

Challenges Facing by Muslim Community: An Analysis of Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

Islam is the second biggest religion in the world. It has 1.21 billion adherents and making over 23% of the world population (Census 2011). The Muslim community is facing many challenges like ethnic, religious, gender, security, and women rights. The most important challenge to Muslim community all over the world is now terrorism, relating to the phrase that all Muslims are not terrorists, however all terrorists are Muslims. There is a great burden on Muslim community leaders to meet these challenges with an eye to the future. Jammu and Kashmir which is having Muslim majority in the valley are facing many challenges on the local as well as on national level particularly. From 1947 Jammu and Kashmir became a tension among India and Pakistan. Both the countries are trying to use the sentiments of a particular sect for their advantages. Muslims in Kashmir are being divided on the basis on casteism, peerism, Sufism and fundamentalism. Besides that some government agencies are dividing the Muslim community into Shia, Sunni, Pahrís and Bakerwals. The most important challenge which Muslims are facing in the valley is security and identity. Psychological fear was set up permanently in the minds of Muslim community of Kashmir, as they may be suspected as terrorists. This paper will focus on identity and ethnicity of the Muslim community in Kashmir and highlight the various issues that are prevalent in the valley.

Keywords: Insurgency; Identity; Security; Ethnicity; Religious diversity

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the heart of Asia. It is situated between 32.17 and 35.58 degree north latitude and 32.26 and 80.30 degree east longitude. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was formed on 26th October, 1947. The state covers an area of 2, 22,236 sq. kms and is the sixth largest state in terms of area. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is surrounded by Himachal Pradesh in its south as well as neighboring countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and China from west, north and east respectively [1] (Figure 1).

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into three regions namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The state, which had earlier been under Hindu rulers and Muslim sultans, became the part of the Mughal Empire in 1586. Various rulers ruled over the state for various years, among them are Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and dogras. In 1846, the Britishers handed Kashmir to Gulab Singh under the treaty of Amritsar (Table 1).

Kashmir is a land of remarkable beauty, blessed by nature with breath taking. Scenery and a glorious climate, the Kashmir valley, a fertile well-watered spot, surrounded by high mountains has been described with justification a heaven on earth, a produce rich oasis an area not noted for its abundance [2]. In the nineteenth century the state of Jammu and Kashmir has acquired a unique geo-political status in the Indian sub-continent. The state has contiguous boundaries with Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Tibet that deserve constant vigil and as such it has made the state very important through geographically, politically, economically and from the military point of view [3] (Table 2).

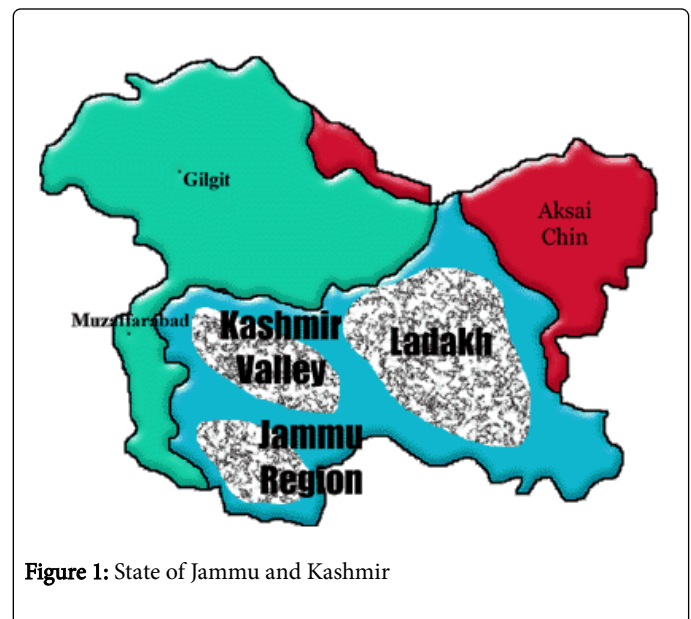


Figure 1: State of Jammu and Kashmir

From 1947, Jammu and Kashmir remained under Indian control and the state was forcefully submerged with the Indian union. The diverse population of Jammu and Kashmir includes Muslims (Majority), Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists which in turn represent several ethnicities, language groups and castes [4]. The most important aspect of this state is that it became a flash point among India and Pakistan, as the people of Kashmir was given the right of plebiscite. There are various views among the masses as some wants to join Pakistan, India and some wants to remain independent. With the state of Jammu and Kashmir became a conflict of India, Pakistan and china [5].

