensions of the conflict, particularly
52 India Pakistan relations and the territorial dispute. Other works have examined constitutional
53 developments, governance, and insurgency.

54 However, there remains a relative gap in sustained analysis of the internal contradictions of
55 Jammu and Kashmir as a composite state formed under conditions of violence and urgency.
56 This article builds upon existing scholarship while shifting the analytical lens inward,
57 focusing on how the state's formation embedded fault-lines that continue to shape its internal
58 political dynamics.

59 Results

60 The analysis indicates that the transition of 1947 produced a structurally fragile political
61 entity. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, characterized by significant regional
62 diversity, entered the postcolonial order without a unified political consensus.

63 The events of late October 1947 were decisive. The entry of tribal fighters from Pakistan's
64 northwest frontier, supported by elements within Pakistan, triggered administrative collapse
65 in the Kashmir Valley. Simultaneously, the Jammu region experienced large scale communal
66 violence, resulting in mass killings and displacement of Muslim populations. These parallel
67 traumas created divergent regional memories that would shape political narratives for
68 decades.

69 The accession to India, formalized on 27 October 1947, occurred within this context of crisis.
70 While legally valid, it lacked the deliberative process that might have produced broader
71 political consensus across the state's diverse regions. This distinction would later inform
72 debates on legitimacy and representation.

73 In the immediate post accession period, particularly between 1947 and 1953, there existed a
74 perception among sections of the population, especially in the Valley, that the new political
75 arrangement offered the promise of empowerment. This perception was closely associated
76 with the leadership of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah. However, his arrest in 1953 marked a
77 significant rupture, altering the trajectory of public trust and introducing a sense of political
78 uncertainty.

79 Over subsequent decades, these foundational tensions manifested in different ways across
80 regions. The Valley experienced increasing political alienation, culminating in the insurgency
81 of the 1990s. While rooted in local grievances, this insurgency was significantly shaped and
82 sustained by external support from Pakistan, including training and logistical assistance to
83 militant groups. Jammu, meanwhile, articulated grievances related to political representation
84 and perceived dominance of Valley -centric politics. Ladakh intensified its demands for
85 autonomy, eventually leading to its administrative separation. The composite structure of the
86 state thus evolved into a configuration marked by regional divergence rather than integrated
87 coexistence.

88

89 **Discussion**

90

91 **The Violent Birth of a Composite State**

92 The apparent dormancy of the Kashmir question in international discourse has, in recent
93 years, given way to a quieter but unmistakable reactivation. From competing territorial
94 narratives in the region's immediate neighbourhood to the renewed diplomatic positioning of
95 Pakistan and the persistent symbolic circulation of Kashmir within broader political and
96 ideological networks, the issue has resurfaced in ways that defy claims of closure.
97 Simultaneously, internal political shifts within Jammu and Kashmir have intensified debates
98 over identity, representation, and regional autonomy, revealing fractures that extend beyond
99 the familiar frame of interstate conflict.

100 This convergence of external attention and internal fragmentation invites a reconsideration of
101 the moment from which the modern political entity of Jammu and Kashmir emerged. The
102 events of 1947 did not simply produce a territorial outcome; they established a composite
103 state marked by uneven legitimacy, differentiated memories of violence, and unresolved
104 regional aspirations. It is within this historical frame that the contemporary re-emergence of
105 Kashmir must be understood.

106 The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 stood at a uniquely precarious intersection
107 of empire, geography, and communal transformation. It was not merely another princely
108 territory navigating the end of British rule. It was a layered political space where multiple
109 identities, regional histories, and competing aspirations coexisted without a unifying political
110 consensus. Unlike many princely states that made relatively swift decisions regarding
111 accession to either India or Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir hesitated. That hesitation was not
112 indecision in a narrow sense but a reflection of its internal diversity and the absence of a
113 singular political will that could speak for all its regions.

114 The Valley of Kashmir, with its Muslim majority and a distinct linguistic and cultural identity,
115 was politically mobilized in ways that differed from the Hindu majority districts of Jammu,
116 where anxieties about political marginalization had already begun to take shape. Ladakh,
117 geographically remote and culturally distinct, was only loosely integrated into the
118 administrative imagination of the state. The ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, presided over this
119 complex formation at a moment when imperial withdrawal was accelerating and the
120 subcontinent was descending into one of the most violent partitions in modern history. His

121 initial attempt to delay accession reflected a desire to preserve autonomy, but it also revealed
122 the limits of princely authority in a rapidly transforming political landscape.

