

Chapter 4

External Factors in Kashmiri Nationalism

Introduction

The chapter looks at the external factors that influence Kashmiri nationalism. It examines the intervention of various political actors through the theoretical structure of civic and ethnic nationalism. It tries to determine whether political actors have changed their positions with the changing geopolitical situations. The first section looks at the relationship between the Kashmiri diaspora and Kashmiri nationalism, as well as how, other than maintaining remittances, this group performs the function of imagining Kashmir outside the geographical confines of India and Pakistan. The second section looks at how Pakistan functions as a factor in Kashmiri nationalism and how, through deploying centralising tendencies, it has tried to contain Kashmiri nationalism within Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (Pck). The following section maps how Pakistan uses irredentism as a policy position to counter the narrative of Kashmiri nationalism.

The Diaspora and Kashmiri Nationalism

The section looks at the diaspora as an object of analysis to consider the relationship between global and local in the context of Kashmiri nationalism. The diaspora is the transnational community that contests the state's power and performs essential functions for the continuity of

political movements. Bhaba (1990:11) argues that in a global field dominated by a geopolitical paradigm of the nation-state, the imperfectly assimilated or unassimilated inhabitants of the margins of the nation-state constitute a subversive subjectivity, contesting nation-states' claim to legitimacy. Diasporic populations entail the plurality of polities within, creating a new alignment of self to the other. Alongside the process of de-territorialization, the political subjectivity of an individual gets reconstituted with an imaginary coherence. Hall (1990:53) understands that displaced people cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places, or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny firm territorialised anchors in their actuality. In this sense, diasporic subjects simultaneously reflect the bi-focality of engagement with struggles in both the homeland and the new geography.

In the context of Kashmir, the continuing dispute resulted in large-scale displacements of the Kashmiri population — the migration movements from the valley date several centuries with environmental and economic push factors. Consequently, there has been a regular Kashmiri presence outside Kashmir. In the modern historical context, the first migration accompanied the partition and bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir territory. The political situation of 1947 resulted in a massive migration from Jammu province. Subsequently, during the wars of 1965 and 1971, substantial migration occurred again from the Jammu province. Rollier (2011:85) elaborates that “those displaced in 1947–1949, mainly from the Jammu province, constitute the majority of this population. Mostly, these migrants were allocated property in the main cities of northern Punjab and eastern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Those displaced in the wars of 1965 and 1971 were also resettled in Punjab, even though many of this generation and their descendants have now moved to Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi”. Since the onset of armed militancy in 1989, more Kashmiris, mainly from Srinagar this time, have crossed over to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (PcK) and Pakistan. While most of them fled as entire families or villages after the state's violent counterinsurgency practices, others crossed the LOC in search of militant training. Most of them were accommodated in refugee camps across PcK.

However, Mirpuris is the largest group that channelled the discontent and displacement towards a diasporic solid formulation. Though culturally and geographically, they are closer to Punjab, allegiance to the erstwhile territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the subsequent displacement by the Pakistani state fostered a sense of unique Kashmiri identity in them. The source of displacement was not direct military intervention but the dam construction in the 1950s and 1960s. The dam project started in the 1950s, aiming at confining waters of rivers Jhelum and Poonch to increase the irrigation of Punjab and generate electricity for the area. Initially, around 13,000 were relocated, but the bulk of the population was relocated over time. Sayyid (2000) notes that the reason for the significant displacement of Kashmiris to the United Kingdom was the dam project, which intended to confine the waters that flowed through parts of Pck.

Given the shortcomings in education and social capital, the dam project mass displaced the inhabitants who joined the labour force in northern Britain. Gradually, this diaspora became vital as it sent back remittances and became repositories of the political act of imagining the homeland outside the confines of India and Pakistan. In this new space, the experience of the shared past and constant displacements mobilised this disenfranchised population around a wide range of identity issues. Subsequently, they resulted in a redefinition of the Kashmiri identity. This memory of this migration was seen as a reminder of many such political migrations at the high-handedness of the two countries vis-a-vis Kashmir.

This diaspora in the United Kingdom gradually emerged as a significant entity. Ballard (1991), through his analysis of emigration from Punjab and Pck, approximated that most of the Pakistanis in the UK are, in fact, from Pak-controlled Kashmir — the reasons for displacement range from militarised to non-militarised. The Mangla dam displacement initially relocated around 13000 inhabitants, but over some time, most of the population was eventually relocated.

