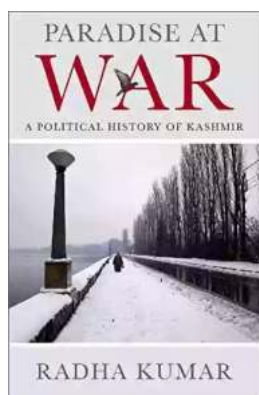


# The Long and Tumultuous Political History of Kashmir: Unveiling the Struggles and Stagnation

The region of Kashmir, nestled in the northernmost part of the Indian subcontinent, has long been a hotbed of political turmoil and contention. With a captivating history dating back centuries, this article aims to shed light on the ongoing struggle for self-determination and the complex dynamics that have kept Kashmir at the center of regional tensions between India and Pakistan.

In order to fully comprehend the present-day political landscape of Kashmir, it is crucial to delve into its historical context. The origins of Kashmir's political struggles can be traced back to the early 14th century when the region began facing external invasions. The powerful Mughal Empire, followed by the Afghan and Sikh empires, fought for control over the strategically important territory.

However, it was in the 19th century when Kashmir's fate took a major turn. Under the British Raj, the region became a princely state with a Hindu ruler and a predominantly Muslim population. This stark religious divide laid the seeds for future unrest and ongoing conflicts.



**Paradise at War: A Political History of Kashmir: A definitive yet accessible study of perhaps the most troubled part of India** by Radha Kumar (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 2844 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 392 pages



Fast forward to 1947 and the partition of British India, which ignited one of the most significant turning points in Kashmir's political history. The partition resulted in the formation of India and Pakistan as separate nations, with Kashmir finding itself at the heart of an intense territorial dispute.

Soon after partition, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, initially chose to remain independent. However, facing pressure from both India and Pakistan, he signed the Instrument of Accession, officially bringing Kashmir under Indian control. This move triggered the first Indo-Pak war over Kashmir, setting the stage for decades of conflict and tension between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

In the years that followed, the situation in Kashmir continued to deteriorate. The people of the region, especially the Muslim majority, gradually started demanding their right to self-determination. However, India, staunchly asserting its dominion, refused to grant Kashmiris their desired autonomy.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Kashmir became a battleground for various political and armed movements. The indigenous struggle for independence intensified, resulting in protests, strikes, and a violent insurgency in the late 1980s.

As the political landscape of Kashmir evolved, so did the methods employed by both India and Pakistan to exert their influence. India adopted a firm stance, positioning its military presence in the region to combat the insurgency and

preserve its territorial claim. Meanwhile, Pakistan supported separatist groups and fueled anti-Indian sentiment, thereby exacerbating the tensions and the human cost of the conflict.

Amidst this backdrop, the aspirations of the Kashmiri people for self-determination often went unheard. The United Nations, concerned about the escalating tensions, passed multiple resolutions urging a fair and impartial plebiscite to determine the future of Kashmir. However, the resolutions were never effectively implemented, leaving the region in a state of perpetual limbo.

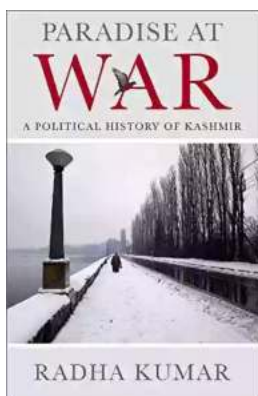
The 21st century brought minimal respite to the region, as sporadic clashes and incidents of violence continued to mar the lives of the people of Kashmir. However, this period also witnessed renewed international attention on the Kashmir issue, with global powers urging India and Pakistan to engage in dialogue and find a peaceful resolution.

The political history of Kashmir exemplifies the complex dynamics involving multiple stakeholders. Besides India and Pakistan, China also lays claim to certain regions within the territory, further complicating the situation. Moreover, the aspirations of the Kashmiri people remain a key driver in shaping the political discourse, with their demand for self-determination intensifying over the years.

In recent years, a renewed sense of hope has emerged as peaceful dialogues between India and Pakistan have taken place. However, the road to a lasting resolution is still long and winding, requiring immense political will and compromise from all parties involved.

, the political history of Kashmir is a story of struggle, stagnation, and unresolved conflicts. The region's rich past, shaped by a blend of conquests, religious schisms, and geopolitical chess, has left an indelible mark on the aspirations of

its people. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, the determination to achieve peace and self-determination in Kashmir persists, echoing the sentiment that a lasting solution is not only crucial for the region but also for the stability and harmony of South Asia as a whole.



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‘A political scientist on Kashmir once said to me: “You cannot discuss Kashmir, or the Kashmir conflict, without starting with history.” In this way begins Radha Kumar’s political history of Kashmir, a book that attempts to give the reader a definitive yet accessible study of perhaps the most troubled part of India.

Beginning with references to Kashmir as ‘a sacred geography’ in the Puranas, Kumar’s account moves forward in time through every major development in the region’s history. It grapples with the seemingly intractable issues that have turned the state into a battleground and tries to come up with solutions that are realistic and lasting.

Situating the conflict in the troubled geopolitics of Kashmir’s neighbourhood, Kumar unpicks the gnarled tangle of causes that have led to the present troubles in the region, from wars and conquest to Empire and the growth of nationalism;

the troubled accession of the state to India by Maharaja Hari Singh amidst partition; Pakistani attacks and the rise of the Cold War; the politics of the various parts of the former princely state including Jammu and Kashmir, and the areas administered by Pakistan; the wars that followed and the attempts that Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri leaders, starting with Sheikh Abdullah and Jawaharlal Nehru, made to find peaceful solutions, including taking the Kashmir issue to the UN, which had unintended consequences for India; the demand for plebiscite; the Simla Agreement, turning the ceasefire line into the Line of Control; communal riots in the 1980s and the growth of insurgency; increase in security forces in the state in the 1990s leading to public resentment; and the guerrilla occupation of Hazratbal, the fifteenth-century mosque. Showing that a changed Post-Cold War milieu offered new opportunities for peacemaking that were restricted by domestic stresses in Pakistan, Kumar analyses the Lahore Declaration and its undoing with the Kargil operation; the morphing of insurgency into an Islamist jihad against India; India's attempts to parley with separatist groups; and the progress made towards a Kashmir solution via peace talks by various Indian and Pakistani governments between 2002 and 2007.

Kumar's descriptions of the contemporary situation—the impact of 9/11 and the war on terrorism; the Afghan war and the Mumbai attacks which created pressure on Pakistan to take action against radical Islamists; the blowback in Pakistan resulting in the growing radicalization of Pakistani institutions such as the judiciary and its spillover in Kashmir; the Indian government's failure to move Kashmir into a peacebuilding phase; the trouble with

AFSPA; the anti-India feelings that were triggered by counter-insurgency responses in 2010, the contentious coalition of 2014 and the killing of suspected terrorist Burhan Wani in 2016— underline the tragedies which ensue when conditions, timing and strategy are mismatched.

Drawing on her experience as a government interlocutor, Kumar chastises the Indian government for never failing ‘to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory when it comes to the state’s political grievances’. Equally, she shows how Pakistan’s Kashmir policy has been ‘an unmitigated disaster’. While arguing that India can do a great deal to reduce violence and encourage reconciliation within the former princely state, she concludes that if Kashmir is ever to move towards lasting peace and stability, the major stakeholders as well as regional and international actors will need to work together on the few feasible options that remain.

Timely and authoritative, the book cuts through the rhetoric that cloaks Kashmir to give the reader a balanced, lucid and deeply empathetic view of the state, its politics and its people.



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