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India, Conflict

On the night of January 19th, 1990, the Valley of Kashmir rested silently. The villagers all whispered their nightly prayers and lay serenely in their humble homes. Without warning, a voice echoed across the night sky, resonated against the nearby Dal Lake, and reverberated against the sky-scraping mountains of the Himalayas:

"Convert, Leave, or Die."

Within hours, a once heavenly place became consumed by destruction. Thousands of armed militants and terrorists rushed the streets, killing hundreds of Kashmiri religious minorities in the process. A paradise full of beautiful mountains, lush fields, and lakes that rested with an unearthly holiness, regressed to a hotspot of violence, displacement, and chaos. Facing a new life in different parts of the world, these individuals have forged a new society, enriching their Kashmiri children with the stories of their past and the events they've experienced. I am one of those children, one who has become immersed in the culture, history, and resilience of my people while living in the United States. Yet, the tension still persists, creating aggressive conflicts that serve as recurring reminders that one of India's most gorgeous and culturally significant regions is still threatened. However, with more international awareness, the world will restructure and rehabilitate Kashmir, developing India in the process.

Context and Implications

After India's independence in 1947, the British Empire created superimposed boundaries to divide up its territory. As a result, people were arbitrarily partitioned based on religion instead of ethnicity, neighborhoods split up, mass migration commenced, and tension was born (Calkins, 2025). After these borders were demarcated, violent disputes regarding the possession of Kashmir immediately emerged. Today, after these events have happened, this region remains involved in a long-standing territorial dispute with nations such as India, China, and Pakistan.

In May 2025, India and Pakistan both launched missiles that hit the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir (Zargar, 2025). When these missiles impacted, they severely damaged the nearby military infrastructure and ended the lives of 31 individuals (Multiple explosions, blackout in Indian-administered Kashmir's Jammu city, 2025). However, regardless of which political entity initiates an attack, the innocent people of Kashmir are the ones who fall victim during every single altercation. Besides depriving the region and its inhabitants of resources, these conflicts are also responsible for the death of a parent to a Kashmiri child. Children in the area have even stopped visiting hospitals or going to school due to fear of being attacked by raiders,

demonstrating the instability of the region (Benque, 2019). The lack of essential supplies, along with the avoidance of hospitals, will only weaken the youth and strand a vulnerable Kashmir.

Nevertheless, the lack of essential supplies in Kashmir has existed for centuries but is now intensified by instability and militarization. Kashmir, an area known for being surrounded by the Himalayas, experiences harsh winters that restrict the growth of crops. Kashmiris mainly combatted this issue in the past by utilizing communal areas for farming as a way to share resources (Tak et al, 2024). However, the current strife in Kashmir requires new methods to prevent food insecurity and starvation. Meroosh Tak, a renowned writer in the field of financialization of food systems, states in her article, “We also documented the area where military infrastructure has been built, its connections to farmlands, and how this has disrupted the agrarian culture of the villages.” Tak’s description of one location in Kashmir also mentions a military cantonment being built on common land where people usually performed agricultural work, illustrating the prevalence of militarization in Kashmir. Lastly, the J&K Development Act of 1970 also influences food insecurity in Kashmir by compromising the agricultural land in the region. According to Tak, this act allows the military to declare an area in Kashmir as “strategic”, allowing the military to settle there for training purposes. However, this becomes an issue when strategic land is the same land Kashmiris rely on for food production. This act along with the increased ubiquity of armed forces in the valley exposes the reality of how food insecurity is threatening the future of Kashmir. However, by advocating for peace in the region and by providing support to the valley, Kashmir will be free from military encampment on their agricultural land.

Aside from external threats, Kashmir also faces multiple internal complications. For example, over the past few years, there have been cases of journalists and reporters being harassed in the area by the police and other “Journalist Watchdogs” (“Why Are Journalists Being Silenced in Kashmir?, 2024). In an interview with Al Jazeera, one reporter, who had experienced this governmental intimidation, stated, “Sometimes we are asked to disclose details about reporting or personal travel. This environment has led journalists to self-censor and avoid topics that are sensitive to report freely.” This suppression of free speech threatens the democracy that India was founded upon.

Lastly, studies show that Kashmiris continue to endure trauma and mental health issues due to past political instability in their homeland. Conditions such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD are prevalent among Kashmiris due to their subjection to decade-long turmoil. Additionally, the stigma associated with mental health culturally only intensifies the struggle of those living with psychiatric illnesses in the Valley. A study published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care disclosed that 11.3% of all adults in the Valley suffer from a mental illness, while only 12.6% of that group actively seek medications. The study also compared the mean prevalence of psychiatric disorders of 7.3% in India with Kashmir, which has a higher percentage of 10.6%. The same study released a table displaying the various mental health diagnoses in the Valley. As shown by Table 1 (Roub, 2024), the respondents who contributed to the study showed categories ranging from depressive disorders, OCD related disorders, to suicidality, demonstrating the wide range of conditions that affect the Kashmiri people.