123 The situation changed dramatically in late October 1947 when armed tribal groups from
124 Pakistan's northwest frontier entered Kashmir. Their advance toward Srinagar triggered
125 widespread panic, administrative breakdown, and a rapid erosion of whatever remained of the
126 Maharaja's authority. The state machinery, already fragile, began to disintegrate under
127 pressure. As fear spread across the Valley, the ruler fled from Srinagar to Jammu, leaving
128 behind a vacuum at a moment when the very existence of the state was under threat. It was
129 within this atmosphere of urgency and collapse that the decision to accede to India was taken.

130 Yet the crisis unfolding in the Valley was only one dimension of a much larger upheaval. At
131 the same time, the Jammu region was witnessing a catastrophe of immense proportions.
132 Widespread violence against Muslim populations, carried out in a climate charged with
133 communal vengeance and political insecurity, resulted in large scale killings and
134 displacement. Estimates suggest that hundreds of thousands were affected, making it one of
135 the least acknowledged yet most consequential tragedies associated with the partition of the
136 subcontinent. The simultaneity of invasion in the Valley and massacre in Jammu produced a
137 dual trauma that would shape the moral and political memory of the state in profoundly
138 different ways across regions.

139 It was under these extraordinary and highly pressured circumstances that the Instrument of
140 Accession was signed on 27 October 1947. Legally, the accession was executed in
141 accordance with the constitutional framework available at the time and was accepted by the
142 Indian Dominion. Yet its context mattered as much as its legality. The decision emerged from
143 an immediate security crisis rather than a deliberative political process involving broad based
144 consultation across the state's diverse regions. This distinction would later become central to
145 debates about legitimacy, consent, and representation.

146 The new political entity that entered the Indian Union was therefore not a settled or cohesive
147 unit. It was a composite state held together by the imperatives of security and the aspirations
148 of a newly independent nation that sought to demonstrate its commitment to pluralism.
149 Jammu and Kashmir came to be seen, in many ways, as a microcosm of India's diversity,
150 embodying multiple religions, languages, and cultural traditions within a single
151 administrative framework. This vision carried both promise and tension. It suggested the
152 possibility of coexistence but also contained within it unresolved contradictions that had been
153 intensified rather than resolved by the events of 1947.

154 In the immediate aftermath of 1947, the political transition in Jammu and Kashmir was not
155 uniformly experienced as coercive or externally imposed, particularly within the Valley. For a
156 brief but significant period between 1947 and 1953, there existed a perception among
157 sections of the population that the new political arrangement carried the promise of
158 empowerment and emancipation, anchored in the leadership of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah,
159 who at that time commanded broad popular legitimacy across the region. This phase,
160 however, proved to be short lived. The arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 marked a decisive
161 rupture, not only in political leadership but in the trajectory of public trust, transforming what
162 had initially been perceived by many as a moment of possibility into one increasingly viewed
163 through the lens of uncertainty, disillusionment, and contested legitimacy. In Jammu, the
164 memory of communal violence and demographic upheaval produced its own narratives of

165 insecurity and grievance. Ladakh, though less directly affected by the violence of 1947,
166 remained peripheral to the dominant political discourse, its concerns often mediated through
167 administrative arrangements rather than direct representation.

168 The postcolonial state that emerged from this crucible attempted to manage these differences
169 through a combination of constitutional innovation and political negotiation. Special
170 provisions were introduced to accommodate the unique circumstances of Jammu and
171 Kashmir within the Indian Union. Democratic institutions were gradually extended, even as
172 questions of representation, autonomy, and regional balance persisted. For a time, this
173 arrangement provided a framework within which competing aspirations could be negotiated
174 without immediate rupture.

175 Yet the underlying tensions did not disappear. They remained embedded in the structure of
176 the state, shaping political alignments and social perceptions in ways that were not always
177 visible but rarely absent. The idea of a composite state, while normatively appealing, rested
178 on a fragile foundation. It required continuous political management, mutual accommodation,
179 and a degree of trust that was difficult to sustain in a context marked by historical trauma and
180 divergent regional experiences.