The process of displacement, though, came along with misery but started a process of articulation of Kashmiri identity. Ali (1996) writes that Kashmiri identity in Britain engages at the individual and the collec-

tive levels. The identification is not with the current territory but with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The familial ties across the cease-fire line further augment the emotional value of the homeland. Though there is no linguistic affinity between the Kashmir valley and the parts of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, it does not impede the inhabitants of this territory from identifying with Kashmir. The entire process ensures the preservation and reliving of memories of the homeland through a collaborative effort. The Mirpuri community developed a somewhat idealised account of their place of origin. It disseminated that if allowed to return to their homeland, the community could overcome the sense of subjugation. This strong sense of returning to the motherland is substantiated by the fact that there has not been a nationalistic closure in the case of Kashmir.

Though the Mirpuris are economic migrants, the community sees itself as a 'nation in exile', done by the relative positioning. Of what the diaspora defines itself against, like the assimilationist policies of the nation-states of India and Pakistan. Like other diasporas, the Kashmiri diaspora also shares an inappropriate connection with nationalism. The diaspora requires a strong sense of self as a nation to provide a coherent, unified understanding of collective identity in territorial dispersal. So, evoking shared history and culture through myths and memories becomes all the more important. Several interviewees used the phrase 'Nation in exile' to describe the Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom. On being asked further, they replied, "that Kashmiri diaspora deterritorialises the notion of Kashmir and therefore projected an idea of Kashmir not founded on the bounded territory". Several explanations are provided to justify the presence of the Kashmiri diaspora. The first classifies Kashmiris as national people and a distinct ethnic group with the right to self-determination. The second presents the Kashmiri diaspora as victims of political oppression and unified by the experience of being part of the liberation struggle. Evans (2005) writes that after the commencement of militancy, many in the diaspora found it more likeable to identify as Kashmiris as opposed to as Mirpuris. The latter often got stereotyped by urban Pakistanis and Kashmiris.

The Kashmiri diaspora in Britain has tried to articulate Kashmiri identity as being a nation by ethnic identification as Kashmiris and not Pakistanis. Ballard (1991) notes that the change in ethnic self-ascription is also a political move as it enables an articulation of the deep resentment felt by the people in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir towards the treatment given by the Pakistani government. For the 2001 census in the United Kingdom, Kashmiri diasporic organisations came together to ensure that Kashmiris are counted as Kashmiris and not as Pakistanis or Indians. From door-to-door campaigning to bringing out printed pamphlets, it was ensured that the Kashmiri population marked itself as 'other' and wrote 'Kashmiri' in the given box. Ali (2002) writes that Kashmiris in Britain have only recently appeared as a separate ethnic group. Previously, Kashmiris mostly got subsumed under a Pakistan, a generic Asian identity, or a regional category. Consequently, this led to exclusion regarding resources, opportunities, and services compared to other ethnic identities. The fundamental argument that my interviewees shared was, "We were given a rough deal in Pakistan."

However, if we don't assert our separate identity, we will never be able to have our homeland."¹ This de-territorializes the notion of Kashmir beyond the geographical boundaries and re-theorizes the national imaginary. Given the Indian and Pakistani nation-states' hostility towards Kashmiri nationalism, the Kashmiri diaspora became a major theatre for the performance of Kashmiri nationalism. This brings us to the question of how solidarity works towards achieving a homeland and how, through Kashmiri nationalism, the diaspora is decontextualised and spread across the world.

Following the efforts of organisations like the Kashmiri National Identity Campaign (KNIC), local councils in the United Kingdom, such as Bradford Metropolitan Council, Rochdale Metropolitan Council, Kirklees Metropolitan Council, Luton Borough Metropolitan Council, Oldham Metropolitan Council, Pendle Borough Council, and Leeds City Metropolitan Council, have recognised Kashmiris as a distinct ethnic

1 Telephonic interview with Habib Rehman, Kashmiri diaspora activist dated 16 May 2016.

community. A systematic program was launched to acknowledge Pahari as a separate language instead of a Punjabi dialect. The growth of Pahari can be gauged by Pahari television channels being aired on satellite television.

The discourse of Kashmiri nationalism operates in various spaces and levels. It may be expressed through oral narratives at an individual level and in the form of shop names, community organisations and special events at the community level. In cities like Birmingham, Bradford, and Luton, Kashmir is a name for retail outlets, restaurants, convenience stores, travel agents, etc. In common parlance, Birmingham is often called Chota Kashmir or Little Kashmir. To evoke memories of the homeland, it is expected to send Eid cards bearing pictures of Kashmiris who died during militancy, Kashmiri leaders, freedom slogans, and Kashmiri flags. Eid festivals and Muslim holidays are routinely celebrated by waving the Kashmiri flag. The cards often have political messages like 'Freedom Now' and 'Day of Independence will be Eid for Kashmiris'. This way, children born and schooled in faraway lands are initiated into the historical past, the reconstruction of which becomes the basis for nationalist aspiration. Ali (1996) writes that human rights violations have become a reason for mobilisation for the younger generation, and emotional location has become significant for the older generation. Close contacts are maintained through a *biraderi* (rural) based lifestyle.