Region	Areas (Sq. Miles)	Population (2011 (Provisional) census)
Kashmir valley	8,639	5,35,0811
Jammu region	12,378	69,07,623
Ladakh region	33,554	2,90,492
Total	54,571	1,25,48,926

Table 1: Population in Three Regions, Source: National Disaster Risk Reduction Portal

Description	As per census, 2011
No. of districts	22
No. of tehsils	84
No. of blocks	143
No. of panchayats	4128
No. of towns	86
No. of cities with million plus population	02 (Jammu and Srinagar)
Total	2,22,236 sq. Kms

Table 2: 2011 Census, Source: National Disaster Risk Reduction Portal

The chaos of the region has been compounded by different ideas of nationalism which have emerged in India and Pakistan and are now competing to make influence in the Jammu and Kashmir. These nationalist ideas are championed by extremist insurgent groups which represent themselves as freedom fighters and claim to represent the border section of the masses. These insurgents misinterpreted religious beliefs and religious fundamentalism to gather popular support. The state also contains a mixture of local freedom fighters and foreign terrorists who disguise themselves as freedom fighters, claiming to defend all Muslims and the Islamic faith in the valley particularly [4].

Rise of Insurgency

The insurgency itself embedded in the dispute between India and Pakistan however, started as a movement for independence of Kashmiri Muslims called as "Azaadi" (freedom) [6]. In 1986 the Muslims founded their own party known as Muslim united front. The (MUF) contested elections in 1987. They were not only defeated but the main leaders of the party were arrested [7]. With this armed militant group existed and exploded a bomb in the main city in 1989 and this group came to be known as Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). This group attracted educated, unemployed Muslim youth from the valley [8]. In 1989 the leaders of JKFL kidnapped the daughter of India's home minister. The Indian government sent security forces to J&K to break down the rebellion created by insurgents. With this human rights violation came into existence on both sides [7]. The authorities declared Kashmir as disturbed area act and implemented various laws like AFSPA and PSA. This gives free hands to the security forces to do genocide of innocent Muslims on the basis of suspicion [9]. The insurgency split up into three phases. The first phase was from 1990 to 1996, where insurgents focused on urban

areas of Kashmir. The second phase was from 2001 to 2002, in which the insurgency spread rural areas mostly and also entered in some districts of Jammu. The third phase is from 2002 to today and this phase is low intensity insurgency [10].

The women's of the Kashmir valley becomes the victims of insurgency. The women's were killed in cross firing, blown up in explosions and have been raped by both security forces as well as militants [11]. Urvashi Bhutalia [12] argues that in religious identities women's are targeted mostly. The women's identity becomes objectified as one that can be used to dishonor the other community. Rape becomes a weapon of war. Both security forces and militants have used rape in order to humiliate the Muslim community by violating women's [12].

The Identity and Religious Diversity of Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir is highly diverse society that reflects a multi-layered identity politics. The diversity ranging from religious to the cultural and generates the picture of complexity. In J&K, the three regions have one section majority and other sections in minority. In Jammu Hindus are in majority and Muslims are in minority. Same is the case of Kashmir and ladakh region. In Kashmir Muslims are in majority and Hindus are in minority while as, in ladakh region Buddhists are in majority and Muslims are in minority.

The demographic complexity of the state does not exhaust with the religious plurality. However regional identities differentiate the Kashmiri pundits from the Hindus of Jammu, the Kashmiri Muslims and from Jammu Muslims and ladakh Muslims from both Jammu and Kashmiri Muslims. The caste identity is very crucial only for Jammu region, while as tribal identity operates in a crucial manner not only for ladakhis, but all Muslim groups of Gujjars, who distinguish themselves from other Muslims on the basis of their identity.