181 **Regional Identities and the Politics of Fragmentation**

182 As the decades unfolded, the unresolved tensions of 1947 began to manifest more explicitly
183 in the political life of Jammu and Kashmir. The eruption of armed insurgency in 1990 marked
184 a turning point that transformed not only the relationship between the Valley and the Indian
185 state but also the internal dynamics among the regions of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh.
186 While the insurgency, at the face of it, drew upon local grievances, political discontent, and a
187 crisis of legitimacy within the region, it was essentially shaped and sustained by external
188 support, particularly from Pakistan, which provided varying degrees of political backing,
189 training, and logistical assistance to militant groups operating in the Valley. The Valley
190 consequently descended into a prolonged period of militarized conflict, marked by violence,
191 displacement, and deepening alienation. This conflict did not remain confined to the Valley in
192 its effects. It reverberated across the entire state, reshaping perceptions, identities, and
193 political priorities.

194 In Jammu, the instability in Kashmir was increasingly viewed through a lens of regional
195 imbalance. Sections of the population began to articulate grievances related to political
196 representation, resource allocation, and administrative attention. There emerged a perception
197 that the politics of the Valley disproportionately influenced the governance of the state as a
198 whole. These sentiments were not uniform across Jammu, which itself is a region of
199 considerable diversity, but they gained sufficient traction to influence political discourse.

200 Ladakh, for its part, intensified long standing demands for greater autonomy and recognition
201 of its distinct cultural and geographical identity. Over time, these demands culminated in
202 administrative reconfiguration, reflecting both local aspirations and broader political
203 calculations. The separation of Ladakh into a distinct Union Territory was not an isolated
204 development but part of a longer trajectory in which regional identities sought institutional
205 expression outside the framework of the composite state.

206 The insurgency period also accelerated the hardening of identities within the Valley. The
207 experience of prolonged conflict reinforced a sense of distinctiveness and, for many, a

208 perception of political estrangement. This was accompanied by significant demographic
209 changes, most notably the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits, which further altered the social
210 fabric of the region. The loss of everyday pluralism had implications not only for inter
211 community relations but also for the broader idea of shared belonging within the state.

212 One of the most revealing moments in this evolving trajectory came in 2008 with the
213 Amarnath land controversy. What began as an administrative decision regarding land
214 allocation to a religious board quickly escalated into a major political crisis. In the Valley, it
215 triggered widespread protests, reflecting concerns about land, identity, and political intent. In
216 Jammu, it generated a powerful counter mobilization, framed around issues of regional pride
217 and perceived discrimination. The two regions entered into a phase of direct confrontation,
218 marked by economic disruptions, mass protests, and a sharp escalation of rhetoric.

219 This episode exposed the depth of inter-regional polarization that had accumulated over
220 decades. It demonstrated that the composite framework of the state had not succeeded in
221 reconciling competing identities but had, in some respects, intensified them by placing them
222 in continuous interaction without adequate mechanisms for resolution. The crisis also
223 revealed how quickly administrative decisions could acquire symbolic meaning in a context
224 where trust was limited and historical grievances remained unresolved.

225 In the years that followed, these dynamics continued to evolve. Political discourse in Jammu
226 increasingly included calls for separate statehood, grounded in narratives of neglect and
227 under-representation. While such demands did not represent a unanimous position, they
228 reflected a significant shift in how sections of the region perceived their place within the
229 broader political structure. Of late, within Kashmir, there are emerging voices suggesting that
230 the unity of the former state should not be maintained at the cost of addressing its internal
231 contradictions. This marked a departure from earlier positions that emphasized the
232 indivisibility of the state.

233 The most sensitive and potentially volatile dimension of this evolving landscape lies in the
234 mixed regions of the Chenab Valley and the Pir Panjal belt, including districts such as Poonch
235 and Rajouri. These areas are characterized by complex demographic compositions and
236 histories of both coexistence and conflict. They occupy a strategic and symbolic position in
237 any discussion of regional reorganization. Competing claims over their political alignment
238 reflect broader tensions between administrative logic and historical imagination.

239 For some in Jammu, the argument is grounded in existing administrative boundaries and the
240 need for coherent governance structures. For others, particularly those influenced by
241 historical proposals and political narratives associated with Kashmir, these regions are seen as
242 culturally and politically linked to the Valley. The coexistence of these perspectives creates a
243 situation in which territorial questions are not merely technical but deeply embedded in
244 questions of identity and belonging.

