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# **Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims in IOJK and Life at LOC**

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## **Abstract**

Kashmir, now the nuclear flashpoint between two nuclear-armed states, has a long history of ethnic cleansing of Muslims. From the Maharaja's time to Modi's contemporary India, Kashmiris have been a victim of Indian forces. They have been facing physical as well psychological violence. LOC is the line dividing Kashmir between Pakistan and India; and, the life of people living near LOC is nothing near normal. Their lives and properties are always under attack of some sort by the occupying power. This paper discusses the ethnic cleansing of Muslims by Indian forces and the dynamics of the life of people at LOC. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the atrocities committed in IOJK and the miseries of people residing near LOC.

**Keywords:** Ethnic cleansing, IOJK, massacre, LOC, ceasefire.

## **Introduction**

Kashmir, the undivided land of the subcontinent and now becoming a nuclear flashpoint between two harsh rival states, has a long history that encompasses wars, ethnic conflicts, protests, freedom movement

and has got an overall identity of being a bone of contention in South Asia. Ethnic violence in Kashmir is as old as Pakistan and India which are surrounding this mountainous region. The Maharaja initiated these conflicts based on ethnicities that still exist in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Muslims, which are in majority, have been a victim of Indian brutality since the beginning. India wants to change the demography of the region; so that, it can pursue its interests in this occupied region. Kashmir is divided between Pakistan and India and the border which separates Azad Kashmir from Indian Occupied Kashmir is known as LOC. People who are living near LOC have divided families as, escaping Indian hostilities, the natives migrated and came to Azad Kashmir. India is still persecuting people in IOJK and there are laws molded especially for this purpose: laws that authorize soldiers to kill Kashmiris even based on suspicion. For example, Section (4) (a) of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) grants the power to military personnel or even a non-commissioned officer to use force and shoot to kill a person who has acted against law, to maintain public order. They are facing multiple issues particularly when tensions between India and Pakistan have been on the rise.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This explains the conflict in Kashmir under the purview of the realist school of thought, particularly neo-realism. Neo-realism sketches an anarchic international system and the relative power capabilities of states. India is violating human rights and promoting ethnic violence due to the dominance of neo-realism. Because of anarchy, India knows that no one is going to maintain check and balance. Secondly, India knows that the only country to try something to stop India is Pakistan; but, as India is relatively more powerful than Pakistan, it takes advantage of it. This paper focused on Indian actions with a neo-realist lens.

## Research Methodology

The paper uses a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method includes a descriptive approach in explaining the conflict whereas the quantitative method includes statistics and numbers of casualties.

## Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims in IOJK

The ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Kashmir has an extended history. Alex Von Tunzelmann in her book “*Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire*” stated that in 1947 half a million Muslims residing in Jammu were displaced. 200,000 Muslims were either displaced or killed by Maharaja.<sup>123</sup> According to the census of 1941, the Muslim population in Jammu was 77.1% and was reduced to 68.1% by 1961<sup>124</sup>.

Transportation services, mainly the railways, from Jammu to Sialkot were blocked and a permit system was introduced. The Muslims who had been left there were in the hands of brutal killers, surrounded by armed forces, and the supply of water and food was blocked. Hindus started taking over their houses before the Indian troops joined them. In Billawar, Muslims faced starvation and their women were raped and killed. In October 1947, British diplomat C.B. Duke visited Kashmir. He saw along the Chenab River that 20 Muslim majority villages were burnt<sup>125</sup>. Maharaja at that time ordered this ethnic cleansing of Muslims because he wanted to create a three-mile buffer zone between his territory and Pakistan; so that the Muslims are either pushed into Pakistan or killed. An intelligence officer from Britain provided an undisputed estimate stating that Hindus and Sikhs carried

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<sup>123</sup> Ved Bhasin (17 November 2015) “Jammu 1947”. Kashmir Life. Retrieved 4 June 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>125</sup> Ved Bhasin (17 November 2015) “Jammu 1947”. Kashmir Life. Retrieved 4 June 2017.