The displacement of Mirpuris coincided with the relocation of individuals involved with the liberation politics in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir to Britain. The political coercion in Pck had made it necessary for many of them to move to Britain, where political organisations like JKLF were formed. Based in Luton, home to many Mirpuris, the organisation flourished by utilising human capital and remittances. The availability of free media also worked in their favour. The creation of Bangladesh in 1972 made it evident that Pakistan could not be a possible ally against India.

Other than the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, the different political organisations, such as the United Kashmir Liberation Front (UKLF), were leftist and internationalist. It was formed by a small yet committed

circle influenced by the Palestinian resistance and agitations against the Vietnam War. Their activism was largely anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. Hutnyk (2006) reminds us of the rise of leftist politics in the British South Asians contributed to Kashmiri activism. UKLF cooperated with leftist organisations like the Indian Workers Association and the Pakistani Workers Association. Gradually, it developed robust connections with the trade unions and anti-racism initiatives.

The Kashmiri diaspora based in the United Kingdom tried engaging in local elections to have a political presence and influence on Britain's foreign policy. Earlier, the majority of the voters would consider the Labor Party as their natural political representative. Sokefeld (2016) elucidates how Kashmiris began demanding labour tickets to contest elections. One of the first Kashmiri Councillors, Muhammad Ajeeb, won from Bradford and became the first mayor of Kashmiri origin. Another significant outcome of the political presence was the formation of the All-Party Kashmiri parliamentary group. Four all-party Parliamentary Groups in the UK are interested in Kashmir. Before this, a Kashmir Human Rights Committee was formed in the House of Commons chaired by a Labour Party MP from Bradford.

Political activity among Kashmiris in the United Kingdom was a mixture of reactions to the events in Kashmir, like the Hazratbal Siege AND the burning of the Chrar-i-Sharief shrine. Protests were held at the Indian High Commission, Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square, and other essential places. Utilising the lobby of British MPs, demonstrations and rallies were confined to London and took place in provincial centres like Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, and Glasgow. Demonstrations were regularly held on symbolic days like International Human Rights Day. Charity Eid dinners were held for Bosnia and Kashmir in Bradford regularly every year. Two satellite channels, channel and Kashmir Broadcasting Cooperation, were set up to voice the feelings of the Kashmiri diaspora. Ali (2002) rightly points out that the Kashmiri ethnicity has succeeded in asserting itself through hegemonic agents such as political parties, welfare organisations, and intellectuals.

In totality, the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain was not simply created by migration. It happened through the discursive creation of a particu-

lar Kashmir vision and political actors' mobilisation towards this imagination. Political activists, academics, and ordinary people have shaped and articulated the idea of community through various factors such as relative freedom, political mobilisation, and frames of imagination. This imagination was enhanced with the growth of satellite television and social media. Ellis and Khan (1998) found universal support for the reunification of Kashmir in all sections of society, but the majority favoured independence for the re-United States. Most believed that this should be decided through a referendum among Kashmiris on both sides of the divide and in the diaspora. The majority assumed that such a vote would favour independence. The diaspora has played a vital role in promoting the debate on Kashmir in the international arena, be it by physical actions or by attending meetings in Britain to advance aspirations for the unification of Kashmir within the near future. Kashmiri diaspora has utilised trauma and the memories (images, myths and practices) associated with Kashmiri nationalism to alter the political imagination. The trauma is remembered repeatedly through symbols, cultural practices, and public memory. Thus, diaspora refigured itself as a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of artistic production.

Diasporic Contribution

The diaspora and its contribution to Kashmiri nationalism foster an understanding of self-determination, political legitimacy, and social integration on civil and religious grounds. It has espoused voluntaristic, organic, and universalistic nationalism and denounced illiberal, ascriptive, and particularistic forms of nationalism. The diaspora has constantly used the language of civic nationalism to present their status, especially to an international audience. Organisations representing the Kashmiri diaspora have, in particular, adopted a universalistic and rationalist understanding of nationhood. The nation is always imagined as a voluntary association of culturally differentiated individuals. Kashmiri national membership is prioritised over Pakistani or British membership. An analysis of organisational patterns reflects the im-