Kashmir: Subject of Subjective Politics

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Abstract: Rana critically considers the disputed territory of Kashmir and discusses the major themes in their painting, depicting the inconclusive uncertain and subjective orientational politics that have ensued in the region and that characterize the conflict.

Keywords: Kashmir, intersectional conflict analysis, art, arts approaches to conflict, Agnes Scott College

Reflective Essay

The process of decolonization that repealed British presence from the subcontinent culminated in the creation of the state of Pakistan. Where most of the division was diplomatically dictated by the British forces, religious and nationalist sentiments perpetuated the need for a Muslim state for the previously oppressed demographic, the region of Kashmir remained ambiguous. Kashmir was one of 562 princely states, therefore was left to decide which side of the border they wished to join themselves.1 It was predicted, due to the majority Muslim population of Kashmir, that the state would reside with Pakistan, however, the ruling king was not Muslim and chose to give Kashmir to India.2 As this decision incited an uproar among the Muslim Kashmiri people, it resulted in the first war between India and Pakistan, the Kashmir War of 1947–1948. This dispute between the two countries is known as the “bone of confrontation between India and Pakistan”.3 Due to these bilateral tensions, the regional security and peace of the subcontinent has often developed into turbulent conditions. This conflict has shaped the trajectory of Indo–Pak relations since the dawn of their independence. The perpetuation of this dispute continues to command contemporary political frameworks and diplomatic activities of Pakistan and India, including the revocation of Article 370. The extent of the contention that followed this political repeal, enacted by the Modi government, is evident by approaching this conflict from the constructivist/realist theoretical perspective.

It is imminent to establish the stakes the disputed region posits for both countries. Because of the realist framework of analysis, the dispute essentializes the countries’ respective capabilities and interest.4 The dominance of India’s economic and bureaucratic power is indisputable as is India’s efforts to sustainably secure that dominance in the case of any threat from their neighboring

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Michael 2018.
Conversely, Pakistan’s history of association with the United States preserves their national relevance within the international anachic system. By establishing alliances with countries that promulgate mutual benefit with a country that is economically dependent on other structures or international favors, Pakistan can demand a bilateral agreement that secures their interests as well. As Jan and Ahmed state:

Both countries’ positions have become even further entrenched based on their varying politico-economic trajectories and power projection capabilities especially in the absence of any similar formal dialogue. India with its expanding economy and regional influence continues to insist on dealing with Pakistan without any third-party mediation. Pakistan with its rampant security crises and faltering credibility about state-sponsored terrorism is still in dire need of international support for it to attain a “just” resolution on Kashmir.⁶

Because of the constructivist framework of analysis, an equal amount of cognizance is designated to the manner in which political ideals are culturally interpreted and internalized.⁷ “For constructivists, the hostility between India and Pakistan is not exogenously determined; instead, the state policies are constitutive of each other’s images and beliefs.”⁸ Accordingly, forthcoming territorial conflicts are rooted in cultural interpretations and their differences. This creates the capacity for alienation or otherization of the opposition for the way in which they conduct their bureaucratic proceedings as it doesn’t just exist within the realm of political organizations but also cultural identification. Which allows for discriminatory dialogue to prevail within a political system that promotes the glorification of their cultural ideology against that of the opposition. This is where the Islamic political framework of Pakistan and the secular structure of India clash and become mainstream among the masses.

With that analytical structure established, the revocation of Article 370 is only an extension of the overlap of the realist and constructivist theoretical perspectives. Article 370 was a clause in the Indian constitution that granted Kashmir a semi-autonomous status.⁹ Once the BJP, Prime Minister Modi’s party, revoked that status in 2019 — of a region Pakistan maintains is a disputed territory — Kashmir became subject to numerous military bureaucratic incursions by Indian forces, such as an imposed communication blockade and strict lock down.¹⁰ In this scenario, a Pakistani nationalist could sympathize with the Muslim population of Kashmir and advocate for international admonition to be directed towards India. Similarly, an Indian nationalist could just as easily advocate for Indian security and mobilization of resources. The dichotomy drawn between Indian and Pakistani politics has articulated and re-articulated itself throughout the years in accordance with their level of tensions at that given point in time, in a manner that is repetitive.

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Jan and Ahmed 2022.
⁷ Michael 2018.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Khan, Khan, and Abbas 2021.
¹⁰ Ibid.
and inconclusive. So much so, it has been reduced as a political tool to amass provocative sensationalism rather than thought-provoking policy conjecture.

**Figure 1**: Haq Aur Baatil. Created by Muntaha Rana.

**Arts-based Project**

At the time of writing this piece, while Pakistan is on the brink of falling under martial law due to the institutional collapse of state establishments and mass demonstrations protesting the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, I wanted my project to illustrate the inconclusive, uncertain, and subjective orientational politics that have ensued in the region. In my painting, I have depicted Pakistan, India, and the state of Kashmir (in red). Written in Urdu (from right to left) on top of the images are the words: Haq Aur Baatil, Truth (righteousness) And Falsooda, respectively. I have encountered this phrase many times when discussing the role of Pakistani politics against the rest of the world. Due to having politically institutionalized a moral, religious framework, Pakistani politics are advanced under divine, righteous connotations. Accordingly, it would place the rest of the world, primarily India, in the realm of falsehood. Ironically, the international community could flip that perspective and justify their political actions against Pakistan with the same justification and advance themselves as the righteous. It is the subjectivity that prevails in such political discussions. Surrounding the image of the neighboring states is a cloud of varying shades of gray. Seldom during the history of this conflict have either party been completely right or completely wrong, their orientational politics have almost always been too complicated to generalize. The gray, at times has been darker than other times but for the common Pakistani and common Indian the welfare of their national identity is of utmost importance.

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11 Jan and Ahmed 2022.
References