out a huge massacre of Muslims in Jammu in which around 20000 Muslims were killed in late 1947. It was estimated that 237,000 Muslims suffered enforced disappearances from the Jammu province and were put to death by the Dogra forces –headed by the Maharaja and included Hindus and Sikhs as well. Some of the people got a chance of escaping to Pakistan. This step by Maharaja gave a clear message to Hindus and Sikhs to follow his idea of eliminating the Muslims.<sup>126</sup>

This had started a campaign of harassment, violence, and genocide against Muslims in Poonch and Jammu. India denied any role in genocide but it was providing arms to the Maharaja’s army. In a document published in October 2012, the RSS acknowledged that it provided support to the Maharaja’s army in the genocide of Kashmiri Muslims. Instead of condemning and stopping the genocide, Maharaja supported the planned genocide organized by RSS and Sikh Refugees coming from West Pakistan. Almost 95% of leftover properties were distributed among killers and looters. Hindus and Sikhs forcefully married Muslim women. Women were raped and smuggled to different areas of India. The number of raped or forcefully taken women is not exactly known but it’s been estimated at 25000.<sup>127</sup> The main objective was to turn Kashmir into a Hindu minority area. As a matter of fact, at first, the Maharaja wanted to remain independent but with time he decided to join India without taking into account the aspirations of his people.

The second war between Pakistan and India on Kashmir also caused the killing of Muslims in Kashmir. A lot of people migrated towards Azad Kashmir because of the atrocities committed by Indian forces

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<sup>126</sup> Noorani, A.G ( 25 February 2012). “Horrors of Pakistan”. Frontline 29(04). 8 Aug. 2019

<sup>127</sup> Emily Rothstein (2020) “Drivers of Conflict in Kashmir”. The University of York Press.

in IOJK. Residing in the LOC-bordering area and being from the second generation of divided people, the author, along with first-hand experiences, conducted unstructured interviews with the migrants from IOJK to Azad Kashmir during the War of 1965.

One of the elderly women narrated that they were living a normal life and carrying on with their routine. Suddenly war broke out between Pakistan and India. A rumor was widespread in the society that Indian forces were killing Muslims whom they thought were spies. They didn't believe in rumors but one day, they found a bag with pieces of a man's body. This incident sparked a wave of terror in the society and people started escaping through the border in the dark of the night. She said they left their lands, their beautiful homes, and their birthplace to survive. Upon asking that was it, particularly the Indian army that killed Muslims, she responded with a yes. She said there were non-Muslims as well but Indian forces only charged Muslims of spying during the war and killing them but there was no authority in the world to ask them about their brutal actions.

An elderly man narrated that he and his family owned a farm and used to provide milk to Indian soldiers who were posted near to their farm. He asked one of the officers of the Indian Army, "Why are you killing Muslims?" He replied, "We are not killing Muslims, we are killing traitors..... Nambardar Sahib doesn't worry you are safe here." On the very next day, Indian forces killed another person in his neighborhood which made him extremely fearful, and the very next day he migrated to Azad Kashmir, leaving behind all his belongings and relatives. Indian Army, by constructing the idea that Muslims are spies, carried out ethnic cleansing of Muslims to make Kashmir a Hindu majority state. After this war nationalism emerged in Kashmir. This led to the creation of the Kashmir Liberation Cell to create an independent state by combining both Azad Kashmir and IOJK.

In 1972, India and Pakistan signed the Simla Agreement which formalized the ceasefire line as the Line of Control as part of a fresh

resolve to address differences following the war that resulted in East Bengal seceding from Pakistan.

### **Notable Killings and Persecution of Kashmiris:**

In February 1984, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India influenced the judicial decision regarding the Kashmiri most popular separatist, Man Maqbool Bhat. He was sentenced to death in a case in which he was not proven guilty: charged with the killing of an Indian diplomat in the UK and had been in jail since 1976. This assassination was carried out on the order of Amanullah Khan.<sup>128</sup> Resultantly, the execution of Maqbool Bhat sparked a huge insurgency in Kashmir and once again the liberation movement gained pace and the Indian army used excessive force, under the cover of the Indian constitution, to kill innocent Kashmiris.

