Can India Give Up Kashmir: An Option or a Risk?

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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Date: 11/18/2010
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ABSTRACT

The ethnoreligious conflict in the Indian state of Kashmir is a challenging case study not only for the region of South Asia but for world diplomacy, as the policy choices available to India and Kashmir have implications for other separatist regions worldwide. In short, “Can India give up Kashmir?” This research studies the historical experiences of Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims under the rule of each other, the roles that their religions have played in shaping their histories (and the current state of affairs), and the main issues that make the conflict-rife region such a challenge presently (including politics, civil society and religion). Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims co-existed with little or no inter-communal interaction for more than 500 years, a reality Kashmir’s Hindu and Muslim rulers galvanized by poor governance that promoted protective practices to guard against the other religion. Also, a weak Kashmiri civil society over-emphasized intra-communal relations, thereby fostering fragile social networks and mutual mistrust. In time, the weakened civil society and long-standing religious persecution from both Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims culminated into the modern conflict and Kashmir coming apart at the seams. This fact is highlighted by the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) in 1989 and 1990 due to the ethnic violence against them. With Kashmiri history as a potent backdrop for the present, all of the options for Kashmir which have been discussed
within the realm of international relations are considered: Kashmiri secession and independence, militarization of the state as a protective barrier against unfriendly neighbors, and engagement and cooperation with the Indian national government in an effort to resolve the discord of Kashmiri citizens democratically under the provisions of the Indian constitution. In conclusion, the modern Indian state was formed on the principle of being a diverse, multi-cultural, secular society. If India lets go of Kashmir, India will be forced to question its founding principles and risk losing other states if they each claim to have unique ethnoreligious identities like Kashmir. That India cannot give up Kashmir is not an issue of the uniqueness of Kashmir, rather the considerable threat that less compatible ethnoreligious groups can fragment or even cause the disintegration of India and perhaps other secular states in the world.
PREFACE

As the questions posed in this thesis can be dizzyingly complicated to tackle on their own, the first four chapters are dedicated to giving a rich and thorough background to the current crisis. Indeed, the Kashmiri crisis did not erupt overnight. It is, instead, several centuries in the making. By exploring the various actors (Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims); events and trends under successive rulers; and the social, cultural, and religious outcomes, the questions posed in this thesis should be placed in the proper context and framework. In particular, Kashmir’s long history of subjugation of both Hindu and Muslim communities levels the playing field in determining the causes leading up to the conflict. Emotional upsets, grudges, and anxieties are felt by both communities and the imbalanced approach in dealing with the conflict can scarcely result in anything more than continued chaos. Kashmir should, in fact, be studied with great care to minimize the risk of further disenfranchising either of Kashmir’s constituent groups, whether present in Kashmir or living as exiles elsewhere in India.

When addressing a separatist state, a country must decide whether to give into all of the demands of the dissatisfied group or seek to resolve the conflict within its own constitutional framework? In the case of India and Kashmir, if giving into the demands of the dissatisfied group (Kashmiri opposition parties who seek autonomy) is a possibility, the result would be to make Kashmir an independent country. As the subtitle of this thesis suggests, this could be either “an option or a risk.” To phrase the thesis question slightly differently, should ethnoreligiously unique states be allowed to expel non-conforming citizens? And, should these states be allowed to secede from their
countries? Though it may be easy to demonize the country and advocate independence for the aggrieved state, the viability of the state as an independent country must be considered.

Kashmir provides an important security barrier for India against China and Pakistan; however, Kashmir relies equally upon India for its own security. Upon considering the option of letting go of Kashmir, how does India verify that Kashmir wants to be made independent? And, if this question is asked in a referendum, should Kashmiri Hindu refugees be allowed to participate? Lastly, does the state of Kashmir have a viable plan for self-governance? The answers to these and other questions will be explored in this thesis and conclusions will be drawn carefully with great consideration to Kashmiri history and to the potential impact of policy changes for Kashmiris.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I started writing this thesis, I explored my thesis topic with Professors Dr. Aparna Vaidik, Dr. James Mabry and Dr. James Millward at Georgetown University, all of whom have shared their thoughts on my research topic and guided me to relevant reading materials. In the initial stages of my research, while grappling with a lack of ethno-religious material, I met with Amit Pandya, J.D., Senior Associate with The Henry L. Stimson Center. He advised me to draw a historical picture of the relevant actors and issues in the conflict and consider the founding philosophies of India and Pakistan in explaining the title of the thesis. With regard to my anthropological study of Kashmir, I received a lot of academic material from Dr. Haley Duschinski, Assistant Professor at Ohio University. Additionally, R. L. Hangloo, Ph.D., Professor at Hyderabad Central University, was very supportive in discussing issues via email related to events currently unfolding in Kashmir.

I would like to thank the Liberal Studies Department, and in particular, Dr. Anne Ridder, Assistant Dean at the Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies for being extraordinarily patient and accommodating. She was kind and encouraging, offering considerable institutional support, which helped me satisfactorily conclude my research.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Ariel Glucklich, Professor at the Georgetown University Theology Department, for critiquing this work and for being an extraordinarily patient teacher. Even through his busy schedule, he found the time to respond to my emails and read my several drafts. His near-
perfectionist academic expectations kept me on my toes! I could not have completed this journey without him.
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CHAPTER 1
KASHMIRI MUSLIMS UNDER HINDU RULE

Chapter one opens with a 2008 event that describes how the Kashmir dispute is far from over. The 2008 crisis ended with some killed and several wounded. The 2008 incident reveals the deep divisions that have remained between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. It is one example of how isolated instances of violence in the twenty-first century link to the past, especially to the 1989 Kashmiri Muslim violent uprising against the government of India and the Kashmiri Hindus. To make a connection between the 2008 disaster with violent incidents of the past, the rest of the chapter provides a historical overview of Kashmir during the period from 1846 to 1989. In this period, the chapter shows how the Kashmiri Hindus, especially, the Hindu Dogra rulers, marginalized the Kashmiri Muslims. As the Kashmiri Muslims are contributors to the ongoing conflict, it is necessary to study their narrative to get a better understanding of the conflict. In this effort, the chapter will include personalities, issues, and incidents that directly impacted the Kashmiri Muslim population. The goal is to examine Kashmiri Muslims under the religious domination of the Hindus, so that the following chapters can effectively demonstrate how this shaped the Kashmiri Muslim relationship with their Hindu counterparts, and with broader India.

Amarnath Debacle of 2008

The central government of India and the state government in Kashmir made a decision in May 2008 to grant temporary transfer of 98.5 acres of land to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB). Not all Kashmiri politicians agreed with the
arrangement. This temporary transfer of property led to a Kashmiri Muslim uprising culminating into a state-wide Amarnath land dispute. The SASB oversaw the needs of Hindu pilgrims traveling to the Amarnath temple. The Board is in charge of setting up temporary shelters, providing portable toilets and ensuring the easy availability of transportation. The Kashmiri government was a coalition of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PPP), which included politicians from the Indian National Congress (mainstream India) and local Kashmiri Muslim politicians. Negotiation of the Amarnath land transfer took place between the INC and the PPP. Local Kashmiri newspapers reported that this brief land transfer, taking place as it did during the Amarnath pilgrimage, was a Hindu scheme to settle non-Kashmiri Hindu travelers on the land and change the Muslim demographics of Kashmir. The fact that the snow-covered area remains barren and inaccessible for nine months of a year did not deter the newspaper’s claims. The newspapers also drew attention, to the fact that, under Article 370 no outsider can become a permanent resident of Jammu & Kashmir. Separatists fanned these rumors and mobilized large crowds for protest (Kumar 2008).

To the people of Kashmir, the Amarnath land transfer violated Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which recognized the sovereignty of Kashmir (including Jammu and Laddakh) and afforded the state exclusive jurisdiction over state employment and land ownership. The article also prohibited non-Kashmiris from owning or purchasing any property in Kashmir. The Kashmiris use this arrangement to preserve their identity. With no outside settlers, the Kashmiris maintain the demographic balance (Noorani 2000).
The demonstration led to almost 40 peaceful protestors killed, and about 600 injured. This was the region’s most significant protest against Indian rule since 1989, when the Muslim majority had first revolted against Indian rule. This demonstrated that, while things were not as violent as in the 1990’s, the relative peace should not be misconstrued to mean that the Kashmiri Muslims had given up hope for freedom. They had matured and reorganized their strategy to resist more peacefully (Wax 2008).

In the post mid-1990 Kashmir, the Indian government, especially the Indian National Congress, had made some electoral headway. The Indian National Congress succeeded in forming coalition governments together with local Kashmiri political parties. These successes made it seem as if the Kashmiri Muslims agreed with combined political leadership of the Indian Central government and the Kashmiri state government. Their vast voter turnout in the winter of 2008, in the aftermath of Amarnath row and demonstrations, reveals the fact that Kashmiri Muslims had the savvy to choose short-term and long-term goals. This reflects clearly how Kashmiri Muslims had changed their way of engagement. They participated in the state elections for short-term economic objectives, such as better roads, water, and electricity. The voter turnout of the Kashmiri Muslims was not a declaration of their support for Indian rule. This was not a statement of their support because, on the one hand, their participation in the electoral process could be considered a show of support for the Indian government; on the other hand, by simultaneously using non-institutional frameworks like peaceful marches and demonstrations, they expressed dissatisfaction with the same Indian government. Distinguishing the issues they supported through one method (institutional), and the
issues they rejected through another (non-institutional) highlighted that Kashmiri Muslims clearly differentiated between different goals. In this case, their long-term desire of freedom from India remained strong (Tremblay 2008, 924).

The Amarnath debacle of 2008 highlighted three main types of local Kashmiris: nationalists who wish to stay in India, secessionists who want to become independent of India and Pakistan, and the irredentist who want to be a part of Pakistan. According to the 2001 Census of India, after most Kashmiri Hindus had already left Kashmir in 1989-90, a majority of Kashmir’s 5.4 million people were Muslims. The Kashmiri Hindus were uncertain about the outcome of the Kashmiri Muslim uprising against the government of India. Unsure of their safety, and in some instances victims of brutality, they left. Adding the numbers of secessionist and irredentist shows that the majority in Kashmir wishes to separate from India. This group defines the current ethno-nationalist sentiment in Kashmir. In this portrayal, the identity of the Kashmiri Muslim characterizes Kashmir. Islam has increasingly come to characterize the ethnicity of the Kashmiri Muslim (Tremblay 2008, 925-927).

To understand, why majority of the Kashmiri Muslims want to break away from India, by asserting irreconcilable religious differences, we must examine their experience under direct and indirect Hindu rule. Directly, from 1846-1947 the Kashmiri Muslims experienced Hindu authority under the Dogra (people from Duggar) Maharajas (kings or rulers). Duggar is now called Jammu, and the language spoken in Duggar or modern day Jammu is Dogri. The majority in Jammu is Hindus.
Indirectly, from 1947 to present, the Kashmiri Muslims have been under the political influence of the Indian Government. The Central Indian Government has been a mixed rule of mostly Indian secularists and, to some extent, Hindu nationalists.

**Kashmiri Muslim Struggle from 1846 to 1947**

Hindu rule of Kashmir began in 1846 under the authoritarian leadership of the Dogra Maharaja, Gulab Singh. During Gulab Singh’s ambitious ascendancy, the Sikhs ruled the Punjab, which was a much larger territory than the modern Indian state of Punjab; they also controlled Jammu as a tributary, and had annexed Kashmir. The Sikhs were expansionists, much like the British East India Company. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company consistently expanded its territorial control in India. In the early 1800s, the Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the East India Company, in a show of restraint, made a peaceful pact with each other. Gulab Singh’s rise comes about during Ranjit Singh’s rule. By distinguishing himself as an excellent soldier and commander of the Dogra contingent in Ranjit Singh’s army and by ingratiating himself to the Sikh king, Gulab Singh highlighted his distinctive role in Ranjit Singh’s court (Rai 2004, 19-22).

However, the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, followed by familial factionalism and fragmentation of the Sikh empire, eventually led to war in 1844 and 1845 between the British East India Company and the Sikhs. This presented Gulab Singh with a defining moment. He switched sides, made a deal with the British East India Company to help them win the war against the Sikhs, and discussed the potential benefits for himself. After the defeat of the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh war, they surrendered Kashmir to the
British. On March 16, 1846, through the Treaty of Amritsar, the British sold Kashmir to Gulab Singh for Indian rupees (Rs.) 7,500,000 (Rai 2004, 23-27).

By acquiring the additional territory of Kashmir, the Dogras, who already controlled most of the region of Jammu and Laddakh, now extended their scope of influence into the Valley of Kashmir. For more than half a millennium prior to the rise of Dogra rulers in 1846, Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs had at different times ruled Kashmir. Unlike the Dogra kings, the previous sovereigns were not absolute rulers. Their subjects had never entirely lost their freedom to their ruler. However, with the rise of the Dogra came the fall of a five hundred year old political class structure that had been concomitantly shared by different levels of Kashmiri society (Rai 2004, 4).

Until 1846, the earlier rulers of Kashmir had, for over half a millennium, also asserted their belief. They had, however, emphasized regional identity and allowed themselves to become localized. What happened differently from the outset, under Dogra rule, demonstrates how Kashmir’s regional identity had changed over time. During the Dogra rule, the public discourse in the valley changed from focusing on the regional characteristic—the integrated Kashmiri Muslim and Hindu identity—to granting benefits exclusively to the Hindus. Earlier rulers of Kashmir, for example, the Afghan, the Mughal, and the Sikh ruled Kashmir as a part of a larger empire that they controlled. In the case of the Dogra rulers, the notion of ruling a kingdom began with Maharaja Gulab Singh’s control of Kashmir. For the Dogra ruling family, Kashmir was their only kingdom. Reconstructing the identity of Kashmir in their own image was the way they claimed legitimacy. Making Kashmir “Hindu” became necessary for the Dogra rulers’
means of maintaining supremacy (Zutshi 2004, 47). In this Dogra ascendancy, two actors, the British (externally) and the Kashmiri Hindus (internally), played a crucial role.

The external force came from the British East India Company (1757-1857) and, eventually, the British Crown, which was also referred to as the British Raj (1858). The Crown took full control of India after the 1857 rebellion against the British East India Company. The British Raj also wanted to undermine the commercial overtone of the British East India Company’s control of India (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, academic edition, “Indian Mutiny”). To protect India’s northern border against Afghan and Russian influence, the British needed the presence of legitimate rulers, like Maharaja Gulab Singh, in the border territories. The British succeeded in curtailing the Afghan and Russian advance into India and in indirectly managing the citizens of the princely states by keeping out of the internal politics of India’s princely states, including Kashmir. They controlled these princely territories by proxy. In the case of Kashmir, where Maharaja Gulab Singh had procured his office through a purchase of territory, it was essential to support the new ruler with some historical legitimacy. Because there was no genuine, hereditary connection, the British created a link rooted in the Indian caste system, which defined a Rajput (Kshatriya) as a member of the ruling class of India (Rai 2004, 30-38).

Long before Britain’s conquest of India, the Kshatriyas in India had, through generations of divine rule, claimed natural rights as monarchs (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, academic edition, “India”). The British approved and endorsed the Hindu Rajput lineage of the Dogra Maharaja at every opportunity. They legitimized their endorsement by combining two elements of the ancient claim—birth as a Hindu, and into a Rajput
noble family. Such a combination meant that Gulab Singh was, of the proper lineage, to be the rightful ruler of Kashmir. The British openly acknowledged Gulab Singh’s Hindu rule of Kashmir as being free from foreign cultures and domination (Rai 2004, 78-80). More importantly, the British trust of Gulab Singh’s government sent a clear message to the Kashmiri Muslims also to accept the Hindu king, Gulab Singh, as their sovereign ruler.

The British did not want to create conflict with the Indian princes, just as they did not want to concern themselves with the administration of the princely Indian subjects. So long as the Indian princes maintained order and economic prosperity, which also filled the British coffers, their colonial rulers were easily satisfied. The British indirect control of the princely states allowed for rulers, like the Dogra king, to govern their kingdoms like a feudal estate. The Dogra ruler wanted to establish a Hindu identity for the region of Kashmir. The British understanding afforded the Dogra ruler unrestrained power over his subjects. This unchecked power allowed the Dogra ruler to favor the Hindus in Kashmir. Under the Dogra ruler, the Hindus prospered, and the Muslims lagged behind (Rai 2004, 14).

Internally, the Kashmiri Pandits (also called as Pandits or Kashmiri Hindus) assisted the Dogra kings in the administration of Kashmir. Though a small group, as well educated, economically sound and administratively astute, the Kashmiri Pandits had served in Kashmiri bureaucracies since Afghan rule in the 18th century (1710-1780). Some Kashmiri Pandits were also rural farmers. During the Afghan rule, the Kashmiri Pandits became proficient in Persian. Dogra rulers trusted them rather than the Muslims
not only because they were fellow Hindus, but also because they formed the traditional administrative and educated group in Kashmir (Koul 1991, 19). Assigned to the tasks of revenue assessment and collection, and handsomely rewarded for it, the Pandit minority in Kashmir rose in rank and wealth. The Kashmiri Pandits managed the Dogra rule well. When the Kashmiri Hindus were powerful, they took advantage of the system and through it, the Muslim peasant. When they were not strong, they were passive. In this way, for a century, the Kashmiri Hindus were directly or indirectly complicit in their ruler’s gross neglect of Muslim Kashmiris (Rai 2004, 46-51).

The Hindu king and the upper echelons of the government barely paid any taxes; while the financially weak, Kashmiri Muslims, paid all the taxes. The Kashmiri Muslims were also responsible, as cultivators, for providing food crops to the ruler and his entire administration (from farm foremen to revenue collectors to highly-paid ministers).