245 The risks associated with these dynamics are significant. History offers repeated examples of
246 how territorial disputes in demographically mixed regions can escalate into broader conflicts
247 when not managed with sensitivity and foresight. The memories of past violence, including
248 the events of 1947 and subsequent periods of tension, remain present in collective
249 consciousness. Any attempt to redraw political boundaries or reconfigure administrative

250 arrangements without careful consideration of these memories carries the potential to reopen
251 old wounds.

252 Understanding the transition of 1947 is therefore not simply an exercise in historical
253 reconstruction. It is central to interpreting the present and anticipating possible futures. The
254 invasion, the massacres, the flight of the ruler, and the hurried accession created a political
255 entity whose internal coherence was always contingent. The postcolonial framework sought
256 to stabilise this entity through institutions and constitutional arrangements, but it did not fully
257 resolve the foundational questions of legitimacy, representation, and regional balance.

258 The challenge today lies in engaging with these questions in a manner that acknowledges
259 complexity rather than simplifying it. Any sustainable political arrangement must take into
260 account the diversity of experiences within Jammu and Kashmir, the historical trajectories
261 that have shaped regional identities, and the evolving aspirations of its people. This requires
262 moving beyond binary frameworks and recognising that the region's realities do not lend
263 themselves to easy categorisation.

264 At the same time, there is a need for caution in how political narratives are constructed and
265 mobilised. Narratives that emphasise division without recognising interdependence can
266 deepen fragmentation. Conversely, narratives that insist on unity without addressing
267 underlying grievances risk appearing disconnected from lived experience. The task is to find
268 a balance that allows for both recognition of difference and the possibility of coexistence.

269 The history of Jammu and Kashmir since 1947 suggests that neither imposed uniformity nor
270 unrestrained fragmentation offers a stable path forward. The former risks suppressing
271 legitimate aspirations, while the latter can lead to new forms of conflict. The idea of a
272 composite state, despite its challenges, remains relevant insofar as it recognises the region's
273 diversity as a foundational reality. The question is how such a framework can be reimagined
274 in a way that is responsive to contemporary conditions.

275 This reimagining requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable histories, including the
276 violence of 1947 and the subsequent decades of conflict. It also requires creating spaces for
277 dialogue that include voices from all regions and communities. Without such engagement,
278 political decisions risk being perceived as externally imposed or internally exclusionary,
279 thereby reinforcing the very mistrust they seek to overcome.

280 The story of Jammu and Kashmir is often told through the lens of international conflict or
281 national politics. Yet its internal dynamics are equally significant. The relationships between
282 its regions, the evolution of its identities, and the management of its diversity are central to
283 understanding both its past and its future. The events of 1947 were not merely a beginning.
284 They set in motion processes that continue to unfold, shaping the region's trajectory in ways
285 that are still not fully understood.

286 If there is a lesson to be drawn from this history, it is that political arrangements cannot
287 remain static in the face of changing realities. They must evolve in ways that are attentive to
288 context, inclusive in approach, and mindful of the consequences of both action and inaction.
289 For Jammu and Kashmir, this means engaging seriously with the faultlines that have defined
290 it since its transition from princely state to postcolonial entity.

291 The region's future will depend not only on how these faultlines are managed but also on
292 whether there is a broader commitment to building relationships that transcend them. This is
293 a long and uncertain process, shaped by forces both internal and external. Yet it remains
294 essential. Without such effort, the patterns of fragmentation that have marked the region's
295 history risk continuing into its future.

296

297 Conclusion

298 The transition of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 created a composite state whose internal
299 coherence remained contingent from the outset. The simultaneity of invasion, communal
300 violence, and hurried accession produced a political entity marked by uneven legitimacy and
301 divergent regional experiences.

302 Over time, these foundational contradictions evolved into enduring faultlines, shaping
303 political behaviour, regional identities, and contemporary debates on fragmentation. External
304 intervention, particularly by Pakistan, and internal governance challenges further intensified
305 these dynamics.

306 A sustainable political future for the region cannot be achieved through administrative
307 measures alone. It requires engagement with historical memory, recognition of regional
308 diversity, and a willingness to address the underlying contradictions of the composite state
309 framework.

310 The question is not merely how to preserve territorial arrangements but how to construct a
311 political order that accommodates diversity while maintaining coherence. This requires
312 moving beyond simplified narratives and engaging with the complexity that has defined
313 Jammu and Kashmir since its transition into the postcolonial order.

314

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