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Kashmir: A Victim of Ancient Imperial Shuffles and Modern National Disputes. P.1

Kashmir continues to be the victim of a long history of ancient imperial shuffling, and contemporary nation-state border disputes, inherited from a long history of heterogeneity, unassimilable ethnic and nationalistic allegiances, and irreconcilable sectarian and religious divisions.



It is understandable why some analysts would call “Kashmir” the “Palestine” of South Asia, as both conflicts have been brewing and causing nonstop geopolitical problems, military wars, and intermittent border skirmishes for more than seven decades. Both conflicts carry

deeper histories that lead to contemporary ongoing syndromes that leave no space for any hope for a final peaceful resolution.

The melting pot of Kashmir, couldn't help but fall under the influence and yoke of different sects, ethnicities, religions, tribes, and empires, who contributed to creating this inflammable heritage

It might be safe to expand, Former US President Bill Clinton's description of Kashmir as "*The World's most dangerous flashpoint*", to include both spots, Palestine and Kashmir. Even though, the two conflicts, developed from completely dissimilar contemporary and historical roots.

Kashmir, a chronic 78-year-old conflict that ignited about the same time when Palestine was occupied, after the Nakba of 1948. However, if we elect to take a journey into the history of this conflicted area, we would need to pay a quick visit to an ancient historical timeline, to lead us into the crucial period of the 1st half of the 19th century in the history of this diverse region.

But first, let's take a quick trek into the ancient history of this extremely heterogeneous area of the Peninsula Plateau of India. Starting from the ancient Vedic period and the settlements of Uttara-kurus in Kashmir, passing through an Alliance between the Kasmira King Abisares, and the Indian King Porus, against Alexander the Great during the Battle of Hydaspes in 326 BCE.

Then, the area went through the short-lived Maurya Empire era, the most famous king during which, was Ashoka the Great. An era that witnessed both Buddhism and Hinduism being introduced to the "Kashmiri" population. This resulted in the spread of Buddhism into China, especially the Tibetan Plateau, and attracted back many pilgrims and ethnic mixing to the Kashmiri melting pot.

Followed by a period of Hun rule, which ended with the Alchon Hun King Toramana, gaining control over Kashmir, among vast areas of Western India. After horrible atrocities committed against the Sikhs at the hands of the Huns and a defeat by the latter at the hands of the Indian Gupta Emperor Baladitya, the Huns' reign faded into oblivion, leaving space for the 3rd Emperor of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, Gaozong, and his second wife Empress Wu, to take the helm of power over Kashmir, among other key cities across vast areas of Central Asia.

Followed by around 7 centuries of Hindu dynasties (7th to 14th Century CE), who shuffled the ruling scepter over Kashmir, during which Kashmir Shaivism flourished. A period of history interrupted only by two failed attempts in the 11th Century CE to take control over

Kashmir from the Hindu Lohara Dynasty, by the Muslim Ghaznavid Empire, during the rule of Sultan Mahmud ibn Sabuktigin.

Around 300 years later, after a long rule of the Lohara Dynasty, marred with a long list of cruel feudalism, corruption, oppression, heavy taxes, and ceaseless internal fights. There rose a Tibetan Buddhist refugee named Rinchana, who mutinied and rose to rule an area in Kashmir called Zulju, and later converted to Islam, at the behest of his Minister Shah Mir, and used the help of Kashmiri Muslims to establish an Islamic Sultanate.

However, the one who founded a Muslim dynasty in 1339, was his Minister, Shamsuddin Shah Mir, who became the 2nd Sultan of Kashmir, and his Dynasty ruled after him for more than 300 years. During which, Hinduism and the Sanskrit alphabet gradually disappeared from “Kashmiri” literature, as Islam became the dominant religion and the Persian script unseated Sanskrit on paper, although not entirely in dialect.

Islamic Sheikh “Nooruddin Noorani”, the founder of the “Rishi Order”, is a perfect illustration of the intricate Kashmiri religious fusion and confusion. As this Muslim Sufi is revered by the Kashmiri Hindus as “Nund Rishi”. And despite his teachings being centered around religious harmony, pacifism, and equality, you can imagine how the overpass Noorani has founded between Islamic Sufism and Hindu Shaivism in Kashmir, can be used in the opposite direction in moments of conflict.