From one harvest to another, the revenue assessment system extracted incrementally more taxes from the cultivator. The British officials assessed that seven-eighths of the land produce went to the ruler. During a bad harvest, the cultivator paid taxes by forfeiting a share of his fruit, ghee (clarified butter), fowl, honey, and sheep or goats to the government. This share had to be given even though a cultivator made about four and half cents a day. John B. Ireland, an American who visited Kashmir in the 1850’s, exclaimed in wonder that, “on the birth of every lamb, a full-grown sheep being worth about twelve annas (36 cents), the owner must pay a tax of one anna (3 cents)…the birth of a calf is four annas. The tax on marriage was sixteen annas (48 cents, 11 days
wages!). A fishing boat cost four annas a day. Walnut trees cost ten annas a year for oil. If a crop fails, it must be made up with ghee” (Ireland 1859, 397).

The Dogra government controlled crops, filled granaries and appropriated common benefits. The previous rulers attempted to balance between all sections of the society by providing basic needs for the urban and the rural poor people, even when they favored the rich. The Dogra government was partial only to the urban—mostly Hindus and some Muslim—elites. Additionally, administration officials manipulated the cultivator to their advantage. The Kashmiri Hindu government officials benefited from selling the laborers to the state and to visiting foreigners. Referred to as begar, the forced sale of a poor man's service was common practice under Dogra rule. These poor, unskilled laborers worked without any hope of payment. Only when a foreign visitor would call for compensation, on behalf of the laborer, could the laborer receive a payment of 1.25 annas, or 3.75 cents, for each stage of carrying a load. The state officials responsible for providing labor to the state would invade villages and enlist men. The bribe to opt-out of this service was Rs. 70 to 90.

The urban elites controlled commerce and the state bureaucracy. They ensured smooth functioning, and successful operation of the Dogra government. Therefore, the city population was free from the plight of the poor; this was so, because appeasing the urban population in Srinagar was crucial for the smooth functioning of the Dogra rule. However, in attempting to maneuver between legitimate upper-caste Hindu ancestry, elite appeasement, and fealty to the British, the Dogra rulers displayed little sense of responsibility for the majority of Muslim Kashmiris (Zutshi 2004, 64-67).
In 1846, the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh, instituted the *Dharmarth* (a religious and legal trust), for the protection of the Dogra Hindu kings and all his male heirs. The fund was to be used for the promulgation of religion and religious establishments such as *dharamsalas* (religious rest-houses/sanctuaries), for repairing existing temples and for the construction of new ones. Additional laws included banning cow-slaughter, expenditures on cow-sheds for cows and bullocks, and the allocation of funds for building lodgings for Hindu pilgrims in the city of Kashi and Benares. Additionally, the *Dharmarth* detailed instructions to appoint and pay ten learned men to translate Arabic, Persian and other languages into Sanskrit, a language used by only a small number of Hindus (Zutshi 2004, 49-50). This trust was eventually transformed formally into a government department.

During Gulab Singh’s rule, however, the *Dharmarth* was a private affair of the ruler. During Ranbir Singh’s rule the *Dharmarth* dramatically changed. Ranbir Singh included government officials and administrators and laid out their roles along the lines of his Hindu faith (Rai 2004, 116).

For the Kashmiri Muslim cultivator, the laws against cow-killing proved expensive. After taxes, penalties and forfeiture of crop yield, the purchase of new cattle while continuing to shelter older and unproductive ones meant twice the cost. The financial strain on the poor Muslim peasant in Kashmir coupled with interference in their religious beliefs and obligatory acquiescence to another religion was an uneasy combination. Gulab Singh imposed Hindu religious laws on the society making Kashmiri Muslims uncomfortable, however, worse was still to come during Ranbir Singh's rule.
Maharaja Ranbir Singh (ruled 1856-85) succeeded his father, Maharaja Gulab Singh (ruled 1846-56). Maharaja Ranbir Singh established complete Hindu sovereignty over religion in Kashmir. Soon after his father’s death, Ranbir Singh used the “Will of the Maharaja of Kashmir”, to codify loosely held principles of rituals, ceremonies and traditions. By establishing procedures for conformity, he incorporated mandatory practices, like the affirmation of the Hindu faith, as conditions of the Dogra monarchy. To safeguard the interests of his descendants, he stipulated that only the former Maharaja Gulab Singh’s direct descendants could claim succession. This ensured that neither the British nor the Maharaja’s distant and close relatives could ascend to the throne or attempt to usurp a future Maharaja’s rule. He also invoked the wrath of the gods to secure his own family’s obedience and declared religious duties sacrosanct. Ranbir Singh elaborated on the “Will of the Maharaja of Kashmir” by defining the religious duties required of his bureaucracy. Ranbir Singh instructed on how the kingdom's funds would be allocated. The indifference to adherents of other faiths showed a total disregard of his duties as the ruler of all his subjects; instead, he favored a select religion and its (mostly urban) adherents. Ranbir Singh laid down an elaborate, insular system to protect the Hindu minority; however, he did nothing for the Muslims and they became more concerned (Rai 2004, 15; 114-118).

When the tyranny became too much to bear, the Kashmiri Muslims began to approach the British directly. The Muslims, in the neighboring Punjab, also supported the Muslims (Rai 2004, 214 & 239-40). In 1880, when the British visited the valley to assess its economic system, they determined that Kashmir lacked the economic conditions that
would induce its cultivators to increase production in the hope of incentives and rewards. The British officials criticized revenue officials, particularly the Kashmiri Pandits, saying “it is to be regretted that the interests of the State and of the people should have been entrusted to one class of men, and still more regrettable that this class of men, the Pandits, should have systematically combined to fraud the States and to rob the people” (Lawrence 2005, 401).

Ranbir Singh’s son, Pratap Singh (1885-1925), was not the king’s first choice for a successor. Pratap Singh’s political insecurities, however, did not stop his ascendancy to the throne. During the period of Ranbir Singh’s rule, the British heard complaints through independent relations with prominent Kashmiri Muslims. The culmination of several meetings had exposed the Dogra kings’ mistreatment of its Kashmiri Muslim subjects. These complaints came also from Muslim cultivators, the British Resident’s assessments of the Maharaja's rule, foreigners’ depictions of the Maharaja’s injustices, and shouts in Lahore against the Kashmiri Muslims’ plight. These combined complaints were making the British anxious. The British had come to realize that marginalizing the Dogra power was an absolute necessity.

The death of Ranbir Singh in 1885 presented the British with the opportunity to assert their own authority; they made Pratap Singh’s ascension to the throne conditional on his acceptance of their proposed version of his rule. These new guidelines would give more power to the British Resident and impose strict controls on the Dogra ruler. The British Resident represented the British colonial government in Kashmir. However, the new guidelines were not meant to infringe upon the king’s sovereignty. The new
measures ensured the people that their ruler was carrying out his duty to all his subjects with fairness and impartiality. The colonial government mandated that, as a condition of taking power, the new king would publicly announce all modifications to the existing laws and system of governance. The British declared that this mandated requirement was in the interest of the king’s subjects (Rai 2004, 93-119).

The British became more interested in limiting Pratap Singh’s powers, and the Kashmiri Muslims became ardent about seeking justice from the oppressive Dogra king. As suppressing the Dogra ruler was a common factor to the cause of the British and the Kashmiri Muslims, their interests converged. In an atmosphere of relative freedom and access to the British, many Muslims came forward to express their grievances. As a result, the British became frustrated. To resolve all Muslim issues, the British colonial government decided to take complete control of governance. Fortuitously, the British government came upon an opportunity; the information, though unscrupulous, from their legal representative, the British Resident in Kashmir, proved convenient. The British Resident alleged that the Dogra Maharaja had plotted with Russia; he tried to murder his own brothers, and the British Resident in Kashmir. The British government, through the British Resident, ordered the Dogra king, to defer all matters to the British Resident, and by extension to the British Crown. In April 1889, the British stripped Pratap Singh, the Dogra ruler of the newly reformed state, of any real power. Pratap Singh was still the king; however, a new council made up of his brothers and relevant ministers wielded actual administrative power. Under the strict guidance of, and consultation, with the British Resident, the Dogra king continued to rule Kashmir (Rai 2004, 134-139).
Another factor, that afforded exploitation of cultural or ethnic identity, was the archeological battle to claim shrines and sites as a representation of specific religious groups. The British archeologists were working hard in many parts of India to restore Indian archeological monuments as relics of human evolution. However, a competition ensued between the Dogra rulers and Muslim Kashmiris, to take unclaimed and ambiguous sites as their own. Whether in the name of religion or for the purpose of asserting political will, both sides asserted historical claim to religious sites. The Dogra Maharaja faced a dilemma. On the one hand, he confronted the colonial government’s determination to preserve shrines and monuments for the understanding of human history. On the other hand, the tenets of Dharmarth obliged him to commit state resources only to preserve Hindu religious sites. The Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh found himself pitted against the Kashmiri Muslims, who were vehemently staking their own claims (Rai 2004, 183-189).

The Kashmiri Muslims faced their own predicament. The competition for sites was slowing. The Muslims found themselves not just pitted against the Hindus, but also against the British archeologists. As dedicated professionals in their field of work, the British archeologists wanted to trace Indian history as far back in time as possible. In this effort, they could not remain neutral to both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Certain actors, like Director-General Sir John Marshall, discussed the urgency of protecting Hindu structures, especially those that had survived the destruction at the hands of the Muslim invaders. These structures would prove to be national heirlooms for all future generations. Such partiality toward Hindu history also made some British archeologists
susceptible to discrediting legitimate Muslim claims. When faced with the challenges in claiming legitimate sites as their own, the Kashmiri Muslims realized that the British government would not reinvent the administrative machinery in Kashmir, if it did not seriously undermine their authority (Rai 2004, 187-190).

The Kashmiri Muslims witnessed the nature of British oversight of the Dogra rule. They observed that the British used reprimands and rewards within a strategic framework. They would not change anything if the status quo did not seriously undermine the British dominion (Punjabi 1992b, 132). Whether assessing the Muslim plight under Dogra rule or recognizing legitimate claims to certain shrines and sacred sites, the British had their own way of appeasing the Kashmiri Muslims without handing them complete victory. This was better than the way the Dogra rulers treated them; however, it was not a permanent solution to their concerns. The will of two masters, the British and the Dogra ruler, subjugated the Kashmiri Muslims. Separately, both of these masters had their own selective agendas in which the Kashmiri Muslims did not figure prominently (Punjabi 1992b, 133).

To obtain recognition, Kashmiri Muslims would need to have a different language. Collectively, the Dogra and the British relegated them to social obscurity, political inferiority and economic exploitation. To define their identity and vocalize their opposition, they sought the most logical place to alleviate their temporal concerns through spiritual means, the mosque (Punjabi 1992b, 150).

Kashmiri Muslims were no monolithic religious group. They had their own agendas, whether as factory workers, educated youth or religious groups. By the 1930s,
discontented with the Dogra rule, these various individuals, despite their selective aim, consolidated and galvanized quickly under a resistance movement shaped by religion. When the Muslims embraced religion as the way to further social and political resistance movements the tone of their struggle changed. After the embrace of religion as a political tool, open confrontation to change the status quo became justified through religion. In this struggle, the use of scriptures helped to highlight differences, and justifying separation between two communities from the same region became defensible. This changed the language of resistance into one that pitted the Kashmiri Pandit against the Kashmiri Muslim on the grounds of religion (Rai 2004, 183-199).

Dogra rulers now found themselves vulnerable to the scorn of their Muslim counterparts. This strong Kashmiri Muslim movement, with local support from clergies, tradesmen, artisans, intellectuals, and peasants gained powerful force under the “all Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference”. From outside Kashmir, residents in the Punjab, mostly Punjabi Muslims, the Ahrars, and Ahmadiyas supported the movement. In its initial stages, the movement thrived due to the support of the Kashmiri Muslims. However, the members quickly recognized that the external support lacked organization, as the relationship among the external supporters was fragmented. Furthermore, the members also realized that the movement was extremely weak, vis-à-vis the strength of the British government that could easily defeat their resistance. The activists, who were members of this movement, realized that withstanding the British power was a more daunting task than opposing the Dogra ruler. In order to be appealing to the larger Kashmiri Muslim population, the activists changed their religious resistance manifesto,
and became more secular (Behera 2006, 14-16). As the options for a religious approach waned, a more robust platform for secular resistance became available. Outside of Kashmir, Indians had also launched a secular opposition movement against the British colonial rule in India.

The commonality in the resistance pattern brought closer Jawaharlal Nehru, the obvious leader of a future secular India and young intellectuals from Muslim Conference, Sheikh Abdullah, Maulana Sayeed Masoodi, and Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi. The Muslim Conference leaders were keen on the overall betterment of the Kashmiri Muslim, but they also wanted to create a unified voice for the plight of Kashmiris against the Dogra ruler. In an effort to mobilize against both the British and the Dogra Maharaja, the Muslim Conference embraced a secular disposition in which the Kashmiri Pandits and the Sikhs were to feel included. However, this political outlook never replaced the desire for an independent Kashmir. The departure of the British from the region would have created a gateway for territories, like Kashmir, to assert their wish for independence. Established in 1818, to consolidate British rule in all of India, the British paramountcy would expire at the time of India and Pakistan’s independence from Britain. The collectively agreed upon date for independence from Britain would give India and Pakistan full sovereignty over their land. However, independence from Britain would apply only to the territories that were once under direct British rule. Concurrently, the deal would also free 546 independent kingdoms, like Kashmir, providing them with the option of remaining independent or joining either India or Pakistan (Behera 2006, 16-19).
The secular voice of the Muslim Conference, however, was soon fragmented into the National Conference (more nationalist) and the Muslim Conference (more religious). This separation came about due to the internal political rivalries and ideological differences between the secular and religious tones of the movement. The Muslim Conference leader, Chowdhary Ghulam Abbas, pinpointed the differences in religious thinking, rejected the tenets of national unity and discredited the secular discourse in the movement. He declared that Hindus and Muslims were two nations and that Islam did not accept Hindu integration into a social and political unity. The Muslim Conference then restructured, with some smaller factions breaking away, and formed the Azad Muslim Conference by partnering with the Muslim League in Jammu.

The religious elements of the group increasingly began to identify with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League and the first Governor General of the future Pakistan. The vacillation between the secular and religious forces in the National Conference led to a complete parting of ways in 1941. From here on, the Muslim Conference took up all causes, as before, under open and clear precepts of Islam, and the National Conference rejected any Muslim precedence in the political and economic affairs of the state. The Sikhs and the Kashmiri Hindus, concerned about becoming insignificant, joined the secular movement (Behera 2006, 19-23).

Kashmiri Muslim Struggle from 1947 to 1989

The British departed in 1947, leaving behind the two new independent countries, India and Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan wanted to strengthen their borders for internal stability. They also wished to obtain as many states as possible so that they
would have the advantage of more territory. In an attempt, to outmatch each other, both India and Pakistan openly employed diplomacy to appease and used politics to convince the princely states to join. Vulnerable and cunning, the princely rulers of the 546 princely kingdoms, balanced between the religious composition of their states and their personal privileges. Finally, they all decided to join either India or Pakistan. The priceless territory of Kashmir—bordering China, India, and Pakistan—was the single largest princely landmass. As it served as a buffer zone between neighboring countries surrounding it, Kashmir provided an advantage, militarily, to any country owning it. This advantage created a competition between India and Pakistan to secure Kashmir’s inclusion into their new borders. The Muslim Conference supported secessionism and the National Conference supported secularism. The National Conference was partial toward India while the Muslim Conference, in the absence of a natural ally in India, swayed toward Pakistan. Pakistan, however, supported the cause of the Muslim Conference. The Dogra ruler wanted to remain independent and rule over Kashmir. In the absence of British control and with no perceived threat from either India or Pakistan, he wanted to wait and take his chances.

Of the two countries, India was restless for a favorable resolve. The indecisive Dogra king remained undecided. He did not wish to relinquish his kingdom. He believed that not joining either India or Pakistan might be a viable option for Kashmir. This was unrealistic, as Kashmir did not have the resources to defend itself militarily from either of the two powers. Despite repeated invitations from both sides to join, the Hindu Dogra king did nothing. While desirous of the territory of Kashmir, the Indian government was
reluctant to use force against the ruler of Kashmir. The complexity of the situation afforded both countries an opportunity to use force against the weak Dogra king. The Pakistani military weighed its options; they seized the right moment, and aided a tribal insurgency into Kashmir. Soon this proxy war morphed into a formal war between the independent countries of India and Pakistan. Incapable of dealing with the cross-border tribal insurgency, the frightened Dogra ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, approached India for help. India, therefore, claims that it entered Kashmir only after the Dogra Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession with India. The resultant war between India and Pakistan ended by dividing Kashmir into two parts. One is azad (independent) Kashmir, territory that Pakistan won in the war. India claimed the remaining territory (Behera 2006, 7-9 and Nawaz 2009, 42-62).

After the 1949 war between India and Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah became the first Prime Minister of Kashmir. Kashmir had complete control of its land; its resources, its own flag, and had a separate constitution. Thus, Kashmir has a special distinction under the Indian constitution. Sheikh Abdullah started the “New Kashmir” program in July 13, 1950, to implement economic, social and educational reforms; this program benefitted some of the lower echelons of society. However, it proved to be an unrealistic program; it did not uniformly benefit all citizens of Kashmir, and it competed with other equally ambitious government programs. By 1953-54, the social and economic development slowed down. Political inattentiveness in the 1950s caused programs like “New Kashmir” to take a backseat. Political appeasement of the people became the focus of the Sheikh Abdullah government.
Sheikh Abdullah took on too many things at the same time. He tried to create broad, rapid social change, enhance bureaucratic control, and bring stability and order. The tax codes were harsh. Kashmiris could not sell their own land, as the Kashmir government wanted to make sure that the land was not sold to a buyer from outside Kashmir. If the landowner did not have a legitimate heir, the property went to the Kashmiri government. In fact, the poorest of the poor never received any real benefits. The government intended the program to alleviate the financial concerns of the poor, not to penalize the rich. The rich felt uncertain about their wealth and assets, which left them dissatisfied with the government’s management of personal property. The poor landowners were also displeased, as they would lose their property in the absence of a legitimate heir. The land was the only means of livelihood for a lot of rural people (Korbel 1954, 284-285).

