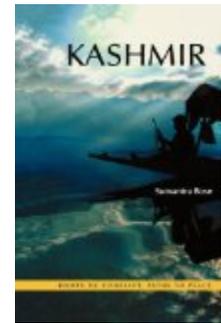


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sumantra Bose. *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Pathways to Peace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. 304 pp. \$25.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01173-1; \$18.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-01817-4.

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## Kashmir—Another Side of the Story

Sumantra Bose's book, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Pathways to Peace*, highlights the condition of the people in Indian Kashmir and provides some insight into what could shift into another site of genocide or increased mass killings. *Kashmir* probably offers today's best researched book on the topic, primarily because the author was one of the first to successfully penetrate the region. Bose gained a depth of understanding unavailable to many of the area's specialists. This extends to the present social and political conditions in which, when seeking data, one gets either a Hindu or Muslim focus. Since India allows no third parties into the region, no one can determine exactly "the truth." Given this difficult political climate and the limitations of the author's sources, *Kashmir* cannot be considered an academic work void of flaws. For example, the author uses only Indian media for information, rather than including the meager international or Pakistani media. Nor is there any discussion of India's strict control of UN observers and international media. In other words, although this should be considered one of the leading new books on the region, readers must remain aware of its limitations and strong political leanings.

In terms of background, India and Pakistan agree that 2005 saw less violence in Kashmir than in the past. This is attributed to increasing peace efforts like the launch of a bus service between Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir (IJK) and Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). But one can also assume that the devastating earthquake in October 2005, killing tens of thou-

sands of people in AJK, left Kashmir more concerned with starting over than fighting about boundaries. In the past, human rights groups and AJK figured the loss of lives due to civil violence to be over 80,000. Estimates of the displaced vary from 170,000 to 700,000, while 4,000 and 8,000 people are said to have disappeared since 1989—mainly women, children, and politicians.[1] Even with increasing movement toward peace, the region is still considered the most violent and one of the most heavily militarized in the world.[2] Human rights abuses are ongoing, while freedom fighters/terrorists and Indian-led counterinsurgents "work" unfettered. India claims that Pakistan sends trained militants from AJK to IJK, while Pakistan defends the militants saying they are fighting for freedom. Each, in response to the other, increases their military personnel along the borders.

To introduce this complex subject, Bose begins the book with a discussion of the conflict's origins, a product of the decolonization process. In August 1947, British India was divided into Pakistan (Muslim-majority areas) and India (Hindu-majority areas); at the time no one anticipated that the problem of the Indian state of Kashmir would live on for decades. It was a Muslim-majority area, ruled by a Hindu Raja who in turn ceded the region to India. To this day, the Muslims in Indian Kashmir wish to be aligned with their religious allies in Azad (free) Kashmir. Azad Kashmir has an independent government and democratic system while remaining aligned with Pakistan. Pakistan and India have fought several wars over this unresolved issue; moreover, both have developed nu-

clear strength, claiming it for defensive purposes only. The UN declarations once called for a plebiscite. But the relationship between these neighbors grows increasingly sour.

According to Bose, the postcolonial, pre-partition offers did not conclude as planned, at least not on India's side, which initially allowed Kashmir self-rule. But over time, with political maneuvers, India removed their self-rule and took over the state's sovereignty. (This early deception only added fuel to the later fire.) The author continues with a limited discussion of why the Kashmiri might prefer Pakistani to Indian rule. He points out that while the people favored joining Pakistan for obvious social, cultural, and religious reasons, it was in fact the Kashmiri leaders who preferred India, primarily due to religious affinities. But a bigger picture is needed when the author talks of the widespread communal violence in newly formed Pakistan. At the time of independence from British rule, there was violence on both sides of the border as Hindus and Muslims migrated to the newly formed countries. This is a reality he minimizes. The UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) repeatedly passed resolutions in the UN Assembly for a Kashmiri plebiscite, starting with the first resolution in August 1948. However, none of this worked. The author describes the establishment and eventual failure of UNCIP, particularly its current weak state. Further discussion on this would have been useful, as towards the end he discusses the significance of institutionalized dialogue for resolving the conflict. In addition, this chapter would have been easier to follow without chronological breaks or with a timeline to help explain this complex political situation.

In the next chapter, the author describes the impact India's rule has had on Kashmir and denounces India's failure to establish democracy. India managed to establish a stable democracy across all of its regions but Kashmir. To this reviewer and apparently to Bose as well, the saddest thing is the hypocrisy shown by the Nehru government of the 1940s. It purposefully and strategically removed the democratic rights of the Kashmiri people and not only enforced but strengthened a regime that it knew to have "rampant corruption, with officials looting the exchequer at will; and Mafia-style authoritarianism, marked by liberal use of police and gangs of professional thugs against any sign of opposition" (p. 72). Because of the problems in Kashmir in 1957, the United Nations continued to pass resolutions for a plebiscite but no action was taken—although why is not explained.

