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Introduction

Kashmir, officially referred to as Jammu and Kashmir, is an 86,000-square-mile region (about the size of Idaho) in northwest India and northeast Pakistan. The region has been violently disputed by India and Pakistan since their 1947 partition. China, too, which borders the region to the north and east, has been involved in these conflicts. The Indian portion of Kashmir is called Jammu and Kashmir and its capital is Srinagar. The Pakistani-controlled part of the region is called Azad Kashmir and its capital is Muzaffarabad.
History

The Indian troops-to-Kashmiri people ratio in the occupied Kashmir is the largest ever soldiers-to-civilians ratio in the world. The Kashmir conflict began in 1947 with partition of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines. The solution led to the creation of India and Pakistan. Because of its location, Kashmir could choose to join either India or Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Kashmir, was Hindu while most of his subjects were Muslim. Unable to decide which nation Kashmir should join, Hari Singh chose to remain neutral. But his hopes of remaining independent were dashed in October 1947, as Pakistan sent in Muslim tribesmen who were knocking at the gates of the capital Srinagar.

Hari Singh appealed to the Indian government for military assistance and fled to India. He signed the Instrument of Accession, ceding Kashmir to India on October 26. Indian and Pakistani forces thus fought their first war over Kashmir in 1947-48. India referred the dispute to the United Nations on 1 January. In a resolution dated August 13, 1948, the UN asked Pakistan to remove its troops, after which India was also to withdraw the bulk of its forces which Pakistan declined.

On January 1, 1949, a ceasefire was agreed, with 65% of the territory under Indian control and the remainder with Pakistan. In 1957, Kashmir was formally incorporated into the Indian Union. Fighting broke out again in 1965, but a ceasefire was established that September. Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bhadur Shastri, and Pakistani President, M Ayub Khan, signed the Tashkent agreement on January 1, 1966.

In 1971 a third war, resulting in the formation of the independent nation of Bangladesh (formerly known as East Pakistan). A war had broken out in East Pakistan in March 1971, and soon India was faced with a million refugees.

The balance of influence had decisively tilted in Pakistan's favor by the late 1980s, with people's sympathy no longer with the Indian union as it had been in 1947-48 and 1965. The status quo was largely maintained until 1989 when pro-independence and pro-Pakistan guerrillas struck in the Indian Kashmir valley. The Indian army moved in to flush them out. Meanwhile Indian and Pakistani troops regularly exchanged fire at the border. India and Pakistan both tested nuclear devices in May 1998, and then in April 1999 test-fired missiles in efforts to perfect delivery systems for their nuclear weapons. Pakistan tested its Ghauri II missile four days after India's testing of its long-range (1,250 km) Agni II. The cross-LOC firing in Kargil began during the mid-1990s. The death toll including both soldiers and civilians was more than 30,000 and killed all diplomacy efforts. In the first week of August 1998 Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged artillery fire, described by locals as heavier than that of the 1948 and 1965 wars put together. An estimated 50,000 rounds of ammunition were expended and a large number of soldiers and civilians killed. The conflict ended only after Bill Clinton, the US President, and Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's Prime minister, met in Washington on July 4, 1999.
Timeline

For an interactive timeline of the History of Kashmir, visit:

  (http://www.xtimeline.com/evt/list.aspx?id=86345)
Geography

Map

Please use the following link to view a map of Kashmir:


Major Landforms

Mountains have a special geographical importance to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir valley is enclosed by high mountain-chains on all sides except for certain passes and a narrow gorge at Baramulla.

There are Sivalik hills, the southernmost and geologically youngest east-west mountain chain of the Himalayas towards the south and very lofty mountains in the north, the peaks of which always remain covered with snow. There are volcanic mountains too in the State which have caused havoc in Kashmir in the past.

For hundreds of millions years Kashmir Valley remained under water; Shankaracharya Hill was the first piece of dry land lying in the form of an igneous island. The largest fresh water lake in India, Wular Lake, is also found in this area.