At best, the shortcomings of the reform program were unintentional. Nevertheless, good intentions did not hide the fact that certain reform methods were not well designed. One such change was the rural credit system. The government of Kashmir did not have adequate funding for loans to the new peasants-turned-landowners. With the rural credit system, the government had abolished the practice of private money-lending in order to prevent the exploitation of peasants. Under this system, peasants had ownership of their land. As landowners, yet without the funds to buy decent tools to till the land, the peasants found the land ownership to be a burden. Tourism had dwindled due to political reasons (tensions between India and Pakistan over the disputed status of Kashmir and the unfriendly relations between the two countries). The timber industry,
Kashmir’s second main source of revenue, depended on a river that now flowed through Pakistan. The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce, which continued to be managed by Kashmiri Hindus, issued a 1953 report that accused the government of controlling trade and transportation, and crippling entrepreneurship and thriving industry. The same report charged the government of incompetence in adjudicating fair and equitable treatment to its minority population of Hindu Kashmiris. The report also blamed the government of manipulating elections, controlling communication networks and censoring newspapers. For Sheikh Abdullah, the inability to reconcile the minority Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, while upholding the predominance of Kashmir’s ethnic Muslim identity would give rise to a political crisis.

With the majority in Kashmir, the Muslims, looking outward to Pakistan and the minority, the Hindus, looking inward to India, Sheikh Abdullah contemplated a plan to satisfy both. Instead of direct state control, he studied the possibility of granting more autonomy to each province within Kashmir. The demographic majority in Kashmir is Muslim. In this new model of governance, most provinces would have classified their legal, economic and political structures on the principles of majoritarianism. The situation of being under provincial administration did not pose a problem for the majority, the Kashmiri Muslims, because they preferred to be governed by an administration that shared their faith. It was, however, an issue for the minority Kashmiri people. In a Muslim majority rule, the minorities (who were more or less distributed across all provinces) would have had to overcome two systems of control to express any grievances against the state government of Kashmir. In the two-tiered—provincial and
state level—political system, their dissent would either be compromised or totally crushed. They saw this as a step toward dissolving their citizenship rights in Kashmir. Thus, Hindus in Kashmir became more committed to fully integrating with India (Korbel 1954, 288-290).

A communal tension was brewing. Hindus in Kashmir were against Sheikh Abdullah. In order to maintain control the government of Kashmir applied bans on travel into Kashmir. In the spring of 1953, communalist Hindu political parties (the Hindu Mahasabha, Jan Sangh, and Ram Rajya Parishad) in India started mobilizing in support of Hindu Kashmiris and their local political party, Praja Parishad. In defiance of the government’s ban, Jan Sangh leader Dr. S. P. Mookerjee marched into Kashmir. The government arrested him; he later died of a heart attack while in prison. Wild, unsubstantiated claims regarding his death fueled and furthered the communal discontent; Muslims started engaging in pro-Pakistanian demonstrations. These developments strained relations between Sheikh Abdullah and the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indian Prime Minister was leaning heavily on Sheikh Abdullah to bring the situation under control; Sheikh Abdullah was in a bind.

His political ideology was under threat. To subdue the Muslims meant being seen as, an Indian puppet, assisting the Hindu minority. To satisfy the Hindus meant being labeled as a pseudo-secularist, who pretended to be a Kashmiri nationalist but, in fact, was a Muslim nationalist. Rather than, confront the domestic Hindu or Muslim constituencies, Sheikh Abdullah calculated that there would be less political fallout in blaming the Indian government. Through accusations and by casting doubts, he
questioned India’s relationship with Kashmir. He challenged the validity of the Instrument of Accession, the official document effected by Maharajah Hari Singh, king of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, on October 26, 1947. However, the formal acceptance of this document by the former Governor General of India, Louis Mountbatten, established the legitimacy of India taking over the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, the Trans-Karakoram Tract, and Aksai Chin (Bowers 2004). He questioned India’s neutrality and accused India of interfering with the internal affairs of the state of Kashmir. He accused the Indian government of supporting the Hindu political party in Kashmir. He claimed the instrument of accession to India was beneficial only to Sikhs and Hindus, and not to Muslims, who likened themselves to being like a “frog in the well” (Korbel 1954, 291). This would prove to be a political mistake.

Within the government of Kashmir, a few politicians planned against Sheikh Abdullah. A movement led by the Deputy Prime Minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed and the President of the Constituent Assembly, Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, accused Sheikh Abdullah of incompetence and of attempting to break relations with India. This group made a case against Sheikh Abdullah and the Minister of Revenue, Mirza Mohammed Afzal Beg, which led to their imprisonment. This led to protests in Kashmir and an outcry for jihad (struggle in the way of Allah) in Pakistan. This was the second time that jihad had entered the vocabulary of Kashmiri resistance. The first usage of the concept of jihad had occurred in 1949 when cross-border tribal insurgency led to the first India-Pakistan war. In both instances, this religious expression is best described as Pakistani and Afghan Muslims taking up the cause of freeing their fellow Muslims in
Kashmir. However, under the secular leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, this sentiment remained foreign and not indigenous to Kashmir.

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed became the new Prime Minister. The Muslims in Kashmir, however, had rallied behind Sheikh Abdullah. His personality influenced the Kashmiri Muslim perception about the National Conference. The combined effect of Sheikh Abdullah’s imprisonment and the intrusive politics of the Indian government resulted in threatening the legitimacy of the National Conference in Kashmir. Subsequent leaders of the National Conference, and their gradual ad-hoc arrangements with the Indian government resulted in the informal merger of the National Conference with Indian National Congress in the mid 1960s. After this merger, the National Conference lost the support of Kashmiri Muslims (Chowdhary and Rao 2004, 1521-1522).

The National Conference-Indian National Congress informal alliance also tested the Kashmir government’s stance on issues of Kashmiri autonomy, including the government’s ability to protect the independent cultural identity of Kashmir and to preserve the rights of Kashmiri Muslims. This convergence, as Kashmiri Muslims feared, co-opted Kashmir into the Indian constitution. Slowly and steadily, through a range of constitutional directives and mandates, Kashmir effectively came under Indian government control.

Sheikh Abdullah returned to power, in 1975 after a long absence, but much had happened in the interim. India and Pakistan fought two wars (in 1965 and 1971); however, they had proved inconsequential in resolving the Kashmir issue. In more than half a century, there had been four elections, three of which were widely thought to be
unfair. People felt uneasy about the electoral machinery. Under the mixed Kashmiri-central Indian government control, Kashmiri Muslims remained without any viable political outlet for voicing their sentiments; the Indian government had cheated them out of fair electoral practices and made them feel subjugated. This disappointment led to the separation of Kashmiri Muslims from the mainstream politics of Kashmir. Whether willfully chosen or not, Kashmiri Muslims were increasingly estranged from the decision-making process of their community which impacted their social, political and economic life. The traditional bond of Kashmiri nationalism between Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus was falling apart. The Kashmiri Muslims identified with neither Kashmiri Hindus nor the Muslim leadership in power (Punjabi 1992b, 139-145).

In an interview with Robert Wirsing, a non-Muslim senior Indian bureaucrat with many years of service in Kashmir said that from 1975 to 1984, during the elected government of Dr. Farooq Abdullah, son of Sheikh Abdullah, there was a return to peace and prosperity in Kashmir. The informal merger between the Indian National Congress and the National Conference fell apart, with both parties contesting the state elections separately. The defeat of the Indian National Congress party in 1983 and the triumphant victory of the National Conference restored some of the confidence lost by Kashmiri Muslims. There was a feeling of reversal of trends; after Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest, Kashmiri Muslims had no confidence in the political order. For a period of nine years, Kashmir benefitted from open democracy. The state benefitted from the overall social and economic progress. However, after this brief respite, the central Indian government, under charges of mismanagement, dismissed Farooq Abdullah’s government in 1984.
This enraged the Kashmiri Muslims. After dismissing Farooq Abdullah’s government, the central Indian government imposed fresh elections in 1986 and 1987; the Kashmiri Muslims declared that these elections were rigged. The dismissal of Farooq Abdullah’s government coupled with unfair elections led to a shift in Kashmiri Muslim sentiment. They became passive participants in the politics of the state. The Kashmiri Muslims considered successive governors and chief ministers in Srinagar, as stooges of the central Indian government. This collective yo-yo effect of regressive, impersonal and hegemonic control from India, and weak responses from secular Kashmiri leadership pushed Kashmiris over the political brink (Wirsing 1998, 115-116).

From 1947-1989, during periods of political dissatisfaction, Kashmiri Muslims considered different parties and their political message. A lot of local Kashmiri political parties emerged as political contenders to the National Conference and the Indian National Congress. These local political parties arose out of concern for estranged Kashmiri Muslims. Among the various types of new political parties: some parties appealed to the religious sentiments of the people, opposing the secular model; some parties favored a merger with Pakistan; and, some campaigned for independence from both India and Pakistan. All the parties furthered their ideological agendas, whether religious or secular, through political activism. It is less their political demands and more their way of engagement that resulted into violence. The parties that called for Kashmir’s Independence and embraced violence were the ones that emerged the strongest. These groups recognized the swift potential of violence in terrorizing innocent civilians and crippling the government machinery, and they capitalized on it. Thus, the violent
insurgency that began in 1989 over the status of Kashmir was not an overnight phenomenon, but a culmination of all that had happened since 1846. Kashmiriyat, or “Kashmiriness,” the way in which Kashmiris lived in harmony with each other and respected others’ religious distinctness, was now outdated. With many local opposition parties and some violent groups, Kashmir was now bitterly divided between the minorities who feared they might be targets and the majority who wanted justice.

The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits and non-Muslims in the years 1989 and 1990 resulted in social distancing between the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims and their non-Muslim counterparts. Through education, and access to swift communication channels, Kashmiri Muslims have a better understanding of world politics. They seek solutions to their position by comparing them with others Muslims engaged in similar situations. Internet-based communication channels provide access to information and exchange of ideas instantaneously. The Kashmiri Muslim activists refine these ideas; they restyle them to fit their own domestic resistance movements against the Indian government. This activism model includes redefined ideas about nationalism as well as the emergence of an inward-looking cultural identity linked to political Islam. Kashmir has a large number of Kashmiri Muslims, and not everyone in the state of Kashmir engages in political violence. However, after the departure of the Kashmiri Hindus, the overwhelming Muslim majority that remains in Kashmir is increasingly less inclined to accept the status quo solutions to their problems. In the post-colonial environment, in Kashmir, the Kashmiri Muslims claim acceptance of their redefined cultural identity; the right to choose independence from India, integration with India,
integration with Pakistan, become independent of India and Pakistan, or to remain in
India with autonomy. The few who wish to stay in India with constitutional autonomy for
Kashmir is a group that politically identifies with the National Conference (Pasha 1992,
375-77 & 380-82).
CHAPTER 2
SYNCRETIC HINDU-MUSLIM TRADITIONS IN KASHMIR

Chapter two will begin with a brief description of the Shariah interpretation (God’s law in Islam) for governance, and the ruler’s responsibilities toward the adherents of Islam. However, the rest of the chapter will focus on the historical syncretic Hindu-Muslim traditions, and how the decline of the combined Hindu-Muslim practices advanced the course of the Kashmir conflict. In expanding the focus, the chapter will address two key questions; one, were there any ethno-religious reasons for Kashmiri Muslim tolerance during the Dogra rule; and two, how did the ethnicity of Kashmiri Muslims change in the post-colonial conditions, in Kashmir? In answering these two questions, the chapter will trace the historical roots of the Sufi-Rishi (blend of mystical traditions from Hinduism and Islam) traditions that imbued tolerance among the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. It will then proceed to discuss political estrangement among the Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. Finally, it will conclude by describing how the identity of the Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims undergoes change to be easily influenced by their respective religions.

Shariah Interpretation for Governance

In Islam, the “final words” unconditionally reside in Allah (Arabic word for God). After God and the prophet, Muslims must follow the Khalifa. The Khalifa is the leader of the Ummah (also spelled as Umma); Ummah means “Muslims everywhere.” As a result, when it comes to issues of religious and political policies in Islam, the peaceful existence of three levels of power, the divine, the spiritual and the temporal, is essential. Thus,
under Shariah law, the ruler must create favorable conditions for Muslims, without hindrances, to practice their religion (Jalal 2000, 232-234).

Keeping this framework in mind, Muslims ascribe considerable importance to having a ruler on earth for the administration of the temporal realm. Thus, it could be inferred that a Muslim would prefer an unjust ruler to a world with no ruler (Rai 2004, 9). However, this notion is in conflict with the common expectations of Muslim jurists who recognize justice as described in Shariah law. This law says that the worst of Muslims is preferable to best of infidels (Lewis 1994, 46). Then the question arises: What made the Muslims in Kashmir submit to this tyrannical rule of the Dogras? The answer lies in the syncretic *Sufi-Rishi* tradition (which blends mystic elements of both Hindu and Muslim religions).

**Syncretic Hindu-Muslim Traditions**

This blend of two traditions, which became popularly termed the *Sufi-Rishi* tradition, was the religious expression of understanding in Kashmir. Islam arrived in Kashmir through Central Asia. Perhaps, before all other known missionaries of the Sufi order (the mystic order in Sunni Islam) who arrived in Kashmir, the first was Bulbul Shah from Turkestan. Others followed from Iran and Afghanistan. Among, these early comers, arriving in 1384, were the Kubrawi saints Hazrat Mir Hussain Simnani, Hazrat Mir Sayyed, Ali Hamdani and Hazrat Mir Hussain Hamdani. This final saint, Hazrat Mir Hussain Hamdani, settled at Kulgam. There, followers established a religious center for the spread of Islam in the region. However, another Sufi group had more influence. Founded in 1356 by Sheikh Nooruddin Nurani, the mystical order of the Muslim Rishis
(Sanskrit word meaning “ascetic”) was most influential in the spread of Islam in Kashmir (Sikand 2000, 364-65). He used the indigenous Rishi tradition as a medium for the proliferation of Islam; he incorporated Sufi practices into the indigenous culture, and by using domestic customs, made Islam more intelligible to the Kashmiris (Sikand 2006).

The Rishis were members of a pre-Islamic movement; they traced their roots back to the Vedic period dated between 1500 and 800 BCE (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “India”). Some were world-renouncing hermits who meditated in caves or renounced the world and went into the forests. They subjected themselves to stern austerities. Many chose a modest lifestyle and devoted their life in service of the impoverished people in Kashmir.

The Hindu mystic-ascetic, Lad Ded, Sheikh Nuruddin's spiritual predecessor, heavily influenced his Sufi path in Kashmir. Both Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims claim Lal Ded as their own. She lived during a time when Kashmir was transitioning from a largely Hindu-Buddhist society to an increasingly Islamic one, and through her spiritual poetry, she influenced the transition in a positive way. She blended the traditions of Shaivite Hinduism (Hindu followers of Shiva, god of asceticism) with Sufism.

Political Estrangement among Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir

With the advent of a new religion, along with its influence and reshaping of identities, came a state of discord. Lal Ded was aware of the process of adjustment her society was undergoing. Through transcendental, spiritual discourse, she blurred the lines of religion; she diverted adherents of both religions to look inward and emphasize the divine. Through her poetry, she confronted the Brahminical (priestly tenets of Hinduism)
practices. For instance, while both were dear to her, the following verse reflects her inability to decide, who to follow, the Muslim god, Allah or the Hindu god, Shiva:

I said la illah il Allah
I destroyed my Self in it
I left my own entity and caught him who is all-encompassing
Lalla then found God
I went to look for Shiva
I saw Shiva and Shaitan (devil) together
Then I saw the devil on the stage
I was surprised at that moment
I adore Shiva and Shiva’s house
When I die, what then? (Zutshi 2004, 22)

In the foregoing poem, Lal Ded identifies Brahminical Hinduism with the devil. She describes how embracing Islam is equivalent to finding God. However, she also continues to yearn for Shiva. Though dichotomous, her poem also offered synergy for a peaceful transition. Lal Ded’s embrace of both religions inspired many non-Muslims to accept Islam as their own. It was this blurring that localized Islam and made its import easy for the Hindus in Kashmir. Lal Ded was successful because both Hindus and Muslims revered her. Instead of being stringent in their respective religious practices, both Hindus and Muslims looked for commonality. Experts in the field suggest Lal Ded might have influenced Hindu reformers such as Kabir (Muslim-born Indian saint who was raised by a Hindu ascetic) and Nanak (founder of the Sikh religion) and also inspired the bhakti (devotional religious) movement in India (Zutshi 2004, 18-21).

Lal Ded’s religious expression is well described by Dr. Heinrich Schäfer, Professor for Protestant Theology and Sociology of Religion at the University of
Bielefeld, Germany:

Actors may construct the bond with others by reference to human transcendence. This kind of logic departs from a distinction between "needy human beings" and "the mystery of many gods." It is tolerated that others might have a different Go (or erroneous beliefs), but they are nevertheless seen as fellow human beings. Here, solidarity is testimony of one's own faith in the name of a common humanity. (Schäfer 2004, 426)

To Lal Ded’s successor, the Sufi mystic Nooruddin, this was an appealing form of religion. The blend of Hinduism and Islam in Kashmir offered a remedy in harmonizing differences between the two religions. A corrupt ruler was corrupt, regardless of whether the ruler was Hindu or Muslim. An immoral practice was inappropriate, whether it was carried out under the rubric of the Hindu caste system or an act of forcible conversion under Islam. Using local language (not Persian, introduced by the Muslim ruler) for his poetry and dialogue, Nooruddin integrated Sufi Islam into mainstream Kashmir (Zutshi 2004, 21-23). These Sufi Muslims (or Sufi-Rishis, as they came to be called) embraced Hindu ascetic practices. They fasted for penance, were celibate, became vegetarians and accepted no pir (religious master). Through the embrace of Hindu ascetic practices, the Sufi Muslims allowed themselves to become ritualized in the preexisting culture of Kashmir and the Vedanta (from the Vedic period) (Rogers and Beveridge 1909, 356).