Political instability led to the dire problems Kashmir faces today. Unfortunately, only once does the author discuss the poverty in Kashmir and the lack of any productive development activities. The impoverishment of the people and the lack of democratic structures can only perpetuate feelings of hopelessness and a willingness to sacrifice their lives for a better future. This is at the heart of Kashmir's civil wars and also one area, in this reviewer's opinion, where the author needed more perspectives. Overall, the author should have described the sentiments of the people—whether they are part of the "freedom fighters" or "guerrillas" as the author calls them—the local communities of different religions, or political sections of society. It would have been useful to give voice to those that had heretofore been silenced. The author devotes considerable attention to the groups fighting for freedom. Thus, it would have been useful to more deeply analyze the local terms used for these fighters—such as the term "Hizb-ul-Mujahiddeen." (*Mujahideen* is a plural form of *mujahid*, which literally means "struggler," someone who engages in *jihād*, or a "struggle." The objective of the group, therefore, is not violence but freedom, or the struggle towards it, whatever the cost.) When talking of external militants, the author also needs to make a clear distinction between "Pakistani" and "AJK" residents. The generic terms "foreign" or "from across the border" do not make this distinction. It is true that people from both territories go across the line of control (LoC); however, the ratio is unknown or not discussed in the book. The LoC, for the reader, may be an international boundary, but for the people of Kashmir it is an arbitrary line drawn by international politics between people who consider themselves belonging to the same land. So for people to move across the LoC for any reason is merely to seek help, refuge, or to just live a better life. And for those people who come from the AJK into IJK, they do so because they feel sympathy for oppressed "brothers and sisters."

In chapter 3 the author concludes the debate on the war in Kashmir by giving three lessons that may be learned from the ongoing conflict. These lessons appear contrary to the evidence the author presents earlier in the book. In the first lesson the author states that the war in Kashmir is a result of the policies of India. However, he continues, Pakistan also had a malignant role to play. Why the author includes Pakistan is surprising when he states that, even at the initial stage, the conflict could not be reduced to cross-border terrorism. Bose shifts the responsibility of the conflict from India to Pakistan without providing substantial evidence to support his claim,

immediately after writing a chapter on India's failure to establish democracy and justice in the region. His claims seem to cancel each other out. Also, the author does not make any distinctions among "foreign guerillas" i.e., AJK or Pakistan.

In the second lesson of the conflict, the author claims that the society and politics of IJK are complex, and the "unitary-sounding" claims of self-determination are simplistic when the self is fractured and differentiated. This also fails in logic. A differentiation in the people, even if it exists, is now being replaced by a united front against the Indian forces. He uses the chapter to explain how the majority of the people want self-rule; some want to align with Pakistan while very few—mostly Hindus—want to be part of India. His conclusion, unfortunately, is that a plebiscite would make no sense. It is clear that the majority of Kashmiri want independence from India and that India runs the state using military control and unpopular, puppet governments. Again, there is a form of unity and it does not appear to be fractured if one chooses a topic on which there is agreement.

In his third conclusion, Bose claims that the "internal and international dimensions of the conflict are inextricably entangled" (p. 162). Here he emphasizes the role of Pakistani and AJK youth in the war in Kashmir. Once again he takes a stance against Pakistan that is off the mark with respect to the rest of his analysis in the preceding chapter. Discussing the problem of IJK youth crossing the border to seek refuge among the Kashmiri, earlier in the chapter, Bose explained that Pakistan's ability to control the border crossings are limited as a result of the passionate sentiments of the people, the difficult terrain, and economic circumstances. Yet at the end he lays the blame at the feet of the Pakistan government without taking into account that this "spill-over" from India creates a tremendous strain on Pakistan's social welfare systems, not to mention the political conflicts it creates within Pakistan. Why would Pakistan choose to support illegal border crossings? In addition, the author fails to recognize that although Pakistan is now strongly discouraging movement of youth across the border, it cannot control Kashmiri who come under the control of the government of AJK. Pakistan has peaceful and cordial relations with the people of AJK, which could be disrupted if Pakistan becomes an obstacle to Kashmiri border crossings.

In chapter 4, "Sovereignty in Dispute," the author further suggests that a war is the last thing that India or Pakistan need at this stage, least of all, the people of Kashmir.