At that time there was also political unrest in Indian Occupied Kashmir. There was a political conflict between Indira Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah which pushed IOJK into further turmoil. As the protests against the Indian occupation simmered in IOJK, on a morning in January 1993, a massacre of Kashmiris was carried out in Sopore, IOJK. In this horrific incident, 57 civilians were killed, 400 shops and 75 houses of Kashmiris were burnt down by Indian forces. In the 1990s the conflict between *Pandits* of Kashmir and Muslims erupted and the Indian army was on the other side from Muslims because they thought that the freedom fighters were sponsored by Pakistan to create a situation of unrest in India-occupied territory.

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<sup>128</sup> Akram, Ahsan. "Maqbool Bhat's Execution – People Who Were Responsible Became His Heirs." [www.thekashmirdiscourse.com](http://www.thekashmirdiscourse.com), Feb. 2020, [www.thekashmirdiscourse.com/maqbool-bhats-execution-people-who-were-responsible-became-his-heirs/](http://www.thekashmirdiscourse.com/maqbool-bhats-execution-people-who-were-responsible-became-his-heirs/).

On June 11, 2010, a student named Tufail Ahmed, 17, was carrying a bag containing books on his back when he was arbitrarily shot by Indian soldiers in Srinagar. He was preparing for his pre-medical entry test. The killing of this innocent student sparked protests and almost 15 were killed while protesting.

A young freedom fighter, Burhan Wani, was killed by Indian forces on July 8, 2016. The killing of Burhan Wani sparked charged protests in IOJK. The Indian government imposed a curfew in the valley which continued for 50 days during which more than 90 Muslims were killed. India started targeting Kashmiris with pellet guns. According to a report, starting from 2016 to 2020, 10,500 people had been injured and more than 139 people were blinded by pellets; and, 210 people lost their eyesight, while 200 people were partially blinded. These pellet guns have been used even against kids just a few months old. It seems like no such thing as human rights exist in IOJK.

### **Contemporary Scenario**

In 2019 Modi was re-elected. He has been pursuing an ideology of extreme Hindu nationalism or Hindutva. One of the aims of this ideology is to eliminate all people from India who are not following Hinduism. Minorities, particularly Muslims and Dalits, have been persecuted as a result. This ideology also demands an *Akhand Bharat* or greater India which means taking over the land of the sub-continent plus some land from South-East Asian states. There used to be an article in the Indian constitution that conferred the status of a special right upon occupied territories: in article 370 a special status was given to Kashmir. Modi, after his re-election, articles 370 and 35-A; meant the special status of Kashmir was abolished. Modi knew that the revocation of this article will create insurgency in Kashmir so before revoking the article he deployed tens of thousands of additional troops in the IOJK. He delivered orders in which tourists were instructed to leave Kashmir, schools and colleges were shut down,



internet services suspended, and the Hurriyat leaders were put under house arrest.

After the revocation of Kashmir's special status, a complete lockdown was imposed in IOJK: people couldn't even go to the hospitals. People have been deprived of their basic human rights. Young men are victims of psychological torture. There is a report that indicates that 13000 young Kashmiri men are detained under Public Safety Act.<sup>129</sup>In March 2020, the Indian government introduced a new domicile law according to which people who are not Kashmiris can buy land and reside in the occupied territory. This introduction of Domicile Law proved that the main aim of India is changing the demography of Kashmir, introducing more and more outsiders in IOJK, and making Kashmir a state which is dominated by Hindus.

Indian forces with the full backing of the Indian government have been committing human rights violations in the IOJK. All of the developed states and international institutions which claim to champion the human rights cause have not shown any serious concern about ethnic cleansing in Kashmir. This is the irony of the world in which we are living.