Although the Sufi-Rishi ascetics may not have defined the religious identity of the Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, they were the creative forces within the religious sphere that introduced the Sufi-Rishi expression of Kashmiriyat (or Kashmiri-ness, a syncretic Hindu-Muslim identity). Importantly, these ascetics introduced a discourse of tolerance during the advent of Islam in Kashmir. In pre-colonial Kashmir, regional identity superseded religious identity. Kashmiris were aware of their distinct religious differences.
However, they were more aware of their shared identity with other Kashmiris living with them in their homeland (Zutshi 2004, 16).

In embracing traditions from two distinctly different religions, Hinduism and Islam, the Sufi-Rishi practices mellowed the firm edicts in Islam that challenge the status of an infidel. Therefore, a religious directive (as outlined in the Shariah law) to accept having a tyrannical ruler over no ruler at all seems a little simplistic. A tradition of syncretism would have been possible only because of the efforts toward coexistence that adherents of both religions embraced. After large-scale conversion to Islam: in the absence of tolerance and some sense of community, the Hindus, as the new minority, could have all departed from the region. The doors of India, a predominantly Hindu country, were not closed to them. The Kashmiri Pandits had historically left India on several occasions when confronted with tyrannical Muslim rulers, but the exodus in 1989 had no comparable precedent.

Religious Rifts Develop between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims

Neither all Kashmiri Pandits had converted to Islam nor did they leave Kashmir in heavy numbers, as they did in 1989-90. Also, it was not until after 1949 that the Muslims in Kashmir adopted religion as an important vehicle for their resistance against the Indian government. The Kashmiri Muslims’ resilience against oppressive Hindu Dogra rule was rooted in their ability to distinguish bad rulers from their faith. Finally, even after a century of tyrannical Hindu subjugation, under the Dogra rule, the Kashmiri Muslims accepted the nationalist rhetoric in which leaders like Sheikh Abdullah suggested a Kashmir that was accepting of everyone. Sheikh Abdullah adopted the political position
to protect the minorities (the Hindu Kashmiris) who, in the minds of many Muslims, were responsible for their anguish during the Dogra rule (Punjabi 1992b, 136-38).

So, how did religion become a major vehicle of Kashmiri Muslim resistance against both the Dogra rulers and subsequently the Indian government? Dr. Riyaz Punjabi, in his 1992 article, “India, Pakistan, Kashmir and the Future,” states:

Kashmiri identity has been developing the signs of exclusiveness for quite some time now, which apart from placing this particular identity under strain, has been creating fertile ground for suspicions, disenchantment and political machinations to thrive. The religious edge has been getting sharper, which in turn has been diluting Kashmir’s ethnicity. (Punjabi 1992a)

The article concurs with the idea of Kashmiriyat, the syncretic Hindu-Muslim identity, which developed during the period of Lal Ded and Nooruddin. However, the same article also identifies that in post-1947 Kashmir, the particularist religious strand increasingly became the signifier of differences; these differences have in turn shaped the new Kashmiri identity of both, the Hindus and the Muslims. Kashmir never existed in a vacuum (Zutshi 2004, 16). In a period of one hundred fifty years, Kashmiri Muslims transitioned from being controlled by the Dogra rulers to being controlled by the Indian government. This experience resulted in an identity transition. Under Sheikh Abdullah (early to mid-1900), the Kashmiri Muslims were resilient and rallied along with Kashmiri Hindus against the Dogra ruler. At this stage, Kashmiriyat was still alive. By emphasizing commonality and remaining silent about differences in religion along with emphasis on the ethnic similarities, secular leaders like Sheikh Abdullah successfully implemented a slogan of solidarity (Varshney 1992, 209).
The tradition of Kashmiriyat remained strong enough for the Indian Army and the Kashmiris to fight against Pakistan in the wars of in 1947 and 1965 (Varshney 1992, 195). However, in the period after the reign of Sheikh Abdullah, the Kashmiri Muslims became steadfast and began refusing outside influence from the Indian government. This was so because the Muslims were heavily influenced by the personality of Sheikh Abdullah, who balanced well between appeasing Muslim sentiments of autonomy, and political relations with the Indian government. The Kashmiri Muslims expressed their dissatisfaction by demonstrating against pro-Indian political presence in Kashmir and the secular philosophy of the state government. The Kashmiri Muslim resistance initiatives continued to transform the state of Kashmir by pulling it into the realm of political Islam while simultaneously redefining the nature of the Kashmiri Muslim struggle. In this era, the Kashmiris continued to fight against the Indian forces. The struggle, violent and peaceful, led to the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90. The resultant demographic homogeneity bolstered the majority Kashmiri Muslim community to seek political autonomy and define their Islamic cultural identity (Varshney 1992, 219-221).

Throughout these changes, Kashmiri Muslims were no longer bound by a preexisting identity, and they have become receptive to outside influences. Since 1947, there have been at least two new generations of young Kashmiri Muslims. The younger generation is politically astute, academically and economically advanced, and more globalized. However, the domestic political situation was not conducive to this energetic group of people. Both, the economic and political climate, were ineffective. Economic development within Kashmir did not meet the needs of young job-seekers, and the
political climate remained tense with struggles and problems. Kashmir was still dependent on India for its most basic needs. This was humiliating for the Kashmiri Muslims, in general, but the youth in particular, since they were in the forefront of the pro-self-rule movement that wanted to be separated from India. The new urban middle class produced some volatile resistors because of the lack of institutions to satisfy their energy (Jha 1991, 33-37). Therefore, it is obvious that the change in Kashmiri Muslim consciousness on the issue of nationalism or ethnic identity is partly being shaped by internal social and political factors.

On the other hand, external factors also affect Kashmiri Muslim consciousness. In stressful situations, most societies derive their strength from some innate sense of belonging or association with others in their own group. Shared symbols, folklore and collective plight all provide a sense of camaraderie. For Muslims, Islam provides a spiritual and practical resolve. While the grievances of everyday life are practical, Islam promotes itself also as an active vehicle to mobilize against those grievances. The religious discourse in Islam is fairly cohesive and contextualized; therefore, it lends itself to facilitating social and political issues for Muslims in varying situations. More Kashmiris have increasingly become informed about the idea of nationalism and are acutely concerned about it. Outside of a select few militant groups, mainstream Kashmiris are defining nationalism, free from India, as a given. The emergence of Islam as a socio-political force is also changing the definition of Kashmiriyat and nationalism, both of which were secular identities. If politics will determine the fate of Kashmiri
independence or Kashmiri identity, then Islam is re-culturing both (Pasha 1992, 371-373).

The younger generation of nationalists is psychologically removed from the golden days of secularism, turbulent conflicts of the India-Pakistan wars, and constitutional arrangements to resolve political issues. Politics, to them, is no longer policies; it is an emotionally charged issue of freedom. The events of post-colonial history of Kashmir and the impact of Pan Islam have shaped their understanding of ethnicity and identity. This new identity transcends the borders of Kashmir and seeks philosophical solidarity with other Muslims. While it is comforting to have support in Pakistan, the Kashmiri Muslims struggling to separate from India, do not depend on it. Their potential and determination for revitalized resistance lies in being able to share their plight with other Muslims who also live under similar conditions as themselves.

The Kashmiri Muslims identify the weaknesses of secularism, in that it is unable to fulfill the moral void, and thus, they seek to replace secularism with religion. In the absence of a strong political space, the Kashmiri Muslims have used the social space as an alternative, by filling it with religious ideas and motivations. This social space ranges from schools, hospitals, post-offices to government agencies. Wherever they work, they discuss politics and prepare to oppose the government through non-institutional processes like marches and protests. They are incorporating different levels of society, including the intelligentsia and the farmers. This well educated and better informed Kashmiri Muslim community has been actively involved at circulating this form of opposition. The gradual integration of ethnic nationalism and religion has redefined the nature of activism for the
Kashmiri Muslims. Moreover, in the past, what were two different, one regional and one personal, characteristics have now come to mean one and the same thing. Being a Kashmiri is no different from being a Muslim. This combination of two independent elements of the Kashmiri Muslim personality is not restricted to political activism. It underscores how a Kashmiri Muslim defines the “self” (Pasha 1992, 374).

However, to put this change into position and contextualize it vis-à-vis developments in Kashmir, the chapter will conclude by highlighting some key reasons for this change. The state of Kashmir (which includes Jammu and Laddakh) is separated along the lines of districts. A homogeneous religious group is the majority in the ten districts of Kashmir, but the state (which includes Jammu and Laddakh) as a whole is not dominated by any one religion. Predominantly Jammu is Hindu, Leh is Buddhist, and Kashmir is Muslim. With the exception of the ten districts of Kashmir, post 1989-90, both other districts, Jammu and Leh, have a significant non-Muslim population. The combination of different religious groups in any given district convoluted the political dynamic when politicians ran for elections. The politicians pandered to specific ethnic groups, based on their being the majority in a given district, at the expense of the minority. None of the three ethnic communities feels satisfied, as one is a majority in one district and not in another. Political alienation of the minority Hindus, as they had no interest in the Sheikh Abdullah government, made them the “written off” electorate in Kashmir. The political alienation of the Hindus triggered divisive politics and separated the interests of the Hindus from the Muslims along the lines of their respective political
aspirations. This separation, in turn, resulted into the Hindus gravitating toward the Hindu nationalist party, Praja Parishad, formed in Jammu (Varshney 1992, 198).

The geography of Kashmir made it difficult for Kashmiri Muslims to interact with their Muslim counterparts in India. Muslims in India hardly ever participated in the socio-political activities of Kashmiri Muslims. The lack of cultural and religious interaction with the Muslims in India potentially shaped the insular mentality of the Kashmiri Muslims and regionalized their concerns. A cumulative effect of this geographical and social separation is that the Kashmiri Muslims had no ideological connection with mainstream India (Ganguly 1997, 42-43). Additionally, during the 1930s, local religio-political movements formed initially to oppose the Dogra ruler, and later to resist Kashmir’s merger with India. Occasionally Sheikh Abdullah would ask the assistance of Jammat-i-Islami, one of the religio-political parties in Kashmir, to use fear-tactics in political maneuvers against the Indian government. Sheikh Abdullah’s political strategy was to get unquestioned support from the Indian government. Sheikh Abdullah’s political style was an unsavory demonstration of how fragile secular democracy was in Kashmir, with a secular leader consorting with the separatists. The Indian government was aware of Sheikh Abdullah’s underhanded political activities, because of which the Indian government could never trust Sheikh Abdullah’s reliability as a democratic partner. After the era of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, this political arrangement did not work. By 1989, political arrangements between successive Indian and Kashmiri politicians had significantly deteriorated. In 1989, across the border in Pakistan, the remnant, mujahedeen or mujahidin, (one who engages in jihad) were becoming a problem.
to Pakistan. These were a group of Afghan, Arab and Pakistani warriors who had fought and were victorious against the Soviet Union. However, their own societies in the Middle East considered most of them rogue. Detecting the unstable political conditions in Kashmir, Pakistan diverted the disenfranchised and well-trained mujahedeen into Kashmir to support the domestic Muslim separatist insurgency in Kashmir. The Kashmir insurgency was now in full force—from within and without (Ganguly 1997, 42-43).

The Palestinian intifada (armed uprising) was another incident that endorsed the mixing of religion with violence in the struggle against the government. Strangely, it was due to the Indian government’s good relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1970s and 1980s; a considerable number of Palestinian students attended Kashmir University in Srinagar. These students brought with them the details of the successful Palestinian uprisings against Israel and their broader Palestinian struggle against the state of Israel (Ganguly 1997, 43).

These highlighted instances reveal the fact that the Kashmiri Muslims are at a different stage of their struggle. Though some separatist Kashmiri Muslim groups took to violence, this practice subsided in the late 1990s. The language of resistance has changed and become more sophisticated. In their journey, the Kashmiri Muslims have also been influenced by both domestic and international factors. Religion has come to define their political demands and has provided them with moral justification. This is how peace activist Cvijeta Novacovic describes religion: “Every religion is a base for respect and coexistence, and for violence and war. It is up to the people to decide what to do with
religion” (Schäfer 2004, 407). In Kashmir, if the Sufi-Rishi tradition became zenith for religion, violence, in its name is its nadir.
CHAPTER 3
EVOLUTION OF KASHMIRI PANDIT IDENTITIES

This first section is divided into three parts. The first part will begin with a brief overview of Hinduism and, in particular, Hindu Brahmins. The second part will explain who the Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus) are and how do they regionally differ from other Hindu Brahmins, in India? The third part of the first section highlights Kashmiri Pandits under Islamic rule. The second section will discuss the social and familial divisions among the Kashmiri Pandits. It will also lightly touch upon the relationship between the Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims. The third section will describe the position of the Kashmiri Hindus during the Dogra rule, and under secular Kashmiri Muslim rule. In the fourth and final section, the consequences of 1989-90 violence and identity shift of Kashmiri Pandits will be discussed.

Overview of Hinduism and Hindu Brahmins

Varna, the Sanskrit word for classification, describes one of the four social classes (or castes) in India, which also includes Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The Brahmins are traditionally the priests. The Kshatriyas are traditionally the warriors. The Vaishyas are typically the traders and the Shudras are traditionally the workers and laborers. The Brahmin social class of India is composed of several regional castes, some of which are of considerable antiquity in India (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, academic edition, “Brahman”). This division is drawn from ancient, sacred Hindu texts, the Puranas. The Puranas describe the Brahmins as the northern Gauda Brahmins and the southern Dravida Brahmins, and the Vindhyas, the mountain ranges, become the border
between northern and peninsular India (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, academic edition, “Vindhyā Range”). The northern Gauda Brahmins have five sub-divisions; Sarasvat or Saraswat Brahmins, named after the river Sarasvati or Saraswati, are one of the Gauda Brahmins. The Sarasvat Brahmins are mainly inhabited in the regions to the west of the river Sarasvati. The Sarasvati, it is believed, flows underground from where it loses itself in the deserts, north of Rajasthan (land of the Rajputs in northwestern India), until it joins the rivers of the northern plains, Ganga and Yamuna, at Prayag. Prayag, situated at the confluence of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna and the mythical underground Saraswati River, is a city in the state of southern Uttar Pradesh (Oxford Reference Online 2005, “Allahabad”). In present day, India, the Sarasvat Brahmins exist in Kashmir, the Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and along the western coast, mainly in Maharashtra, Goa, and Mysore.

Who are the Kashmiri Pandits and How they Differ from Other Hindus?

The Sarasvat Brahmins of Kashmir, who formed the bulk of the native Hindus, identify themselves a little differently in terms of their caste name. A lot of Kashmiri Hindus prefer to simply link their Hindu identity to Sarasvati, the Brahmanic (or Vedic) Goddess of “learning”. They claim that Kashmiri Brahmins are distinct from Sarasvat Brahmins elsewhere in India, especially in the special importance they attach to knowledge and education (Jagmohan 2006, 42). This could be because chroniclers of the past, like the Chinese monk Hiuen Tsang who visited Kashmir in 631 A.D., highlighted the importance of learning to the Kashmiris. He described, “This country from remote times was distinguished for learning, and their priests were all of high religious merit and
conspicuous virtue as well as marked talent and power of clear exposition of doctrine; and though the other priests (i.e., of other nations) were in their own way distinguished, yet they could not be compared with these, so different were they from the ordinary class” (Kak 1995, 6). The modern day Sarasvat Brahmin of the western coast, however, claim descent from Kashmiri Brahmins; this shows that the region of Kashmir was always in some way connected to mainstream Indian society. As listed in the Oxford dictionary of Hinduism, the Sanskrit word, “Pandit(a)” means the learned one (Oxford Reference Online 2009, “pandit(a”)’). The Kashmiri Pandits refer to themselves by the Sanskrit word *Bhatta*, which means “doctor,” the title of eminent scholars. Instead of referring to them as *Bhatta*, their preferred self-descriptive term, this chapter, like others will continue to refer to them as either Kashmiri Pandits or Kashmiri Hindus.

There are two other Hindu minority groups in Kashmir in addition to Kashmiri Pandits, though their historical origins are not clear. They are the *Buher* (or Bohra) and the *Purib* (or Purbi). During pre-colonial times, these two groups struggled to assert their identity on the Kashmiri Pandits. There were various claims. They were considered outsiders, a trader-caste, from the greater Punjab. Some claims suggested that they were descended from Kashmiri Pandits who lost caste during the early days of the Muslim rule. This may have occurred because they failed to observe essential rituals out of the fear of punitive taxes, or because they temporarily accepted conversion to Islam as a matter of expediency (Bhowmik 1992, 1246-48). A Khatri (Punjabi caste) origin is more probable, as the *Bohra* were generally only found in urban areas and their traditional occupations were trading and shop keeping. In fact, the word *Bohra* is often used in
Kashmir to refer to a grocer (Madan 1961, 16). The *Purbi*, also found only in urban areas, are probably descended from an immigrant Brahmin caste. They are also thought to have been immigrants from east Punjab. They have been almost completely assimilated into Pandit culture. Some Hindus arrived from Jammu and the Punjab during the Dogra rule of 1846-1947, but they were all confined to the city of Srinagar and preserved their linguistic and cultural identity (Bhasin 2009, 198-99).