There are also some small valleys in this region. One of the more popular valleys, Lolab valley, has many meadows, groves of walnut trees and forests are so thick that they hide villages in them. On the other hand, Lidar Valley has small glaciers, grassy meadows, huge rock walls and gorges in its upper mountains.

The most heavily populated area is the Valley of Kashmir also known as Jehlum, a valley between two mountain ranges of the Himalayas. Much of northern Kashmir is occupied by the Karakoram Range. Major Rivers include: the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab.
Climate and Vegetation

Kashmir has a varied climate due to great differences in elevation. In its lower elevations, summers are hot, humid and dominated monsoonal weather patterns, while winters are cold and often wet. In the higher elevations, summers are cool and short, and winters are very long and very cold.

The Kashmir Valley is 90 miles long and 20 miles across. It is one of the most fertile lands on the planet, thick with rich pine and cedar forests and covered in rice paddies, hemp and saffron, apple and apricot orchards and walnut trees. Rice is the main crop and fruits like apples, pears, apricots, almonds, walnuts, peaches and cherries grow in abundance. The valley is also rich in forests. Mulberry trees grow in abundance and are the mainstay of silk industry in the Valley.

Regions

Until the 19th century, Kashmir geographically included the valley region from the Himalayas to the Pir Panjal mountain range. Because of its disputed status, there is conflict over the region of Kashmir. Today, Kashmir is controlled in part by India, Pakistan and China. Pakistan controls the northwestern part, while India controls the central and southern portions and China controls its northeastern areas. The Indian-held part is in the south and east; it includes most of the fertile land and most of the population. The Pakistani-held portion, to the north and west, is mountainous and sparsely populated. The Kashmir region is mostly undeveloped and dominated by large mountain ranges such as the Himalayan and Karakoram ranges. The most populated areas are Jammu and Azad Kashmir.
Culture

The population living in the Valley of Kashmir is primarily homogeneous, despite the religious divide between Muslims (94%), Hindus (4%), and Sikhs (2%). The people of the Valley, share common ethnicity, culture, language and customs, which is no doubt the basis of "Kashmiriyat". Kashmir's culture is interlinked with its geography: cut off from the rest of India by high mountains, it lies along the once fabled Silk Route. For centuries it has thus been open to influences from Persia and the countries of the Central Asia.

Language

The most widely spoken language is Kashmiri, an Indo-Aryan language. However, the predominant language differs according to region. Such as, the predominant language of Azad Kashmir is Pahari and the people of Azad Kashmir are ethnic Punjabis. Kashmiri is only spoken in a few border areas of Neelum District.

Use this map to learn more about the languages that are spoken in different regions:

- http://www.koausa.org/Languages/index.html
Way of Life

Kashmiris are hospitable by nature. They enjoy social life and mutual entertainment.

The Kashmiris are passionate about their food. Different types of menus were also inspired by the cuisines of different rulers and visitors, who came in the past from Persia, Afghanistan and other places. Mugals especially had a great influence on the cooking of Meat Dishes and different Pulavs. Kashmiris are known for their spicy meat dishes and the delicate flavor of saffron. Meat being the staple; most of the special dishes have mutton as a major ingredient.

Kashmir is also a valley of fruits. Fruit trees, growing on higher altitudes, and their orchards, are found everywhere. Apart from being a great tourist attraction, for Kashmir, fruits are a major item of export and a source of income of the State. Fruits, naturally, form a good part of Kashmiri diet. Huge quantities of Water-Chestnuts are a main produce of Kashmir’s ‘Wullar’ lake. Musk and Water Melons, Cucumbers and almost all varieties of fruit, tuber, root and leafy vegetables are grown abundantly. Enough Cereals, Legumes and Oil-seeds are produced in the valley, to feed its people and a large number of tourists etc. as well. Plenty of local Fishes, Poultry, Sheep and Coat, Game birds and animals, Ducks and Geese, all cater to the needs of Kashmiris, who are mostly non-vegetarian, and also to those of the visitors and outsiders.