## **Life at LOC**

Borders between states are not just physical barriers but also create an ideological impact on the life of the people of these states. Borders create an identity of 'us' vs 'them'. Borders between states play an important role in shaping the national interests of the states. LOC, which is not an internationally recognized border; but, divides the Azad Kashmir and IOJK nonetheless. The militaries of both states are present here. At first, it was given the name of Ceasefire line but after the signing of the Shimla Agreement, it was given the name of Line

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<sup>129</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/News/10537286>. 8 Aug 2019.

of Control. Some parts of IOJK are bordering China and the border between them is known as the Line of Actual Control or LAC. There are crossing points at LOC which were functional but after the revocation of article 370 by the Indian government, those crossing points were closed: there were three main crossing points namely Chakothi to Salamabad, Tetrinote to Chakan Da Bagh, Chillihana to Teetval and there are two more crossing points located at Haji Peer and Tatta Paani.

The crossing point Chakothi to Salamabad is located between Chakothi and Uri and this crossing point is mainly used for trade and travel purposes. A bridge is there, known as the Bridge of Peace and this bridge is linking Azad Kashmir and IOJK. The bridge was destroyed in the horrific earthquake of 2005, but it was reconstructed. There was a transport service which ran from Srinagar to Muzaffarabad, this transportation was being carried out through this bridge. The other crossing point is Tetrinote to Chakan Da Bagh this crossing point linked Azad Kashmir and IOJK with the road. This is also a significant route for trade and travel purposes and the flag meetings between the militaries of Pakistan and India were also held here. The third crossing point is Chillihana to Teetval this crossing point has a river in between and it is linking Neelum Valley with Kupvara. People cross this point by using boats.

A ceasefire agreement was signed between India and Pakistan in 2003. In the agreement, it was decided neither India nor Pakistan will start firing across LOC.<sup>130</sup> But India has continued violating the ceasefire, which is giving birth to political unrest and military tensions between two states but the people who are suffering on both sides are innocent civilians of Kashmir. Ceasefire violations by India are forcing Pakistan to act aggressively and because of Indian violations, both states came to an environment of chaos. According to

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<sup>130</sup> Naik, E., 2022. *Ceasefire violations are making life a living hell for those along the India-Pakistan border*. [online] Herald Magazine. Available at: <<https://herald.dawn.com/news/1154050>>

the Ministry of Defense data, 192 ceasefire violations have taken place.<sup>131</sup> The property of people residing near LOC became a victim of this their houses were covered with bullet marks, their livestock became victims as well. Because of Indian shelling, more than 50,000 people have left their homes and migrated to other areas which are far away from LOC. Some women get injured, kids suffer and even-aged persons are facing the impacts of shelling.

People at LOC suffer both physically and mentally: physical scars can be healed but the psychological suffering is hard to vanish. The most drastic effect is on the mental health of kids and youth: they are growing in an environment of fear which is changing their view of the world. They have become so fragile that even the sound of a firecracker is sensed by them as a shell from the Indian army. Their education is hindered; it is hard for them to concentrate on their studies.

## **Conclusion**

Kashmir is the undivided land of the subcontinent. The ethnic cleansing of Muslims has been there since the division of the subcontinent. Kashmir got divided between Pakistan and India, the people at Pakistan's side are in safe hands whereas people in IOJK are suffering to date. The Kashmir case has been in the UN and passed resolutions, including the plebiscite option through which Kashmiris will decide their fate. From the very beginning, India started ethnic cleansing of Muslims to change the demography of Kashmir. Human rights violations have been occurring in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Azad Kashmir and IOJK are divided by a border named LOC. The life of people at LOC is miserable. They have been victims of cross-shelling, damaging their lives both physically and psychologically. The people living near LOC, majority of them are people of divided

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<sup>131</sup> Jacob, Happymon. 2019. *Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics*. Edited by Sumit Ganguly and E. Sridharan. 1st ed. Oxford, England: OUP.

families. The economic life of people residing at LOC is also not very well; there is a clear difference in the life of people living near to LOC and people who live far away from it.