During the 7th decade of the 15th Century, the states of Rajauri, Poonch, and Jammu, who were at the time paying tributes to Kashmir, rose against Kashmiri Sultan Haider Shāh, but their revolt was thwarted by his son Hasan Shāh.

The influence of Hindu Brahmin priests continued its decline, as the sway of Muslim Scholars and Sheikhs soared, and the numbers of Muslim emissary migrations into Kashmir increased.

Muslim domination continued even after the Chinese Muslim Mughals from Xinjiang, led by Haidar Dughlat, successfully invaded Kashmir and became Governor of Kashmir, at the behest of the Mughal Emperor Nasir al-Din Muhammad (Humayun), who succeeded his Father Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in the Indian Subcontinent.

It was not until the Mughal Emperor, Akbar the Great, that Kashmir was directly ruled by the Mughal Imperial throne. Despite a period that witnessed great artistic architecture and infrastructure development in Kashmir under the Mughals, religious bigotry and prejudiced taxation policies quickly rose again during the reign of Mughal Emperor Alamgir I (a.k.a.: Aurangzeb), in the mid-17th Century.

The expected decline of the Muslim Mughal rule over Kashmir, induced the rise of the Afghan Durrani Empire, starting from the reign of the founder of modern Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Durrani. Things did not get better for Kashmir, as the Durrani era was blighted by, forced religious conversions against Hindus, forced labor, slavery, and indiscriminate oppressive taxes against Kashmiris of all sects and ethnicities. This nightmare lasted for 400 years, until the fall of the Durrani rulers, handing the mantle to the Sikhs in 1819 CE.

Although initially welcomed as saviors from the yoke of the Durrani Empire by Kashmiris, it quickly turned into a renewal of the same nightmarish rule. The Sikhs enacted anti-Muslim laws, like banning the Azaan (Muslim call for prayers), closing Mosques, and death sentences for cow slaughter. High taxes were levied on Kashmiris as usual and were never reduced until the province was hit by a Famine.

European Orientalists who visited the area, wrote about the horrible conditions of poverty, high taxes, and oppression, especially of Kashmiri Muslims during the Sikh rule, although Muslim peasants were the biggest contributors to the Sikh Empire's revenue stream, as Kashmiri Shawls made of local wool, became a globally renowned and sought-after product. Maybe that's what caught the attention of the British "East India Company", who attacked and defeated the Sikhs under the leadership of the acting Governor of "Sikh-ruled Kashmir" Shaikh Imam-ud-Din, in the Battle of Sobraon in 1846.

By 1846, political instability was growing following the Sikh defeat in the First Anglo-Sikh War. Under the Treaty of Lahore, signed on 9 March 1846, the Sikh Maharaja was compelled to cede the Kashmir Valley and other territories to the British as war reparations, officially removing Kashmir from the Sikh Kingdom.

Starting a century of rule by the "Dogra Dynasty" Maharajas of the "Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir", a subsidiary state of the East India Company until 1858, and then under the paramountcy of the British Crown, until the partition of India in 1947.

This was but an extremely shortened summary of the Imperial shuffling of Kashmir between several empires. The melting pot of Kashmir, couldn't help but fall under the influence and yoke of different sects, ethnicities, religions, tribes, and empires, who contributed to creating this inflammable heritage, that Kashmir itself and the world in general have to deal with today.

Kashmir continues to be the victim of a long history of ancient imperial shuffling, and contemporary nation-state border disputes, inherited from a long history of heterogeneity, unassimilable ethnic and nationalistic allegiances, and irreconcilable sectarian and religious divisions.

We have covered only the historical Imperial shuffle part, not to mention when we decide to go through the border disputes of modern nation-states sharing divided control over Kashmir, what happened to this ceaselessly aggrieved area, from 1947 until the present moment.

Judging by Kashmir's historical timeline, this last incident with the terrorist attack on Hindu tourists, on the outskirts of Pahalgam, in the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, is but the latest recurrence of a chronic conflict that is not expected to see its end anytime in the near -or even far-future.

To be continued...

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