Therefore, the traumatic events in Kashmir, combined with the stigma associated with mental health, contribute to the despondency and demoralization in the Valley.

Table 1

Variable	Diagnosis	Frequency	Percentage
Depressive disorders	Major depressive disorder	276	6.9
	Dysthymia	61	1.5
	Total	337	8.4
Anxiety disorders	Panic disorder	66	1.7
	Agoraphobia	90	2.3
	Social anxiety disorder	17	0.4
	Generalized anxiety disorder	26	0.7
	Total	199	5.1
OCD and Related disorders	Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	41	1
Trauma-stress related disorders	Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	40	1
Bipolar disorders	(Hypo) manic episode	37	0.9
Psychotic disorders	Psychotic features	5	0.1
Suicidality	Suicidality	71	1.8
Any diagnosis	Any diagnosis	452	11.3

Solutions

Rebuilding the Valley of Kashmir is a process that will require time, effort, and careful administration. However, the global community must play its role in order to restore Kashmir.

1. *Building More Shelters and Sending Resources to Orphans.*

   By partnering with NGOs such as Athrout that have previously operated in Kashmir, more homeless and orphaned children will be sheltered. To provide further context, GPS and GIS systems have the ability to identify optimal locations to build these homes by overlaying maps of Kashmir with concentrations of orphaned populations and data regarding proximity to hospitals and schools. It is important to also prioritize community shelters over large scale orphanages in order to promote integration and a sense of unity among the children. Then, by collaborating with Helping Hands J&K, donation arrangements will be established in developed countries to supply food, medical supplies, and books to Kashmiri orphans. Schools, hospitals, and libraries across countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada can collect these materials, convert them into a monetary donation, and send it to the Athrout Donation Portal.
2. *Promoting Expression Within the Kashmiri Community.*

   By working with the Free Press Kashmir Organization, websites or platforms where Kashmiris write and publicize their original thoughts, stories, and ideas will be created. Their works of art will be displayed, and prize money distributed to well-written pieces in order to create opportunities for youth in the area. These submissions must also be translated between languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Kashmiri, and English to ensure that people in all areas comprehend the ideas of young Kashmiri writers. Writing pieces must also be printed out or

sent by mail and distributed across the area to account for places in Kashmir that lack Wi-Fi. Additionally, by liaising with Lawyers Without Borders, legal support will be provided to local reporters and journalists. Politicians who support free speech in Kashmir can also help these international legal experts fight for vulnerable journalists.

3. *Advocating for Mental Health in Kashmir.*

   With KashmirLifeline, an organization specializing in providing psychological aid to Kashmiris, awareness about the crucial nature of mental health will be spread across the valley. In the past, KashmirLifeline has provided community-based, effective assistance to the inhabitants of the valley. With more support, this organization will continue to expand its influence to diminish the stigma regarding mental health. Volunteers from these NGOs can also initiate workshops for local teachers, youth leaders, and medical professionals in the area that educate them on the importance of mental health in order to integrate it into Kashmiri society.

4. *Advancing Food Security in the Valley*

   In addition to previous donation systems that send resources to orphans, further networks can be implemented in order to supply more food to Kashmir. In regards to international aid, this solution focuses on collaborating with organizations such as The World Food Programme. To focus on national cohesion between Kashmir and the rest of India, the All India Agri Transport center would be utilized to divert more agricultural resources to Kashmir in order to compensate for the military's usage of Kashmiri farming land. By working with Kashmiri politicians who emphasize the importance of food security, this solution will be fully functional and compatible with the Indian government.

However, to fully operationalize these ideas, it is necessary to account for the potential hurdles that may arise during the administration of this plan. Therefore, to mitigate these risks, this framework focuses on working with politicians in Kashmir who advocate for similar plans such as mental health appropriation and free speech. Similarly, emphasizing local organizations like Athrout and KashmirLifeline can make these solutions more appealing to the general Kashmiri public. Diplomats from the UN Department of Peace Operations might aid in facilitating negotiations with leaders in the area. These negotiations are especially important as they maintain the sovereignty of all political parties involved when it comes to assisting the Kashmiri people.

While Kashmir is considered many things, a lost cause is not one of them. With the collaboration of global and regional nonprofit organizations, a rehabilitated and prosperous Kashmir will be restored, paving the way for India's development in the process. If a region cannot develop, neither can a nation. In order to fully promote the stability of this region, the Valley of Kashmir along with its inhabitants requires support. When this issue is finally resolved, thousands of displaced families could return to their homeland from across the world, reliving

the long-lost days when Kashmir was not defined as a battleground, but as a land of peace, knowledge, and beauty.

In Kashmir, time is not marked by the hours, but by the colors in the landscape.
And the colors show that the time for change has arrived.

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