Most of the Kashmiris live in villages and are dependent on agriculture. Paddy, orchards, saffron are the main crops grown by them while the urban Kashmiris are engaged in business, tourism, hotel-management, carpet making, silk industry, shawl-making, wood work, papier-mâché and several other handicrafts.

The Kashmiri’s common dress is a pheran (Knee-length and baggy top; the sleeves are loose enough for the arms to be retracted into it), shalwar (trouser) and a turban or a Kashmiri cap. This goes back to the ancient and medieval times of Kashmir. Garments of the Kashmiri male consist essentially of a lower garment, an upper garment and a turban; whereas, the dress of a woman consists mainly of sari and tailored jackets or blouses. The women also wear a long flowing tunic and trousers. Every man, woman and child wears a pheran during the cold winter months. It was fashion for both men and women to braid their hair in different styles, wearing sometimes tassels of varied colors.
Religion

Kashmir’s old capital, Shrinagari, was first founded by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka and the region served as a center of Buddhism. In the 9th century, Hinduism was introduced to the area and both religions thrived. In the 14th century, the Mongol ruler, Dulucha invaded the Kashmir region. This ended the Hindu and Buddhist rule of the area and in 1339, Shah Mir Swati became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. Throughout the rest of the 14th century and into subsequent times, Muslim dynasties and empires successfully controlled the Kashmir region. By the 19th century though, Kashmir was passed to the Sikh armies that were conquering the area.

Most of Kashmir’s population (three-fourths) is Muslim. Hindus also live in the region.

The religion of Kashmir also differs according to the region. A few examples are as follows:

The people living in Ladakh are primarily Buddhist and are of Tibetan origins. The Muslim minority in Ladakh belongs to the Shia sect. The Kashmir Valley is ethnically homogeneous with ethnic Kashmiris of all religions residing mainly in the Kashmir Valley, with Srinagar as its capital. The people living in Jammu that profess Hindu and Muslim faiths are ethnically different from those living in the Valley in terms of ethnicity, language and culture. The people living in Azad Kashmir, share common religion with their counterparts along the line of control, but are not ethnically and culturally similar to the people living in the Valley who are Dardic.

Economy

Kashmir’s economy is mostly made up of agriculture that takes place in its fertile valley areas. Rice, corn, wheat, barley, fruits and vegetables are the main crops grown in Kashmir while lumber and the raising of livestock also play a role in its economy. In addition, small-scale handicrafts including carpets, woolen shawls, and brassware and tourism (The region’s breathtaking mountain scenery attracts many tourists) are important to the area.
Ethnic Groups

The mosaic of ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir State is complex and the race structure cannot be explained without understanding the pre-historic movements of people. In the process of peopling of the region, the Dards in the north-west, the Ladakhis in the east, the Gujjars and Rajputs in the south and Paharis in the south-east have closely influenced the existing ethnicity of the people. The racial composition of the State was also influenced by the immigrants from the territories of Turkmenia, Tazakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakistan, Georgia, Azerbaijian (U.S.S.R.) Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

The various ethnic groups of the Jammu and Kashmir State though intermingled have their areas of high concentration. For example, Kashmiris are mainly concentrated in the Valley bottom; Dards occupy the valley of Gurez; Hanjis are confined to water bodies of Kashmir; Gujjars and Bakarwals are living and oscillating in the Kandi areas; Dogras occupy the outskirts of the Punjab plain, while Chibhalis and Paharis live between Chenab and Jhelum rivers. Moreover, there are numerous small ethnic groups like Rhotas, Gaddis and Sikhs which have significant concentration in isolated pockets of the State.

Arts & Education

Kashmir is the home of handicrafts like wood carving, papier-mâché, carpet, gabba and shawl making and embroidery on clothes.

Kashmir has been the highest learning centre of Sanskrit and Persian as Indo-Aryan civilization has originated and flourished here.

Kashmiris are known to enjoy their music in its various local forms; The Dumhal is a famous dance in Kashmir, performed by men of the Wattal region. The women also perform a special folk dance known as the Rouff.
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