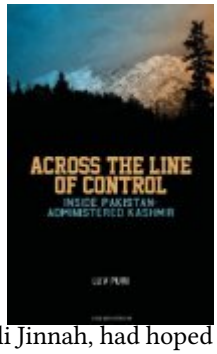
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Luv Puri. *Across the Line of Control: Inside Pakistan-Administered Kashmir.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. ix + 136 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-70306-2.



Reviewed by Sumit Ganguly (Indiana University)
Published on H-Diplo (January, 2013)
Commissioned by Seth Offenbach

Few territorial disputes have proven to be as intractable as the Indo-Pakistani conflict over the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir. It has led to three wars and contributed to multiple crises. A small but sound body of scholarship exists on the origins of the conflict as well as the internal politics of the Indian-administered portion of the state. Curiously enough, much of the literature on the domestic politics of Pakistan-administered Kashmir has been either hortatory or polemical.

Consequently, Luv Puri's *Across the Line of Control*, a short but succinct account of the Indo-Pakistani conflict, is a most welcome contribution to the subject. The virtues of this book are self-evident. The author has a sound grasp of the historical circumstances that led up to the partition of the subcontinent and the emergence of the Kashmir dispute, is familiar with the politics of the Pakistani-controlled portion of the state, and is knowledgeable about its fraught constitutional relationship with the Pakistani state. He has succeeded through a careful perusal of relevant documentary evidence; pertinent fieldwork in Pakistan; and his knowledge of the politics of an important diaspora community, the Mirpuris from Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, located in the United Kingdom.

Puri also demonstrates a fine-grained knowledge of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Pakistan-controlled section of the state and its implications for the politics of the region. Specifically, he draws attention to particular ethnic groups who were at the forefront of the movement against the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh in the waning days of the British Indian Empire and shows how they became the principal beneficiaries of the largesse of the Pakistani state. This transpired because key Pakistani leaders, most notably, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, had hoped that Kashmir would accede to Pakistan.

In addition to his careful analysis of the politics of the region, Puri examines the human tragedies that have ensued as a consequence of the division of this state. Through the deft use of emblematic accounts and case studies, he highlights the costs that this contest has exacted on citizenry on both sides of the disputed state. His analysis also deals with the impact of the indigenous insurgency that erupted in the Indian-controlled portion of the state in 1989 on the politics of the other segment. Among other matters, he argues that some political activists within Pakistan-controlled Kashmir considered the rebellion to be merely a resurrection of the original grievances against Hindu minority domination that had come to the fore at the time of independence and partition in 1947. This view, while credible, obviously does not accord with extant facts. The abrupt unrest that shook the Kashmir Valley in 1989 stemmed from the exigencies of local and more immediate political circumstances rather than a continuation of long-standing complaints. Specifically, the uprising could be traced to the growth of political mobilization within the state and the electoral malfeasances of the 1987 state-level elections.

He also discusses, albeit briefly, the growth of radical Islam within Pakistan and its consequences for this contested region. This analysis, however, remains somewhat superficial. He quite correctly argues that the long-held political sentiments within this region were explicitly in favor of the complete independence of Jammu and Kashmir. However, within the past decade or so there has been a shift in that position to a more radical Islamist stance at least within segments of the population. Un-

fortunately, Puri seems content to merely allude to "a combination of factors which were rooted in the political history of the state of Jammu and Kashmir" without carefully delineating and explicating the role of these forces in precipitating the shift (p. 120). The turn to a more orthodox vision of Islam, in considerable part, stems from Pakistan's dalliance with a host of Islamist groups that were spawned during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Once the Soviets withdrew, a number of these entities and their members were directed toward Indian-controlled Kashmir.

The other shortcoming of this book is its rather anemic discussion of possible policy options for easing the political tensions that have dogged the relationships of both segments of the original state to India and Pakistan. Apart from his plea for greater movement of populations between the two parts of the state and a call for greater institutional autonomy from Islamabad and New Delhi respectively, he has little to proffer in terms of viable policy options.

These limitations notwithstanding, this slender volume is nevertheless a useful and handy contribution to the exiguous literature on a region of the world that has been mostly neglected in the scholarship of the Indo-Pakistani rivalry. Instead of focusing on Kashmir solely within the context of the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, Puri has chosen to dwell on the internal politics of the section of the state about which very little is known to outside observers. For that reason alone, a careful perusal of his book should prove useful for scholars, journalists, and analysts who wish to understand the complexities of an important component of the protracted conflict that has long haunted the region.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo

Citation: Sumit Ganguly. Review of Puri, Luv, *Across the Line of Control: Inside Pakistan-Administered Kashmir*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. January, 2013.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37039

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.