While there is little information available to help determine the percentage of Kashmiri Pandits who left in 1989-90, the following gives some sense of their numbers at the end of the 1800s to the mid 1900s in Kashmir. This also provides some context with regards to conversions to Islam, the status of the Kashmiri Pandits as a minority group, and their claim to residence in Kashmir. The Hindu population of Kashmir somewhat increased after 1891 (Dogra Hindu rule), when it reached 52,576 which was approximately 7% of the total population (Lawrence 1895, 225). However, according to the 1941 census, there were 76,868 Pandits in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Due to the troubled conditions, no census was taken in Kashmir in 1951, following the cross-border tribal incursions into the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, and during the subsequent first war between India and Pakistan. According to the 1961 census, 89,102 of the 1,899,438 inhabitants of Kashmir were Hindus, constituting about 5% of the total population. The change in the term from Kashmiri “Pandit” to “Hindus” in Kashmir in 1961 is due to the fact that the caste system (post independence in 1947) was abolished (Wreford 1943, volume 22).
Despite their name that regionally identifies them with Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits are also found in many cities of northern India, such as Jammu, Jaipur, Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Allahabad, and Benares (modern day Varanasi). In British India, Lahore also had a significant number of Kashmiri Pandit residents. During British rule, Kashmiris founded the Kashmiri Association of Europe, whose founder-chairman, Mr. L. Zutshi, a Pandit from Srinagar lived in England in the early 1900s. Mainstream Indian politics has been considerably influenced by Kashmiri Pandits who have settled outside their homeland. Some of the most well known political and social reformers in modern India, including Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and Jawaharlal Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India) are Kashmiri Pandit. Others include Urdu (a language evolved out of the combination of Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit) littérateurs such as Rattan Nath Dhar Sarshar and Anand Narain Mulla (Madan 1965, 17-18).

The migratory pattern (evacuation from Kashmir) of Kashmiri Pandits has been primarily influenced by periods of tyrannical rule that have typically occurred under Muslim rulers. It has also been considered for economic interests, when such interests have been compromised under the same tyrannical rulers. Their primary destination was the central, northern and northwestern regions of India, where they have retained most of their customs and practices. They succeeded in maintaining their distinctiveness outside of Kashmir by observing the rule of endogamy. This means that they married from within their own Kashmiri immigrant community. Lawrence describes, “It is an interesting fact that Kashmiri immigrants in distant parts of India retained their old language even though generations have passed since they left Kashmir” (1895, 454). The post 1989-1990
immigrant community has not retained its Kashmiri language with the same zeal as the earlier generations. However, the immigrants of all generations seemed to preserve certain customs, which had even disappeared from Kashmir.

Today, there are only Kashmiri Pandits and negligible number of other Hindu castes in Kashmir, a stark contrast with the rest of India. However, non-Brahmin castes were not always absent in Kashmir. A map of India shows that before the advent of Islam, Kashmir was a part of greater Hindu India without consolidated borders. In fact, in the twelfth century (CE), Kalhana, author of a verse chronicle of Kashmir, made many references to castes in the Rajatarangini, the “River of Kings” (Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism 2009). Brahmins, Kshatriya and Damara (feudal lords), Vaishya and Kayashta (clerical castes), merchants, watchmen, scavengers, and chandala (outcastes or untouchables) are mentioned in the Rajatarangini. However, with a mass conversion to Islam, the Kashmiri religious landscape changed, leaving Kashmiri Pandits as the only substantive Hindu population in Kashmir (Kaul 1954, 210-218 and Ghoshal 1965, 208-215).

Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus) under Muslim Rule

The first connection with Muslims in Kashmir can be traced back to the times of the Hindu king Harsha (1089-1101), who had enlisted them in his army. But their presence did not impact the political and cultural history of Kashmir until 1320 AD (Kak 1995, 54). In that year, the Tartar (people of Central Asian origin) warlord Dulucha (also known as Zulqadar Khan) invaded Kashmir to loot its riches. The Hindu king Suhadeva fled from Kashmir. Dulucha, however, did not remain there for long, as his army
completed its looting and withdrew. However, this respite was short lived. Since the Hindu kingdom was pulverized and terrorized, it was easy prey for an invasion, this time by Rinchana, son of the Tibetan Buddhist chieftain. Ramchandra, a Brahmin aristocrat, attempted to fight Rinchana, but was killed through treachery. Rinchana assumed the throne and declared himself king. He then legitimized his rule by marrying Kota, Ramchandra’s daughter. In an attempt to gain the acceptance of the Kashmiris, Rinchana tried to become a Hindu. Unfortunately, the Brahmins refused to convert him. He eventually embraced Islam, the religion that most inspired him. His royal court contained many Muslims including Shah Mir, an immigrant from Swat who had previously been in the service of Suhadeva. Rinchana died in CE 1323, survived by his wife and infant son (Ibid.). Although Suhadeva’s younger brother Udyandeva came to the throne, the real power lay in the hands of Kota, who married him following her husband’s death. Udyandeva died in CE 1339.

After a brief power struggle with Kota, Shah Mir Shamsuddin succeeded the throne. Kashmir was under Muslim rule for most of the next 500 years, from CE 1339 until CE 1819 (Kak 1995, 55). All subsequent Muslim rulers influenced the course of Kashmiri Pandit history. This work gives most attention to two reigns, the rule of Sikandar (CE 1389-1413) and of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470). Other reigns are briefly discussed to provide a chronology of events, which lead up to the assumption of power by the Hindu Dogra ruler in 1847.

Although Sikandar demonstrated tolerance early in his reign, he later became tyrannical toward his Hindu citizens. Sikandar’s advisers and courtiers heavily influenced
him, and some of these advisers were immigrant Muslims. His court also included converts from Hinduism. He imposed severe taxes on the Kashmiri Pandits, prohibited many of their religious observances, and looted and demolished their temples. These ruins still exist throughout Kashmir today. Not fully satisfied with the success of his actions and with the aim to obtain full compliance, the king proclaimed to his kingdom that his Hindu subjects must choose between Islam, exile and the sword. Mass conversions to Islam followed and many Hindus escaped from Kashmir. By the end of his reign all Hindu inhabitants, except the Brahmins in Kashmir, had more or less adopted Islam (Lawrence 1909, 24). It is said that only eleven Brahmin families survived in Kashmir when Sikandar died in CE 1413 (Lawrence 1909, 40).

Sikandar was succeeded by his elder son who passed the throne to his younger brother in CE 1420. For Kashmiri Pandits, the younger son, Zain-ul-Abidin (ruled 1421-1472) proved to be a great relief. In an intriguing account, the king was near death and restored to health by a Kashmiri Pandit physician who asked for no fees except mercy for his coreligionists. Zain-ul-Abidin withdrew most of the anti-Hindu laws and worked to restore confidence among his Hindu subjects (Lawrence 1895, 192). The new king Zain-ul-Abidin became famous as the badshah (great king), after his father had earned the title of butshikan (iconoclast) (Lawrence 1895, 166). The destruction of Hindu scriptures was stopped (Lawrence 1909, 24). The Brahmins who had fled during Sikandar’s rule had their land and property restored to them after it had been usurped by Muslims (Bamzai 1994, 17). The schools were reopened and Hindu boys were allowed to study their scriptures. The annual capitation tax was reduced to a nominal fee and was later
abolished entirely. Hindus were again allowed to practice their traditions and rituals including Hindu funeral/final rites, which had been prohibited under Sikandar. The king himself visited Hindu shrines, performed sacrifices, and built monasteries. He not only acquired a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit, but also employed all his available time in the study of its sacred books (Kak 1995, 64 and Bamzai 1994, 248).

The descendants of the Brahmins in Zain-ul-Abidin’s time are the Pandits of modern day Kashmir, whereas the descendants of the families who survived in Kashmir during Sikandar’s time are known as the malamasi. The banamasi (Bamzai 1994, 17) are the descendants of the émigré, who returned to Kashmir during Zain-ul-Abidin’s reign. The “golden period” of the badshah (the king) was followed by less favorable times. A change in dynasty brought Muslim Chaks to the throne and, along with it, a period of hardship for the Kashmiri Pandits. After 26 years of Chak rule (CE 1555-1586), Kashmir became a province of the Mughal Empire in CE 1586. The Mughals, who were based in Delhi, ruled Kashmir through their viceroys. Some of these viceroys were kind and tolerant while others were cruel towards the Pandits. Among the Mughal rulers, Akbar was the most tolerant. Jehangir and Shahjehan were less tolerant than Akbar, but were better than the Chaks. The last of the great Mughals, Aurangzeb, visited Kashmir only once. Despite that he unleashed his religious fervor against the unbelievers. Thus, his name is denounced by the Kashmiri Pandits (Lawrence 1909, 25).

The Afghans, who were led by Ahmad Shah Durrani, conquered Kashmir in 1752. During this time, some Pandits rose to prominent positions. One even became the prime minister of Kabul. However, hard times were in store for most of the Kashmiri
Pandits during the Afghan rule. Governors from Kabul plundered and tortured people indiscriminately, but reserved their worst cruelties for the Kashmiri Pandits, the Shiahs, and the Bambas of the Jhelum Valley (Lawrence 1909, 25).

An Afghan ruler, Asad Khan, introduced some practices that went beyond the usual levels of cruelty. His punishments made it a common habit to tie two Pandits in a grass sack and sink them in the Dal Lake. As a sign of degradation, Pandits were made to carry pitchers full of excrement, and Muslims would pelt the pitcher with stones until it broke and blinded the Pandit carrying it. Asad Khan imposed the jizya, a poll tax levied on non-Muslims under Muslim rulers that promised to protect the payers, and he stopped the Kashmiri Pandits from observing their symbolic religious practices. Madad Khan succeeded Asad Khan, and in terms being tyrannical to the Hindus, he outdid his predecessor. While he continued his predecessor’s brutal practices, he also added his own. Pandit parents would shave their daughters’ heads or cut off their noses to protect them from degradation. During this time, if a Muslim encountered a Pandit he would jump and mount his back, and he would ask the Pandit to give him a ride, saying, “you are a Brahmin and I will mount you” (Lawrence 1895, 198). When their plight became unbearable, the Kashmiri Pandits looked for help from Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab.

In 1819, Pandit Birbal Dar undertook an arduous journey from Kashmir to Lahore to the court of the Sikh king, Ranjit Singh. He informed the Sikh king of the plight and struggles of the Kashmiri Pandits. The Sikhs conquered Kashmir; however, they proved to be not much better than their predecessors. They were indifferent and ignored
Kashmir. However, they did not discriminate against the Kashmiri Pandits in favor of the Kashmiri Muslims. Except for that, they abandoned Kashmir completely (Lawrence 1895, 198). In 1846, the battle of Sobraon marked the collapse of Sikh power in the Punjab. In the summer of 1846, the British Government of India transferred the Kashmir region to Maharaja Gulab Singh for a price of 7,500,000 Indian rupees (169,491.53 USD). Thus began the rule of yet another alien dynasty over Kashmir. For the Pandits, however, this proved far better than the previous 500 years of largely Muslim rule, as it saved them from religious persecution and enabled them to rehabilitate themselves. They were, in many respects, favored by the Hindu government over the Muslims, and were quick to take advantage of these favorable circumstances (Bruce 2009, 97).

Social and Family Structure of the Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus)

Back during Zain-ul-Abidin’s rule, from 1421 to 1472, the Kashmiri Pandit society developed three subdivisions. This was defined more along occupational lines; however, it was given authenticity by incorporating it into the traditional and familial framework. The Kashmiri Pandits recognized the political and civil state of affairs in Kashmir. With no hope of escape from Muslim rule or minority status, they engaged strategically to make themselves indispensable to the ruler. In a short span of time, the Brahmins mastered the study of Persian language (Lawrence 1909, 24). They did not, however, abandon Sanskrit or their religious ceremonies, as they recognized them as symbols of their distinct ethnic identity. The Kashmiri Pandits, as discussed before, were the only caste of Hinduism represented in Kashmir. Along occupational lines, caste was divided between those who studied Persian and joined secular professions, and those who
studied religious scriptures, Sanskrit and performed priestly duties. The Karkuns (typically the merchants and administrative group) were among the former who studied Persian and engaged into secular professions and the Bhasha Bhatta (language Pandit) took up studying religious scriptures, Sanskrit and performed priestly duties (Lawrence 1895, 192). To resolve the issue of “who will study what,” the Pandits introduced kinship roles into the family classification system. Older men with daughters would ask their daughter’s son to become the Bhasha Bhatta and administer to the religious needs of his maternal grandfather's family (Kilam 1955, ch.4). Though initially simple, over time this arrangement spawned two distinct classes, each with a distinctive culture and social lifestyle. The distinguishing practices resulted into divisive social sensibilities, distancing the two communities to the extent that though no religious restrictions exist, they do not intermarry (Lawrence 1895, 302).

What was a source of pride for the Bhasha Bhatta—having the priestly position and being custodians of the scriptures—in due course became the reason for economic dependence upon the Karkun. The socioeconomic position of the Karkun (which was influenced by how much they were supported by Kashmir’s leaders) in turn shaped the social identity of the Bhasha Bhatta. Some of the Bhasha Bhatta became mechanical in the execution of their religious duties, as their remunerations depended upon the generosity of the Karkun. Others continued the great tradition of learning and culture (Kilam 1955, ch. 4). Over time, however, the Karkuns came to look down upon this creative system of fitting their occupation into the social mold. It is at this juncture the term “Kashmiri Pandit” was coined to distinguish the group given to culture, learning and
religion. The ones who identified themselves more with secular profession retained the
name “Karkuns” (Lawrence 1895, 303). In modern times, however, these divisions have
blurred and every Kashmiri Hindu is referred to as, Kashmiri Pandit.

Aldous Huxley, wrote in his travelogue while visiting Kashmir, “The Kashmiri
Pandit has a more than Spanish objection to manual labor. But, unlike the Hidalgo who
thought himself dishonored by the exercise of any profession save that of arms, the
Pandit is ambitious of wielding only the pen. He may be abjectly poor, but he does only a
Pandit’s work” (1926, 30). The prevailing characteristic of an upper class or noble Pandit
family is that none of its living male members or ancestors has ever engaged in manual
labor. However, in the rural parts, disdain for manual labor is feasible for the well-off
(landed) families (from urban areas of Kashmir) or for the rich traders. Scarcity of
respectable occupations forces even a Kashmiri Pandit (small-time landowner) to remain
poor and share the crop with a tenant rather than till the land himself.

Yet, there are many who cultivate the land themselves, become tenants to other
Kashmiri Pandits or migrate to the city of Srinagar as cooks and domestic servants
(Madan 1965, 24). In Srinagar, there is hardly any shame in taking up manual labor; this
is for three reasons. Firstly, appointment to government services has been the prerogative
of the Kashmiri Pandits, so much so that it has become their traditional occupation. A
high percentage of literacy along with the fact that they are Hindus has been responsible
for their privileged positions (Lawrence 1895, 282). Secondly, menial and domestic
service provided to urban Pandits by rural Pandits who, driven by economic need, do not
mind engaging in manual labor away from their homes. Thirdly, vegetable gardeners,
who are invariably Muslims, do the only cultivation of the land in the city (Madan 1965, 25).

Kashmiri Pandits who live in cities regard themselves as superior to their rural brethren, who are associated with manual labor. Salaried jobs were the main source of income for urban Kashmiri Pandits, with trade and ownership of land in villages (absentee landlordism) coming in second and third, respectively. A substantial difference also lay in the fact that literacy was more widespread in the capital city of Srinagar. Access to higher education and technical training, such as engineering and medicine, was easily available to urban Kashmiri Pandits (Madan 1965, 25).

Religious and cultural traditions are a central feature of rural Kashmiri life. Traditions, in the villages continued to emphasize religious divisions; contrastingly, young Kashmiri Pandits, in colleges or at secular work places, often ate and drank at Muslim restaurants and made no secret of it. Thus, it was the economically higher status and the secular attitudes of the urban Kashmiri Pandit that defined the relationship dynamic between the rural and the urban Kashmiri Pandits. The dependence of rural Kashmiri Pandits upon their Muslim counterparts, for the provision of many necessities, defined the nature of their relationship with the Muslims. Either from centuries of acculturation to scholarly or religious work or because of caste ethics that prohibited manual labor, the Pandits did not pursue the professions of a barber, blacksmith, potter oil-presser, weaver, or washer-man. These professions were undertaken by the Muslims. Socially, the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims did not inter-dine or intermarry.
They had different religious practices, separate social and cultural organization (Madan 1965, 26).

While culturally, both communities, the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir, continued to maintain their separate religious and social systems well into the twentieth century, the status of Kashmiri Pandits improved during the Dogra rule (1846-1947). With regard to religious practices, Kashmiri Pandits lived fearlessly under Dogra rule. As a Hindu ruler, the Dogra rulers left the Kashmiri Pandits alone to observe their rituals, traditions, and ceremonies. The Dogra rulers shaped the state in their own image, and in the process secured the borders, rooted out all opposition, and consolidated the state’s economic machinery to control trade and the profits therefrom (Bamzai 1994, 656-658).

Kashmiri Hindus (Kashmiri Pandits) under the Dogra Rule

As they drew their legitimacy from Hinduism, they engaged in promoting and manipulating the scope of Hinduism scripturally and ritualistically. They reinstated sacred Hindu practices, built Hindu temples, spent on the care of sacred Hindu monuments and structures, and abolished practices offensive to religious Hindu sensibilities. The first ruler, Maharaja Gulab Singh, instituted endowments to establish and maintain the legacy of Hindu religious practices for generations to come (Zutshi 2004, 49). In his book, The Valley of Kashmir, W. R. Lawrence describes that while they were harsh and determined rulers, the Dogra Maharajas were both widely respected and feared by their subjects and servants. He identifies them as reasonable kings who allowed their Muslim subjects to practice their religion freely. In addition to being a wise landlord, Lawrence describes Maharaja Gulab Singh to be an effective, able, and just
ruler. The condition of the people improved, and people regained some confidence in the administration. He also suggests that the Dogra rulers managed to bring peace to Kashmir, rescuing it from regular, violent attacks from outsiders. Economic alternatives replaced Lawlessness and desperation, especially with the tourism from European visitors that created opportunities for all ranks of the society (1895, 201-202). The Dogra kings established Srinagar (the capital of Kashmir) as the center of their Kingdom. They directed and managed affairs of state during the summer from Kashmir and during the winter (when the snow completely restricted mobility) from Jammu (Lawrence 1909, 114-116).