In diverse society of J&K, each identity maker is internally differentiated with others and assumes a complex character. There is no clear cut of the majority or minority. The one who collects numerical strength also simultaneously voices its victimization as minority. Thus the Kashmiri identity politics while asserting the numerical dominance within the state bemoans the marginalization of Kashmiris and Muslims in larger context of the Indian state.

The Islamic national identity started in Indian sub-continent in 1906, when elites from various Muslim communities joined to form the All India Muslim League. In 1932 a group of young educated Muslims formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference to coordinate the popular movement against the Maharaja, calling for social justice and a democratic government [13]. In 1938 the strictly Islamic movement started to take multi factional national character. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah recast the previous movement into All Jammu and Kashmir National conference and opened the doors for Hindus Muslims and Sikhs to revive the inter-religious tolerance commonly known as Kashmiriyat and prepared them to join in the freedom struggle for an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir [4].

Conflict in Kashmir Ethnic

The ethnic conflict around the world is a reality. The conflicts that arise from ethnicity related factors are as important and laid impacts on international relations such as political and economic globalization, the balance of power, regionalization, terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Ethnic conflicts can have an important religious dimension. Religion plays an important element of ethnicity; in fact some ethnic groups have their primary origin in religion. Kashmir is a prime example of ethno-religious conflict. Kashmir is considered as a major conflict on the earth. Its origin dates back to the partition of the British colonial empire after world war second. Kashmir is treated as homogenous unit however; it is actually the opposite in terms of demography, religion, culture, ethnicity and language.

Apart from religious variances, ethnic divisions between Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists were exacerbated by their territorial dispersion throughout the state caused irredentist, even secessionist, demands in Pakistan, India and within Kashmir itself. The main source of conflict in Kashmir has been religious and ethno-secessionist groups that are present there. Besides that both India and Pakistan are trying to use their sentiments for their advantage. Both countries tried to divide the state on the basis of religion. In post- nineties scenario Muslims were already divided on the basis of casteism, Sufism, peerism and fundamentalism.

In the present time Muslims were divided into many sects on the basis of religion. The sects are tableegis, al- hades, jamaat-i-islami and bravelli. These sects created hatred among the Muslim majority in Kashmir. These sects divided Muslims and performing their own rituals, customs and gatherings. Besides that the people of Kashmiri are divided into Shia, Sunni, Pahrirs and Bakerwals. The urban-rural division is also surfacing in the valley. All these events may demolish the plural society in Kashmir on the basis of such religious basis [14].

While talking about regional and religious radicalization of J&K, the Kashmiri Muslim monolith pitted against Jammu and Ladakh is always misunderstood. The three regions of the state are divided for all practical purposes, except in the official map. The fact is that the ethnic groups of Jammu Dogras and Ladakh Buddhists are pitted against the Kashmiri speaking Muslims [15]. The ethnic conflicts in the valley become a major challenge and politicians used these conflicts during election times and created hatredness among the masses. Such ethnic conflict becomes a great challenge not for Kashmiri Muslims but also for whole Muslim community around the world.

Conclusion

The state of Jammu and Kashmir with the majority of Muslim population has been struggling for identity over the last sixty years. The people have articulated their political demands in a multiple ways including the use of religious metaphors that has continued and

sustained in the insurgency discourse. The construction of coercion put by India in the valley to control the people creates perverse incentives for different bureaucratic, security and political interests. The basic need is that Indian government give up the culture of suspicion towards Muslims of Kashmiri that were considered as terrorists all over the country.

Besides that religion was divided into many sects in Kashmir only for the political benefits and created hatredness among the Muslims. Apart from these the valley is far behind the developments due to Muslim majority population. It is duty for all citizens of the country that Muslims of valley particularly should be treated as inhabitants of this secular country (India) and avoids remarking against them, recognize their feelings and support them for their lost identity (Kashmiriyat).

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