Yet he rejects his two solutions to over fifty years of civil conflict (partition or a plebiscite), even though these are what the Kashmiri are increasingly demanding. Bose describes the daily atrocities of the military and the disregard for personal and human rights, for example, the use of rape and molestation of Kashmiri women and girls (pp. 114-115). Torture has become commonplace. The people are even more vulnerable, which increases their resentment towards the Indian state and strengthens their resolve for freedom. One Indian journalist wrote that Kashmiri "children no longer dream of becoming doctors or engineers; their ambition is to become *mujahids*" (p. 116). Given these realities, it is unclear to this reviewer why it is acceptable to remove the idea of a plebiscite. According to Bose it should be removed from the table because India would never agree to the outcome. (Perhaps India should consider rewriting and implementing a new policy on its treatment of Kashmiri so it can feel more secure about a plebiscite.) Also, it is important for international human rights organizations and observers to be allowed to witness and document what the author has successfully noted. The author is also correct in stating that the establishment of a fair electoral process is essential for a peaceful Kashmir.

Surprisingly, when Bose then turns to the problems of a partitionist approach, he suggests that Muslims of Jammu "are likely to forge a common front over-riding internal ethno-linguistic and political differences, and to insist on remaining connected to their fellow Muslims in the valley [Kashmir]" (p. 185). If such a union were even possible, then why would it not also be possible in the case of a plebiscite, which the author insists would only result in bloodshed? Surprisingly, the author brings in the factor of AJK and how the IJK and AJK could be merged. But this would be impossible. First of all, AJK is an independent entity with its own democratic process. Bringing AJK into the equation would mean engulfing a peaceful region into the chaos that has taken control of IJK.

In the last chapter of the book, "Pathways to Peace," the author gives various suggestions through which Kashmir's problems may be resolved. He calls them pathways to peace, implying that peace might be attained if this path or idea were followed. The four "paths" are titled according to the partnerships that need to be forged in order for peace in the region. This includes partnerships between India and Pakistan (called the "Delhi-Islamabad Axis," the Indian state and Kashmir), i.e. "New Delhi and Srinagar" and so on. However, all these pathways come with their own weaknesses, starting with the

author's premise that any third-party intervention will not be accepted by India. The only third party allowed in some of these options is Pakistan.

The "Delhi-Islamabad Axis" (path) calls for sustained cooperation between India and Pakistan. This ignores the state-funded terrorism and continued daily use of military forces in Kashmir. It does not discuss the possibility of a free electoral process. Furthermore, an institutionalized process is difficult when third parties are not allowed as observers. In the second path the author suggests harmonizing relations between "New Delhi and Srinagar." Here he rightly suggests that the atrocities by Indian soldiers on Kashmiri citizens have to be reduced for Kashmiri to trust India. A fair and democratic system should be allowed. Although this suggestion sounds practical, the weaknesses are many. First, it does not address the main cry of the Kashmiri, a plebiscite for freedom. Second, it will take a long time for Kashmiri to trust new Indian policy; in turn, India will be insecure about the people Kashmiri elect as leaders. In this section the author also suggests that AJK be included in the "New Delhi-Srinagar Axis." AJK is not engulfed in violence and there is no need to pull a peaceful region into the conflict. The third path, the "Islamabad-Muzafferabad Axis" suggests merging the AJK and IJK. It suffers from many of the same weaknesses as the second path. In addition, the author offers the reader minimal research or discussion in the preceding chapters on the relationship between AJK and Pakistan. To make sweeping statements referring to Pakistan's interventions and interference in the running of AJK (p. 255) seems inconsistent with the detail in the rest of the book. The fourth path suggested by the author, "Srinagar and Muzafferabad Axis," also would not be an easy solution as easing up on the LoC will be difficult. A partnership between Srinagar and Muzafferabad is not possible until the Kashmiri have a fairly elected leadership.

Ultimately, the author's suggestion that India should begin healing the wounds in Kashmir by acknowledging its role in the atrocities and making a public apology is a good starting point. Continued years of fair treatment and justice are only the first step towards establishing such a relationship. Bose also brings home the fact that military corruption and atrocities have to end with a diminishing military presence, or peaceful co-existence is not possible without further instilling fear, vulnerability, and insecurity. Also, extensive development work—significantly for orphans, widows, and people personally affected by abuses—might help heal the wounds. Bose suggests releasing political prisoners. The truth is almost six decades of abuse will not be easy to forget; but it is a first step and a bitter pill that India must swallow to gain peaceful resolution.

Although this is probably the best-researched book on the historical aspects of the Kashmiri conflict to date and although an Indian author clearly sees many of the mistakes made by the Indian government, Bose still maintains that Indian sovereignty over Kashmir need not be changed. Where are the voices of the Kashmiri? The one thing that unites the majority in this conflict is independence from India. There is diversion after that; some Kashmiri would choose self-rule, others Pakistani rule. The option that Bose never proposes is to turn Kashmir over to Pakistan. Are there other solutions that have not been considered? Will the Kashmiri people ever get to choose?

#### Notes

[1]. See *Financial Daily* (March 8, 2001).

[2]. "Terrorism in Kashmir." *Wikipedia*, accessible at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism\\_in\\_Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_in_Kashmir). Also see Human Rights Watch 2005 Report on Kashmir.

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