While all this was an impressive demonstration of the Hindu principles of Dogra rule, the Kashmiri Pandit felt the influence in nuanced manner. The Kashmiri Pandits, as Hindus, undoubtedly benefited from the Dogra Hindu identity. The rural Kashmiri Pandit remained in the pastoral position, removed from the Dogra rulers patronage. Urban Kashmiri Pandits, the Karkun, went in the direct service of the Dogra rulers. The Dogra ruler sought the skills of the Kashmiri Pandits not only because they were co-religionists but also because they had, since the time of the Afghans, established their credentials as effective administrators, accomplished linguists, and mid-level bureaucrats. They provided services in revenue management; they collected taxes and supervised agricultural returns to the state (Zutshi 2004, 52). The urban Kashmiri Pandits lived alongside upper caste Muslim elites like Pirzadas and Sayyids. These three groups paid paltry taxes and enjoyed privileged positions under Dogra rule (Zutshi 2004, 62).
The Dogra rulers had, from the beginning, understood the importance of the Kashmiri Pandits, and they sought the assistance of the Kashmiri Pandits to help establish Dogra control. Having eased into their rule, the Dogra expected Kashmiri Pandits to share their administrative positions with other non-Kashmiri Hindus. These were primarily Dogras from Jammu, but the groups included other new migrants, as well. Thus in the religious sense, while the urban Kashmiri Pandits found relief, they were intellectually frustrated at the same time (Zutshi 2004, 63). The Kashmiri Pandits had no easy access to the upper ranks of the administration; hard as they tried, they could not easily join the Dogra army. The urban, well-educated Kashmiri Pandit was also an irritant to the Dogra rulers; those Kashmiri Pandits who opposed the government’s policies would wield the pen and stoke nationalists’ passions. They did not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims. Their artistic tactic of employing religious poetry toward social causes would afford some protection from criticism, but it would cleverly highlight the plight of the Muslim peasant (Zutshi 2004, 52).

The urban Kashmiri Pandits were also involved in bureaucratic excesses. They undermined the state’s ability to exert direct control. Once they were appointed to select, official positions, they advanced their own interests at the expense of the Kashmiri peasantry (Zutshi 2004, 77). As most of the Dogra system was a continuation of preexisting practices from Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh reigns, Kashmiri Pandits were not single-handedly capable of removing every trace of their acts, and were beyond challenge (Zutshi 2004, 80). The regulatory and procedural loopholes, the unequal treatment of rural and urban Kashmiris (both Hindus and Muslims), and the personal identity of the
ruler all shaped the destiny of the subjects for over three hundred years (Zutshi 2004, 74-76).

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a socio-religious reform movement began among the Kashmiri Hindus. This movement, which was rooted in the teachings of the Hindu Arya Samaj (translates to “Hindu Noble Society”), was later consolidated under the name Yuvak Sabha, meaning the youth movement. The Kashmiri Pandits recognized the prevailing political context in which the British dominated Dogra Maharaja and the Dogra Maharaja unsuccessfully maneuvered between appeasing the minority, the majority, and the British. To claim a legitimate minority status in the politics of Kashmir, the Kashmiri Pandits established Yuvak Sabha, a forum through which they addressed issues related to the inner-workings of the Kashmiri Pandit community as well as relations between their community and the rest of Kashmir. With respect to personal issues, they addressed women’s rights such as education, widow remarriage, and abolition of the dowry system. As for external issues they discussed minority rights of the Kashmiri Pandits vis-à-vis the majority Muslim claims (Zutshi 2004, 256-257 and Kaur 1996, 45-46).

Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus) under Sheikh Abdullah’s Secular Rule

Even in the post-colonial time (1947 onwards) the Kashmiri Pandit minority did not entirely trust Sheikh Abdullah or his government. They identified Sheikh Abdullah’s secular political rhetoric as a way to distract the Indian central government. Their suspicions traced back to early 1900s freedom struggle movement, in which Muslim Conference influenced the identity of Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference
party. This notion intensified when, in the 1930s, two well-known and respected Kashmiri Pandit leaders, Kashyap Bandhu and Jia Lal Kalab, resigned from the National Conference. Kashyap Bandhu had accosted Sheikh Abdullah on his sincerity to the cause of nationalism, and proved him to be less than loyal to nationalism and more committed to his faith. Kashyap Bandhu challenged Sheikh Abdullah’s claims of being a nationalist. Sheikh Abdullah responded by saying that Quranic injunctions required him to declare himself a Muslim first and last. Kashyap Bandhu pressed further, asking Sheikh Abdullah if he would abandon nationalism if the Quran so asked him. To this, Sheikh Abdullah replied by saying that unless clearly endorsed by the Quran, he would give up any such nationalism (Zutshi 2004, 267). There were Pandits who clearly endorsed secularism and nationalism in Kashmir, and who benefitted from aligning with the National Conference. However, as a minority again under majority secular government, their rationale could also be shaped by the desire not to be marginalized due to the fear of reprisal.

In independent India, Kashmir is a region with more autonomy than other Indian states. As the minority community, now under what they considered questionable secular rule, the Kashmiri Pandits navigated their political identity with uncertainty. They lived alongside their Muslim counterparts from 1947 to 1965 through two wars between India and Pakistan. These wars were both directly related to the issue of Kashmir. They were aware of the discontent among the Kashmiri Muslims about the lack of Muslim identity in Kashmiri nationalism. There was also dissatisfaction among Kashmiri Pandits with two basic things regarding Kashmir’s status: 1.) what they claimed was the pseudo-secular state government of Kashmir, and 2.) a lack of confidence in the Indian Central
Government’s ability to exercise efficient control in Kashmir. As a result, Kashmiri Pandits oscillated between secular and communal identity.

Though it began as a movement for social change under the guidance of Hindu reformist principles, rigid religious notions were gradually incorporated into the group, and the distinction between regional identity and religious identity became blurred. As the issue of identity in Kashmir became increasingly knotted in religion, the Kashmiri Pandit gravitated toward Hinduism, and by extension, towards Hindu nationalism. The convergence of Kashmiri regional identity and religion explicitly allowed Kashmiri Pandits to employ Hindu nationalism as a means to contend with the majority’s growing embrace of a Muslim identity.


The high-profile killings of Kashmiri Pandit leader Tikkalal Taploo, in September 1989, and a former high court judge, Nilkanth Ganjoo, later in November the same year, shook the Pandit community. The violent resistance, though more selective in its earlier stages, later included sporadic killings of even non-Kashmiri Pandits. However, it became a serious threat, when Kashmiri Pandits started being specifically targeted. Increasingly, the killings became more organized; and, violent activists specifically targeted groups of Hindu civilians, high-profiled Kashmiri Pandits or individual Hindu political leaders (Evans). In Srinagar, February 1990, besides the murder of various Hindu officials, the violence also claimed high-profiled Chief of Doordarshan TV (Indian national television), Lassa Koul (Evans). There were also two local newspapers that had voluntarily (or unwillingly) become the mouthpiece for JKLF and Hizbul Mujahideen.
(Party of Holy Warriors). On April 16, 1990, two other local newspapers, the *Alsafa* and the *Srinagar Times*, printed a message to all Kashmiri Pandits to leave Jammu and Kashmir in two days (Evans). Through the use of same newspapers, the Kashmiri Pandits' requested clarification from extremist organizations as to what were the reasons for the brutal killings and if whether the Kashmiri Pandit community should consider itself at risk. In February 1990, the *Kashmir Times* newspaper and All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference (AIKPC) urged the militant outfits to discuss their resolution for minorities in Kashmir in the wake of the recent killings so that their confidence could be restored. They never received a response.

With the inability of the local government to control the violence and India’s ineffective response (i.e., imposing Governor’s rule), the Kashmiri Pandits started leaving. By March 1990, the same All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference that was engaging the militant outfits through newspapers was now asking the governor of Kashmir to assist them in moving out and relocating to Jammu (Evans 2002, 22). In Sumit Ganguly’s words, “The condition of violent resistance went from being spasmodic to orchestrated and deliberate. The targets of violence were carefully chosen, and objectives of the perpetrators well exceeded the limited goal of removing the Congress Farooq Abdullah regime. The Kashmir insurgency, in an incipient form, had begun” (Ganguly 1997, 102). While right-wing Kashmiri Pandits exaggerated the number of departed Kashmiris at 300,000, Alexander Evans offers a more credible figure. By applying the earlier census data, with an estimated population growth rates to infer the
number of people who may have left, Alexander Evans came up with the number of 150,000-160,000 (Evans 2002, 28).

Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus) in Exile

A few Kashmiri Pandits remained in Kashmir due to financial constraints. Others felt the violence may have been brief and did not want to leave their homeland. Most of the Kashmiri Pandits who left in 1990 went to Jammu where they lived in squalid refugee camps until 1997. By 1997, most had established their lives outside of the camps in Jammu or had moved to other cities in India. When the number of refugees continued to grow, the central government in India constructed refugee camps in Delhi. Thus, the cities of Jammu and Delhi absorbed considerable refugee population. In Delhi, the Kashmiri Pandits found support from other Kashmiris who had settled in Delhi generations before, from politicians who had an agenda of their own, and from Hindu nationalists who viewed the Hindu exodus from Kashmir as an issue of religious persecution. Combined, these different entities mobilized help and assistance in the form of medical care, education, and financial and moral support for the Kashmiri Pandits. The All India Kashmir Samiti (AIKS), based out of Delhi, became the main body connecting a group of local associations to create a social and cultural network among Kashmiri Hindus. They function out of India, the U.K., and the U.S. (Duschinski 2007).

As the community settled outside Kashmir, it mobilized and grouped together to preserve cultural identity and provide political credibility to its grievances. After the initial issues of basic needs, AIKS changed the character of the engagement from cultural and social to political. Its monthly magazine, Koshur Samachar, shifted significantly in
its reporting. It went from printing poems and folktales to covering the plight of the migrant community, and from commenting on the community dispersed around the country to firsthand accounts from Kashmir. Slowly the discourse in Koshur Samachar moved toward protecting the identity of the Kashmiri Pandits from the influence of Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism is presented as a foe of Kashmiri Hindus and the Indian nation (also identified as Mother India by both secular and rightist Hindu political parties). Progressively the lines between the Kashmir and Mother India became blurred, and the magazine presented a picture that equated protection of the Kashmiri Hindu to protection of India. The safeguarding of the Kashmiri Hindu community was thus cast as a moral responsibility of the state of India. In this narrative, the Kashmiri Hindus rejected the notion of economic and political deficits as the cause of Kashmiri Muslim rage.

Furthermore, Kashmiri Pandits link their plight in Kashmir to greater South Asian political concerns, in which they argue that the Kashmiri Hindus become scapegoats. They identify the aggression against them as part of a bigger agenda: a Muslim religious crusade to create a separate homeland within India, thereby completing the partition of India by securing a Muslim majority state of Kashmir which can then align with the Muslim State of Pakistan (Teng and Gadoo). Kashmiri Hindus, on the contrary, are presented as a community in Kashmir whose mere presence undermines the representational completeness of fundamentalist Islam. The violence against Hindus in Kashmir exists because they preserve the secular ideals of mainstream India. Pakistan realizes that the presence of Hindus in Kashmir keeps the hope of Islamization of
Kashmir unfulfilled. Without the Hindus, Kashmir is exposed to fundamentalists and their long-term agendas. Thus, the issue is about the intractable Hindu-Muslim conflict, the India-Pakistan conflict, and the struggle between secularism and fundamentalism in South Asia, with the Kashmiri Hindu as the victim (Trishal). As the Kashmiri Hindus connect their identity to secularism and India, they strengthen their claim for protection and a return to Kashmir. While they remain loyal to India, they complain that India has abandoned them. They emphasize India's unresponsiveness and insist that it is the responsibility of the Indian state to return them to their homeland. Kashmiri Pandits claim that they remain committed to India's honor and dignity; they further contend, that their patriotism and commitment toward India demands the preservation of both their community and identity (Munshi).

The Kashmiri Hindu migrant community that had arrived in India before 1989 and the expatriates abroad came forth to help those Kashmiri Pandits, who were forced out in 1989-1990. The Kashmiris formed an organization, All India Kashmiri Samiti (AIKS), subsequently in 1991, this same group started another movement, Panun Kashmir, which means "our Kashmir". The movement started in Jammu with the clear political objective for a separate homeland in Kashmir for Kashmiri Hindus. Other smaller nationalist groups of Kashmiri Hindus supported this political claim for a separate homeland in Kashmir for the Hindus; they outlined their request through four agendas. These agendas were: 1.) The demarcation of a separate homeland for Kashmiri Hindus in the Kashmir, comprising the regions of the Valley to the east and north of the river Jhelum. 2.) The application, of the Constitution of India in letter and spirit to this
Kashmiri homeland in order to ensure rights to life, liberty, freedom of expression and faith, equality, and rule of law. 3.) The placement, of the homeland under Central administration with a Union Territory status. 4.) The extension, of resettlement rights to all Kashmiri Hindus, including those who had previously left Kashmir for various reasons and wished to return. This movement also designated a clear division of labor between cultural Kashmiri outfits and political outfits like, Panun Kashmir (Duschinski 2008, 41-64).

Throughout the 1990s, while the Indian government engaged in resolving regional tensions in Kashmir and establishing agreeable conditions for the return of the Kashmiri Hindus, the Kashmiri Hindus mobilized and resisted the Indian government's plans for their return. There was no apparent success, and the Kashmiri Hindus realized that the Indian government’s effort was staged to gain political mileage during elections and appease the Muslims in exchange for their votes. While they supported Indian secularism, they opposed the secular, nationalist political parties. They alleged that secular, nationalist parties were appeasing Muslim minorities in India at the expense of the Hindus. They saw this political style replicated in the management of the Kashmir issue as Indian secular political parties promoted Muslim separatism to serve their own political ends (Vaishnavi, Khosa, and Kumar 1996, 52).

Kashmiri Hindus continued to express desires for return and efforts on the part of the Indian government continued into the late 1990s. The result was a “back-and-forth” of Kashmiri Hindus in and out of the Valley. Along with assurances that safe conditions existed for the Kashmiri Hindus to return, when the government of India would pledge
financial support, some Kashmiri Hindus would flock to the Valley. However, sporadic killing of the Kashmiri Hindus in the Kashmir would soon drive the Kashmiri Hindus back to the places they had left. This back-and-forth confirmed for immigrant Hindu Kashmiris that their homecoming would have to be consolidated with political rights and protection, before any return would be viable. Favorable comments from some Kashmiri Hindus (about stable conditions in Kashmir) would be met with cynicism, and contempt for provisional returns (Duschinski 2008, 57-60).
CHAPTER 4
KASHMIRI PANDITS AND HINDU NATIONALISM

This chapter will explore how the Kashmiri Pandits integrated their political movement with the Hindu nationalists and, like their Indian Muslim counterparts, borrowed their religion’s vocabulary to strengthen their political discourse. First, the chapter will discuss the Hindu nationalist movement. Second, the chapter will discuss the arrival of Hindu nationalist movements in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Third, the chapter will conclude by bringing the Kashmiri Pandits and Hindu nationalists together in a political arrangement.

Hindu Nationalist Movement

Hindu communalism and fundamentalism are not the same as Hindu nationalism. Semiticizing Hinduism is difficult, which is what the Hindu nationalists are attempting to do. Hinduism has a variety of sects, and each sect has its own particular religious observances, duties and deities, which makes it difficult to devise one set of fundamentals, agreeable to all Hindus. The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj (as discussed later in this chapter) attempted to define Hinduism under certain unifying fundamentals; they did this by rejecting the principles of Advaita (the principle of duality connecting the human soul to the divine), but it never became mainstream. In fact, the modern-day Hindu nationalist leaders, while they may borrow from the unifying elements of these two movements, are not exclusively Arya Samajis (followers of the Arya Samaj) or Brahmos (followers of the Brahmo Samaj). The problem with communalizing Hindu
nationalism is that it does not fit the true definition of communalism (Kishwar 1998, 250).

Communalism, as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, is:

1.) A principle or system of social organization in which the major political units of society are local self-governing communities.

2.) Communal living, usually with common ownership of property; the organization of society at the level of the community rather than the individual.

3.) Strong allegiance to one's own ethnic or religious group, rather than to a society or nation as a whole; (Oxford English Dictionary 2005, “Communalism”).

From the above definitions, it is evident that what is acceptable and sometimes even considered effective in the Western construct is not always regarded similarly in India. In India, communalism refers to a person who is religiously biased or bigoted. Opposed to the definition presented above, the Hindu nationalist philosophy does not support autonomous local communities; it aspires for an authoritarian, centralized system. It does not believe in the communal ownership of property, in fact, its laws support a more capitalist system. It does not support rallying around the ethnic interest of any one community; instead, it is vehemently devoted to the defense of the nation as a whole. The Hindu nationalist parties and movements cannot be considered communal because most of the members of these associations are not religious. Most of them are not well versed in Hindu scriptures or practices, do not have academic credentials in Hindu theological studies, nor promote the idea of nationalism based on Hindu identity. They do not aim to protect the sacredness or the sovereignty of the Hindu religion. The only reason Hindutva (Hindu way of life) becomes synonymous with national Indian identity is because the
majority supporters of that philosophy are Hindus (not Indians). Hindu nationalists continue, with considerable success, to merge territorial continuity with antiquity (Kishwar 1998, 250-252). This blurring of lines assists in connecting Hinduism's progenitor (namely, ancient Brahmanism and its later accretions) to modern India. Mythic tales, joined with unclear medieval Indian history, provide for quasi-religious and quasi-historical folk tales (Fuller 2009, 160-163).

Hinduism as a religious identity took centuries to form. Diverse religious practices within, conquests and cultural influence from without, the colonial impact, and its role in recent history have all contributed to the evolution of the modern Hindu identity. In the colonial era, a key factor that inspired and influenced modern Hindu nationalism is the evolution of nation-states in the West. Hindu nationalism vis-à-vis colonialism is a combination of the incongruent combination of Hindu renaissance heavily shaped by European contact, and the introspective shift away from the effects of the same (Fuller 2009, 160-163). Fiercely ideological freedom fighters of colonial India identified the need to modernize Hinduism to bring it up to speed with the changing times. Rooted in their motivations to fighting an external force, the Hindu nationalists, have embraced this model for shaping politics based on “us” and “them” (Jaffrelot 2007, 6-10).

The group combines religious history and mythology for political pursuits. Every prominent figure in Hindu history—from Ram, Krishna, Arjun, Vikramaditya and Chanakya to Shivaji and Rana Pratap—is portrayed to be a nationalist. The foregoing must be viewed with the knowledge that these Hindu religious and historical entities
existed in times when there was no Indian nation-state. As the goal is to make the masses follow the principles, connecting the spiritual to the temporal necessitates making nationalism indigenous. The fact that there is an indigenous vocabulary present (or one that can be tailored) to Hinduism makes it a natural choice. By making Hinduism predate all other faiths in India, it becomes easy for the Hindu nationalists to connect the golden age of India to the followers of the Vedas (oldest Hindu sacred texts), the Hindus. This also provides the impetus to describe all those opposed to the nationalist Indian identity as hostile outsiders, even if they are from other ethnic communities within India (Sharma 2003, 4-6).

The Hindu nationalists envision a common culture for the Indians. Their political strategy is to educate Indians to hold the country before the individual. They presume that if Indians put their national identity foremost then they will relinquish all contending ethnic loyalties or consider them secondary. They argue that India's socioeconomic challenges, regional and global, are due to the multilayered ethnic identities (Sharma 2003, 8-13). In an attempt to shift the focus of Indian Hindus from their many gods and varying religious beliefs, Hindu nationalists have worked to transform geographical India into “Mother India,” with all the features of a goddess and the need for real devotees, in the form of nationalist Hindus. For the cause of Mother India, the Hindu nationalists have embraced all societal realities—from economic issues shaping the Indian middle-class to the emerging global trends shaped by Western powers (Kishwar 1998, 258). It is not by chance that the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), one of the oldest Hindu nationalist movements, chose khaki knickers for its first uniform in 1925. This was also
the uniform of the British Sergeant Majors. Achieved whether through culture or religion, all the Hindu nationalists want is for the Indians to be modernized, westernized, and nationalized (Kishwar 1998, 251).

One of their core messages has been about a strong Mother India. There is a temple dedicated to Mother India, in the northern city of Haridwar. In the 1990’s, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, one the Hindu nationalist parties, carried out a nation-wide procession in honor of Mother India. The Hindu nationalists value Rashtra Dharm (national religion or nationalism), over any other belief system, and require all Indians to follow them. They are interested in Hindu gods and goddesses only so far as they can be used in the service of Mother India. The songs, the poems and even the religious platforms incorporated, reinforce the nationalist message.

Their leaders openly declared that the Hindu ascetics, saints and monks, who normally do not concern themselves with political issues, should abandon spirituality and return to the mainstream society as advocates of nationalism (Kishwar 1998, 257-259). To quote a popular theme of the Hindu nationalists: “Muslims who value their religion more than their nation, they can never be nationalists. And Hindus who treat religion as a personal matter can never be communalists…because those who give pride of place to their nation over their religion cannot be communalists” (Kishwar 1998, 252).

The Hindu nationalist movement began in the early 1800s when the Indian Hindu intelligentsia divided into two camps. One group, identified as revivalists, sought to renew religion and use it as a resistance vehicle. The other embraced the secular, socialist principles of Europe to resist British colonial rule. Both groups marketed their
philosophies to the Indian society. The four main sources of inspiration to Hindu nationalism were Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Veer Savarkar. They were different in how they designed, debated, discussed and delivered their message. However, they were all alike in two aspects: they were all influenced by European science, technology and rationalism; and, they wanted a unified India (Sharma 2003, 8). The Hindu nationalists were politically unappealing during the earlier years. They gained recognition as social reformers but not as political leaders. As the Hindu nationalists evolved, from being social reformist to anti-colonial political strategists, the revivalist campaign morphed into militant anti-colonial nationalist movement. However, their rigid political radicalism could not withstand the secular and inclusive philosophy purported by most of the leaders in the Indian national congress, like Nehru, Gandhi and Patel. Gandhi’s accommodation of multiple Indian identities was appealing to both secular Hindus and non-Hindus (Kishwar 1998, 260-261). The RSS connection with Nathuram Godse, who shot and killed Gandhi, also made the Hindu nationalists unpopular.

They gained credibility in some areas similar to the platform used by the secularists that called for a revival of traditional Hinduism. Occasionally the secular and the Hindu nationalists agreed on issues involving the treatment of women, education, the caste system, reforming indigenous forms of piety, and national progress (Fuller 2009, 168). The stoic social reformers Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Veer Savarkar rejected post-Vedic accretions to Hinduism in the late twentieth century. However, political pragmatism compelled Hindu nationalist parties, like the Bharatiya
Janata Party (a political group formed under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (a splinter group of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), to pick and choose between different Hindu schools of thought. In the process, a combination of neo-Vedanta (interpretations of the Vedas) teachings, secular rationalists and emotive neo-Vaishnavas (follower of God Vishnu and his reincarnates Ram and Krishna), all lend themselves to the cause of nationalism (Sharma 2003, 6, 7-8).

The Hindu nationalists would like to impose certain Hindu ideologies uniformly among all Indians. Also, there is evidence that the Hindu nationalists have attempted to destroy one, and want the demolition of a few other mosques that they claim were built in place of destroyed Hindu temples. In pursuit of rebuilding the ancient temples, they adopt radical activism. However, the Vedas that the Hindu nationalists espouse, neither offer militant nationalist strategies nor validate intolerance in the pursuit of nationalism. Their violent activities are better explained on the grounds of Hindu nationalist grievances mainly against the Muslims. They accuse the Muslims of forcing the partition of India. They complain that, in relation to Pakistan’s hostilities toward India, the Indian Muslims do not openly stand against Pakistan, which makes them less loyal to India. They posit that instead of following the Indian civil codes of law, the Indian Muslims insist on following the Shariah, which means that they place Islam above India. The Hindu nationalists argue that the Muslims have extraterritorial loyalty, because they are obliged by religious tenets to be loyal to Muslims everywhere. In this scenario, the fear posited is that the Muslim in India will not rise against the state of Pakistan, even if India needs the help of all its citizens. Furthermore, as their religion expects, they will rush to help their
coreligionists across the border, which makes them enemies within the state of India (Kishwar 1998, 254-256). The more an ethnic group challenges this primacy, the more alienated and foreign they become to the Hindu nationalists. The more foreign they become, the easier they are to be targeted like once the colonial rulers were.

As indicated in previous chapters, Kashmir was never entirely isolated from mainstream India. Hindu nationalists arrived in the form of a socio-religious movement in Kashmir. Similar to Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj was a rationalist Hindu group that spun-off of Hinduism, in disagreement with the archaic principles of the Hindu caste system. Established in Kashmir in 1892, Arya Samaj differed from the Brahmos only on the issue of the Vedas. The Brahmos rejected the Vedas, and the followers of the Arya Samaj did not (Lillingston 2009, 102-106). The Arya Samaj was also challenged in Kashmir by the Hindu religious group, Sanatan Dharm Sabha (universal religion council). Arya Samaj gained support among the Hindu Kashmiris by opposing the colonial British rule and the oppressive Hindu Dogra ruler (Kaur 1998, 53). The movement had connections with other similar groups in India; it first advocated social and religious changes, but later sought to assist political changes. Influenced by the Christian missionary presence, especially their spread of education, Kashmiri Hindu youth was ready to reform many social problems such as child marriage, widowhood, untouchability and the caste system (Biscoe 1995, 253-55).

Arrival of Hindu Nationalist Movements in Kashmir

From its inception to the 1920s, Arya Samaj engaged in religious and social reforms, but not actively engaged in political activities. Since the Punjabis, people from
the neighboring state of Punjab, introduced the Arya Samaj movement into Kashmir, it was not indigenous. To withstand the competition faced from the Sanatan Dharm Sabha, the Arya Samaj movement initially sought support from the Dogra king to support its benign activities. The message of the Arya Samaj was more appealing as it rejected the biased tenets of the Sanatan Dharam Sabha that rallied only for Kashmiri Hindus. Sanatan Dharam Sabha categorically opposed outsiders seeking state employment, demanding they be reserved for Hindu Kashmiris. The Arya Samaj, on the other hand, was inclusive of all Hindus and had several social aims: (1) to propagate Vedic principles; (2) to fight against the caste system; (3) to raise the status of women; (4) to educate women; (5) to abolish the civil institution of child marriage; and (6) to promote remarriage and protection of widows (Kaur 1998, 54-55).

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a change in the Arya Samaj movement. During this period, Arya Samaj fully identified with leaders like Gandhi, who opposed casteism. In Kashmir, they became strongly invested, just as the Christian missionaries, in adding more Hindus to the fold. As there were no religious rituals for proselytizing, they invented shuddhi, a purification ceremony, through which non-Hindus converted to Hinduism. Alternating between the socio-religious and the political realm, the Arya Samaj, was successful in blending the idea of Hindu solidarity with social reform and political radicalism (Kaur 1998, 56). As the Dogra ruler supported British autocratic rule of the state, under the leadership of many prominent Kashmiri Pandits, the Arya Samaj galvanized to oppose the Dogra king. Like in India, these prominent Kashmiri Pandits, Kashyap Bandhu, Jia Lal Kalam, Premnath Bazaz, and Shambhu Nath Pesin, disapproved
of the inward looking and transcendental essence of Hinduism. Similar to their Hindu nationalist counterparts in mainland India, they were also inspired by European science, technology, and rationalism. In their social reforms, they focused on consistency; they wanted cultural and social relationship with mainstream India. Kashyap Bandhu, follower of the Arya Samaj and well-respected Hindu Pandit, preached to the women to discard their traditional Kashmiri dress, the pheran, and embrace the Indian sari, a traditional garment worn over a blouse and an underskirt that wraps around the waist and drapes over one shoulder (Kaw 2001, 230).

Political Alignment of Kashmiri Pandits and Hindu Nationalists

Cognizant of the demographic imbalance between the Kashmiri Muslims and the Kashmiri Pandits, reformers like Bazaz, Bandhu, Kalam, and Pesin, were more susceptible to the message of Kashmir’s Hindu nationalists. This forceful idea of integration afforded moral support not only against the archaic, obsolete traditional Hinduism of the Dogra ruler, but also for the majority Muslims who were unifying against the Hindu Dogra ruler. By extension, it also went against the Kashmiri Hindus on occasion. Arya Samaj was not the only organization operating in Kashmir; splinter groups (to reach the rural areas and youth) and competing groups sprang-up and spread the same or a slightly modified message (Kaur 1996, 57). Premnath Bazaz, one of the Kashmiri Pandit reformers, left the Arya Samaj and started "The Fraternity," a more secular and inclusive association for the advancement of women and especially widows. Another group was the Kashmiri Pandit’s Social Uplift Association. It started in 1931 and spread later to Jammu (Kaur 1996, 59). Yet another was the Jammu and Kashmir
Women’s Welfare Association, which started in 1927 (Kaur 1996, 60). Thus, there were several reformist associations started by Kashmiri Pandits working for the social progress of women and young people. These associations interacted with Indian leaders in their struggle against colonialism. Both, the secular and Hindu nationalist leaders from India, informed and influenced the Kashmiri Hindu intellectuals and their strategies for change.

In post-colonial, or free India, these socio-religious and quasi-political Hindu reformist associations established the roots for Hindu nationalist parties like the Hindu Praja Parishad (also called as Praja Parishad) of the 1950s. After the Dogra king had signed Kashmir’s acceptance into India, the accession was to be determined partly through the votes of the elected assembly members. However, Praja Parishad, with ties to a Hindu-led Jammu-based political party, rejected the political process and sought complete integration of Kashmir into India (Evans 2002, 29).

In Kashmir, like in India, the Hindu reformists gained credibility among the Hindu Indians. In the rest of India, their message of Hindu unity under a caste-less society appealed to the lower-caste Hindus. However in Kashmir, in a largely caste-less society, the idea did not get much traction with the Kashmiri Hindus. Kashmiri Hindus were also inspired by the secular and inclusive message of Gandhi. There was another factor that limited the influence of Hindu nationalism in Kashmir. In mainstream India, the Hindu nationalists attracted the privileged communities who felt exposed to infringement from politically empowered minorities. In Kashmir, the Hindus Pandits, the thus far privileged, were the minority (Duschinski 2008, 43). Thus, a combination of two factors—the rise of political control of the Kashmiri Muslim and appeal for rationalism—
led to the softening of Hindu nationalism from the 1950s to the 1980s. During this time, leftist Kashmiri Hindus negotiated their places and political participation alongside the secular Kashmiri Muslims in Kashmir.

In the immediate aftermath, of the late 1989 and early 1990s departure of the Kashmiri Pandit, the community initially concentrated on relocation and relief efforts. Throughout the 1990s, the Kashmiri Pandit migrant community defined its political strategy focused toward their return to the homeland. The group was evaluating its common cultural identity and its religious history (Duschinski 2008, 42). This self-searching resulted from being illegally expelled from their homes in Kashmir. For the Kashmiri Pandits, the collective memory of the past five hundred years of suppression and the current forced evictions were both a religious attack on their community. They needed an ally whose cultural and political objectives tied with their own; they found their partner in the Hindu nationalist movement, in India. From the late 1970s well into the 1990s the Hindu nationalist parties, especially the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), defined its political strategy around activities and issues that the secularists had either failed to deliver on or were considered politically bankrupt.

The Indian, middle class (including non-Hindu minorities) was rising, becoming politically savvy through community representation; was making global connections through instant communication; and, was becoming financially better off through the liberalization of the economy. The elite Hindus felt threatened by the empowered non-Hindu minority and the poor Hindus felt left out of the nation’s narrative of pride, direction and power. Among the many issues, that the secular parties took for granted,
one was the issue of the Kashmiri Pandits. While religious minorities were privileged and protected in other parts of India, much as the Kashmiri Pandit was affiliated with the dominant religious population of India, they were often sidelined in the political thinking of secular Indians (Duschinski 2008, 43). Political calculations did not consider the complaints and grievances of the Kashmiri Pandits that were coming out of Kashmir during Sheikh Abdullah’s period of influence. As the anxieties of the disappointed elite Hindus, impoverished Hindus, and the migrant Kashmiri Hindu community aligned against the secular Indian political parties, the Hindu nationalist parties gained footing.

Out of fear for their survival, and as immigrants in their own country, Kashmiri Pandits represented themselves as an endangered community. Alignment with the Hindu nationalists provided a political tool for bringing their issues to the state. In this association, the shared plights were Hindu religious and cultural traditions, the decline of the Hindu culture, the loss of Hindu homeland, encroachment by Muslims and other minorities; and, the claim for a protected status recognized by the state (Duschinski 2008, 43). The Kashmiri Pandits, as a minority, had maneuvered through political adversity and social change for almost six hundred years. For the first time in their history, they were entirely dependent upon religion to restore their Kashmiri identity. Two Kashmiri Pandit immigrant associations, who have politicized their messages and merged with the Hindu nationalist philosophy, are Panun Kashmir (our own Kashmir) and the Kashmir Samiti (Kashmir Association) Delhi. These two groups may have begun as social organizations in service of migrant Hindu Kashmiris; however, by the early 1990s they had calibrated their philosophy and sought to give a political voice to the Hindu Kashmiri cause. Panun
Kashmir accepted the political work, and Kashmiri Samiti Delhi took up the cultural work of the movement.
CHAPTER 5
KASHMIRI ETHNORELIGIOUS CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

The first section of this final chapter will begin with the June 2010 violent riots in Kashmir. The incident will illustrate the fragility of a coalition government (which was elected in 2008) in Kashmir. Furthermore, this 2010 incident tied with the 2008 debacle (covered in chapter one) will strengthen the argument that the Kashmir crises is a continued ethnic conflict. The next section is divided into two parts: 1.) a discussion of how weak civil society structures in Kashmir led to divisiveness among Hindus and Muslims; and, 2.) an explanation of the role of religion as an element in the ethnic conflict in Kashmir. The third and final section will briefly mention other regions in India that are also embroiled in ethnic struggle; and, then, conclude by discussing the implications of these confrontations on India's multicultural character.

June 2010 Riots

The coalition government of National Conference and Indian National Congress in Kashmir was unable to manage the crisis that erupted in June 2010. In a *Guardian* article (August 30, 2010), the Associated Press in Srinagar reported that in response to protests from a rock-throwing eleven year old boy, the coalition security forces opened fire, killing him. The security forces countered that the boy protested by throwing stones at the soldiers, which resulted in the shooting and killing. The article also reported that the news of the boy’s death led to thousands of Kashmiris taking to the streets in protest against the security forces, the coalition government and India. In the June 2010 violent riots that broke out in protest against the coalition government of Kashmir, more than 60
people died, and hundreds were injured. Just like the Amarnath debacle (as discussed in chapter one) that occurred in 2008, this incident demonstrates that the Kashmiri Muslims effectively used associational (informal) and institutional (formal) forms of opposition against the political establishment in Kashmir. As stated in a *Guardian* article of August 2010, there seems to be region-wide agreement in their riot-chants, which are mostly “Go India! Go back” and “We want freedom.” As reported in the Asia Pacific section of a *New York Times* article (August 31, 2008), slogans like, “we want freedom” were also used in the 2008 Amarnath temple land transfer incident. These continued episodic eruptions of riots and violent struggles in Kashmir make it difficult to ignore the fact that local Kashmiris consider “self-rule” a strong alternative.

**Weak Civil Society and Ethnic Divisiveness**

In India, the concept of civic institutions began only in the late 1800s as a means of freedom struggle to oppose British rule. In fact, it was the impact of rationalism, nationalism and industrialization (from Europe) that mobilized the Indian freedom fighters (Samiuddin 2008, 296). These influences from Europe were also instrumental in shaping nationalist ideologies that all, Muslim intellectuals, secularists and Hindu nationalists, utilized in advancing their ideologies (Singh 1997, 117-130). In pre-independent India, the combination of monarchy and colonialism kept the diverse society under control. As the rulers controlled the police force and the army, and hardly any associational forms of engagement existed, the subjects lacked the mechanism through which to challenge the status quo.
In Kashmir, the situation was no different from elsewhere in India. The Kashmiris opposed both the Dogra king and the British rule. Furthermore, in Kashmir, just like in India, the materialization of nationalism, anti-colonialism and the need for freedom did not originate in the field of politics, but in the sphere of ideology and culture. This awareness about nationalism and freedom gave rise to social and religious reform movements (Panikkar 1995, 57). Both Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims organized to adopt ideologies that would take them closer to other modern states, while improving the situation of women, education and examination of faith as an expression of personal identity. When social reform movements changed into political actions, some organizations shied away from communal objectives to state wide secular agendas. In an attempt to assert their objectives, secular intellectuals became inclusive and pluralistic (Behera 2006, 14-16). It was the efforts of the secular parties (both in India and in Kashmir) that bolstered the cause of the struggle, which ultimately resulted in independence in 1947.

This did not change the fact, however, that a significant minority among Hindus and Muslims (both in India and in Kashmir) remained in favor of (their respective) religious and cultural solutions. The death of Mahatma Gandhi at the hands of a fanatic Hindu and the tribal insurgency from Pakistan, favored by some Kashmir Muslims, are examples of the fact that secular nationalism was not fully favored as an ideal for a free society. Some Kashmiri Hindus wished to merge with India (a predominantly Hindu country), and some Kashmiri Muslims favored integration with Pakistan (founded to provide an Islamic home to South Asia’s Muslims). The dissatisfaction with secular
nationalism among some Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims was due to historical separateness between the two communities as well as the fact that they had never considered the possibility of an inter-communal society with shared values and principles of governance. It seems as if the Sufi-Rishi tradition was a cult of personality and that, after the period of Lal Ded and Nooruddin, Hindus and Muslims busied themselves in splitting up. They formed separate cultural and religious organizations. Also, their cultural practices afforded no avenues to share inter-religious experiences or explore cultural similarities (Madan 1965, 26). Added to the cultural differences was the fact that not even the Kashmiri intelligentsia made any conscious attempt to establish inter-ethnic or civic groups. The communities engaged with each other, on issues of bureaucracy and commerce, only as a matter of need.

In diverse communities, like in Kashmir, communal harmony could be assured through "day-to-day" and "associational forms" of engagements between individuals of different religious groups. Everyday engagements, which are feasible in rural settings, bring together members of different communities to build neighborhood organizations and peace committees. This, in turn, creates amiability among the diverse groups. Continued close relationships among different groups induce the development of mutually beneficial organizations that assist in managing mishaps. Associational forms of engagements include trade unions, associations of businessmen, traders, teachers, doctors and lawyers. At the municipal level in Kashmir, the absence of associational forms of organizations involving Hindus and Muslims made it easy for divisiveness to establish itself (Varshney 2001, 375-378).
Associational organizations limit local politicians from enacting divisive policies. These associations encourage members to distinguish between constructive and destructive political strategic policies. When such countering organizations exist, they evaluate the potential loss that may arise from a communal conflict and oppose any action (governmental or nongovernmental) that would create communal friction (Varshney 2001, 378). Exposed to poor governance under Sheikh Abdullah’s administration and meddling from the Indian central government, Kashmiris believed their security could be provided by a government more representative of their own community. In the post-independence environment of Kashmir, the secular government of Sheikh Abdullah relied heavily on identity politics. While, on the one hand, his secular administration assured equal rights to minority Hindus; on the other hand, he introduced programs and policies that favored poor Kashmiri Muslims at the expense of Kashmiri Hindus.

In Kashmir, where intercommunal associations were practically nonexistent, politicians easily polarized Hindus and Muslims for electoral gains. They made use of extra-legal means to avoid scrutiny for ineffective governance. For example, Sheikh Abdullah’s government engaged the separatists in Kashmir to use terror tactics against the Indian government in Delhi (Ganguly 1997, 42-43). This resulted in the Kashmiri Hindu minority accusing the Kashmiri state government of engaging in terrorism and calling for help from the Indian government. Intervention from the central government in India would result into deployment of security forces to protect the minority. And, in the absence of any communal understanding, the Kashmiri Muslims would hold Kashmiri
Hindus responsible for the presence of the security forces and any violations of their autonomy. Kashmiri Hindus interpreted the objections from their counterparts as being sympathetic to acts of terrorism. This resulted in continued and mutual mistrust, and, rather than considering the realities that shape the political events in their society, they blamed each other.

Dr. Ashutosh Varshney, in his 2001 article, “Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond,” describes the impact of absence of intercommunal associations:

If the civic edifice is interethnic and associational, there is a good chance it can absorb ethnic earthquakes that register quite high on the Richter scale (a partition, a desecration of a holy place); if it is interethnic and quotidian, earthquakes of smaller intensity can bring the edifice down (defeat of an ethnic political party in elections, police brutality in particular city); but if engagement is only intraethnic, not interethnic, small tremors (unconfirmed rumors, victories and defeats in sports) can unleash torrents of violence. A multiethnic society with few connections across ethnic boundaries is very vulnerable to ethnic disorders and violence.

Historically and in the period following Indian independence (discussed above and in previous chapters), the absence of interethnic associations at rural and urban levels of the society made Kashmir susceptible to ethnic conflict.

Religion as an Element of Ethnic Conflict in Kashmir

From the advent of Islam in Kashmir to the formation of the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, all rulers either favored one religious group over the other or furthered their own political agendas at the behest of both. The Muslim Afghan rulers were not shy to employ the Kashmiri Pandits in their administration because the Pandits were proficient in Persian (Koul 1991, 19). The Dogra rulers employed the Kashmiri Pandits in their administration, as they were co-religionists (Zutshi 2004, 52). Some
Muslim rulers advanced their faith by expurgating Hindu religious practices, and the Dogra Hindu kings oppressed Muslims by adopting Hinduism as a state religion. As discussed on page 54 in chapter three: Muslim ruler Madad Khan humiliated and morally degraded the Kashmiri Hindus. Pandit parents would shave their daughters’ heads or cut off their noses to protect them from degradation. During this time, if a Muslim encountered a Pandit, he might jump and mount his back, and tell the Pandit to give him a ride, saying, “you are a Brahmin and I will mount you” (Lawrence 1895, 198).

Likewise, as discussed on page 10 in chapter one: Under the Hindu Dogra king, Kashmiri Hindu government officials benefited from selling the laborers (Kashmiri Muslims) to the state and to visiting foreigners. Referred to as begar, the forced sale of a poor man's service was common practice under Dogra rule. These poor, unskilled laborers worked without any hope of payment. They would get paid only when the visiting foreigner would intervene and insist that the laborer receives wages for his services that the laborer would be compensated. The Dogra rulers demonstrated little responsibility for their Muslim subjects (Zutshi 2004, 64-67).

This was a consistent pattern. Whenever a ruler in Kashmir favored one religion, they employed punitive measures to keep the other community in check. This style of governance resulted into a protectionist mentality amid both the communities. Both Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims considered themselves vulnerable, when they were under the rule of the other group. Additionally, while robust interethnic interaction (as discussed in the previous section) was absent, historically induced, divisive religious practices had created a robust intraethnic framework. Religious institutions sprung up to
alleviate the concerns of both religious groups. If Pakistan (from across the border) engaged into irredentist practices (against India) and used Kashmiri Muslims to its advantage, then Hindu nationalists, from within India, allayed Kashmiri Hindu fears.

The cumulative effect, of religious favoritism by rulers and the resulting insular tendencies among the adherents, made religion into a tool for all grievances, social and political. For the purposes of understanding religion in context with ethnic conflict, this study will use all three definitions of religion in an article by James and Özdamar:

1.) Religion bolstered and undermined the legitimacy of governments in Kashmir. This mostly occurred, when either one community claimed that an administration was too secular and not enough religious or the other community claimed that an administration was incapable of protecting minorities, because it was too religious.

2.) Religion became a source of identity for Hindus and Muslims, and helped them bond with others in their own religious group for realization of common goals. This was demonstrated when Kashmiri Muslims indiscriminately come together to oppose the government for freedom and, when Hindus organized to petition the government to resettle them in their original homeland (in Kashmir). Religion has also provided both communities with a group identity. The Muslims have a sense of shared plight with Muslims elsewhere, and the Hindus identify themselves with the broader Hindu community.

3.) Religion has provided Hindus and Muslims the capability of mobilizing and affecting the legitimacy of governments, and government policy. In Kashmir, it is difficult for any government to disregard Kashmiri Muslims, the majority ethnoreligious group, and remain in power. In India, no political party, secular or Hindu nationalist, can disregard the Kashmiri Hindus in exile, as the potential political fallout would be significant. (James and Özdamar 2005, 448; 455; 459 and 461)

Conclusively, as there is no consensus on the cause of ethnic conflict; and, if the presence of multiple ethnicities is not sufficient to cause conflict, then perhaps religion should be considered as a latent factor of ethnoreligious conflict (James and Özdamar 2005, 449; and Carment, James and Taydas 2009, 65 and 66). The ethnoreligious struggle
(as perceived by the involved actors) in Kashmir is for the common good of the religious group engaged in the conflict. The members of the religious group realize that forsaking some rational choices in the interest of the group is for a higher cause. In their common cause, they recognize that Islam (for Kashmiri Muslims) or Hinduism (for Kashmiri Hindus) is their cultural identity. Of all the available options, from nationalism to secular democracy, both communities eventually came to rely on religion as a source of political strength and social solutions. The poor conditions, in which a lot of Kashmiri Hindus still live in Delhi and Jammu, challenges rational thinking; they have used religion to make a political case for resettlement in Kashmir and pressurize the Indian government through Hindu nationalists. However, the foregoing does make sense, if explained in the words of Dr. Ariel Glucklich in his recent book, “Dying for Heaven”:

…the reason religions still thrive, is that this is the secret to reining in individual impulses for the sake of social values. The raison d’être of religious hedonics, as I call this technology, is the group. Religion makes a group cohere, and it does this by means of spiritual happiness. This is precisely what makes religion dangerous at the brink of a catastrophe such as a nuclear showdown. (Glucklich 2009, 288)

Periodic strife in Kashmir causes havoc for all Kashmiri Muslims; yet, they have accepted it; violence, in the name of religion, becomes a justifiable reason for freedom. Breakdown of government apparatus through strikes, riots and violence is all justified. Kashmiri Muslims, from the intelligentsia to religious clerics, all become a part of the opposition movement. In some cases, religion has provided the basis for violence against the other religious group. Again, Dr. Glucklich explains:

The prevailing assumption among religion scholars—as opposed to popular writers—is not that religion is intrinsically violent, but that it can somehow turn bad. Religion can be distorted, co-opted, or simply misunderstood in the name of aggressive agendas. At worst, one may suggest that religion contributes to
separate group identities or that it promotes absolute claims to truth and thus exacerbates preexisting conflicts. In that case, religion is no worse than nationalism, capitalism (or communism), or any other secular justification for human aggression. (Glucklich 2009, 287)

Conclusion

States are rational actors (checked by both international and domestic pressures) and they do not create a basis for civil unrest and violence in their society, unless there are calculated gains (real or imagined) in doing so. An example of planned gains would be Hitler’s Germany carrying out genocide against the Jews. In dealing with local, ethnic issues, the state of India has, thus far, militarily targeted perpetrators of civil unrest. While the state machinery has been responsible for the killing of innocent civilians, the government has not engaged in any systematic extermination of helpless civilians. While contending with regional civilian disturbances, the country cannot easily consider the separatist ideas of the region. As a rational actor, the state will review the boundaries of the disturbed territory within its sovereign borders and evaluate its relationship with the neighboring countries. In the case of Kashmir, India faces the “security dilemma” concept, a realist approach to internal conflict and cross-border tensions. In this realist concept, the international system is without an all-encompassing supreme body and the states have to be responsible for their own safety. The sovereign state, thus works assertively to become more powerful, as it is the sole source of security to its citizens and the balancing influence between different groups in the society (Carment, David, James, Patrick and Taydas, Zeynep 2009, 66).

The thesis question, “is letting go of Kashmir an option?” explains India's founding philosophy. It is not an option for India to give up Kashmir, because India's
founding principles are based on a secular, multicultural democracy. While Pakistan was founded on the basis of religion, India embraced secular principles and enshrined equal rights and dignity for citizens of all faiths. India’s inability in successfully retaining a region with minorities goes against its claims of being a multicultural democracy. Thus, to maintain its multiethnic identity, the Indian state is compelled to use every means at its disposal to keep the region of Kashmir within India’s sovereign borders. Conversely, Pakistan’s founding principles let it continue to claim the region of Kashmir, as the main constituency is Muslim, and justify its irredentist actions in pursuit of an unresolved territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Every time Pakistan engages in cross-border hostilities with India, it pressurizes India to clamp down on its minorities, for reasons of security. Pakistan also frustrates India’s foreign policy and attracts international attention. In response, India engages by investing more in its defense budget through outreach to the Indian Diaspora in the West and by using favorable partners in supranational institutions. This regional conflict hinders both India and Pakistan’s abilities to invest more in development projects and institutional improvements.

On a domestic level, ethnic conflict in Kashmir will be examined as an internal issue. First, the issue of autonomy and self-rule for Kashmir will be discussed; and, second, the question of viability of an independent country of Kashmir will be explored. Opposition parties like the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) assert claims for self-rule. For this option to be acceptable to all political parties in India, it will have to be considered under the Indian constitution. Additionally, the opposition parties in Kashmir may have to consider the issue of resettlement of Kashmiri Pandits. How an autonomous
region of Kashmir treats its minorities will be of interest to the broader Indian society. A
democratic party like the PDP must be able to ensure complete security and establish
democratic provisions for its legitimate Hindu minority. Furthermore, political parties
and groups seeking self-rule should be able to satisfy the skeptics in India that self-rule
(autonomy while remaining an Indian state) is not a cloaked strategy to assist in finally
breaking free from India. These groups should be able to articulate the reasons why
Kashmir should not remain within the Indian constitutional framework. The groups must
be able to define how they will convince Pakistan to relinquish its more than fifty-year
old claim to Kashmir. In the case of independence for Kashmir, India will need a clear
understanding of how the new country would defend itself from China and Pakistan; and,
consequently, India must consider how secure it will be with a weak and unprotected
buffer country between itself and its hostile neighbors. The broader Indian society and
national opposition parties in India will raise questions about critical issues of security
and territorial integrity vis-à-vis Kashmir. While exploring their options, separatist
groups, political parties and social movements must be cognizant of the fact that the
Indian state may not engage on any options, as it may fear a domino effect in others parts
of the country. The disintegration of India is not what any ruling party in Delhi can sign-
off on, which means that they may maintain status quo. The negotiating parties (whoever
they may be) from Kashmir, in discussing their plans, must prepare for any contingency.
If the region wishes to have peace, then its arbiters will have to be creative.

In terms of recommendations for managing ethnic issues in Kashmir, the Indian
state must be proactive in engaging ethnic minorities and dissenting groups. These groups
must be provided with efficient institutional avenues for the expression of ethnic
grievances and interests. The federal system in India needs to be stronger; the Indian
military cannot always be a resolve. Local law enforcement must be incentivized and
trained to be better arbiters in a local incident. However, the Indian government needs to
consider the constitution as a living document. What was possible at the time of the
founding of the country may not even be a viable option today. A like example can be
found in the American constitution, which did not provide for suffrage for women or
rights and freedom for Blacks in the society. However, through amendments, both groups
were eventually accommodated. Likewise, India should uniformly apply the Indian
constitution to all its states (including Kashmir), so that states’ characters remain in
accord with India’s national identity. However, as needed, amendments must be made to
accommodate exceptional issues, like ethnicity and religion, which will facilitate the
smooth functioning of the multiethnic identity of the country.

As a multicultural society, India must consider the issue of multiple identities and
loyalties as parallels and not contending factors of citizenship. Granting special status to
citizens or groups who exhibit ethnic or religious personalities is fear-based politics,
which the state of India cannot consider. Whether these ethnic groups are marginalized
minorities who need social care or dissenting minorities in Kashmir who need
institutional intervention, the state of India cannot employ hasty short-term solutions to
meet these critical needs. In order to bolster and maintain the country’s legitimacy, India
must emerge as a state that views security as a response to hostility. Ethic dissent
emanating from citizens must be reviewed in the realm of cultural solutions. Strong
intercommunal networks and interethnic associations must be created to absorb shocks from dissent. Such institutions build upon an all-important founding principle of India, multiculturalism. When supported by strong civic institutions, multiculturalism becomes an ideology. It helps in forging common identities, while maintaining ethnic integrity. Concerted efforts on the part of the Indian state to engage dissenting communities in Kashmir and in the Northeast through civic networks will facilitate positive outcomes. Dissenting Indian citizens must be convinced that their ethnic and religious identity is an asset.
REFERENCE LIST


