

# Writing a Marxist history of the Kashmir conflict

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Writing a history of the Kashmir conflict is by no means an easy task. A volatile political situation and multiple pieces of contradictory propaganda from all sides makes fact discovery and checking a harder job than it already is. Given a systematic approach to studying the matter may, however, be a more fruitful exercise than grasping at straws, and using the Marxist methods of historiography we shall attempt at outlining hypothetically such an exercise.

## The Tools for a Marxist study of History

While describing the process of such study, references will be made to the basic tools of Marxist historiography, namely: dialectics, and class - and it serves us well to present them as understood.

Probably the most fundamental concept utilised throughout shall be Marx's twist on the Hegelian idea of *dialectics*<sup>1</sup>, of a preceding thesis giving a synthesis, which in dialectical opposition to an antithesis gives rise to a new thesis. In this, matter is the base.

The second idea is that of *class*. Class, according to Marx, is the "single greatest dialectical opposition in history"<sup>2</sup>; a statement that in practice seems to get increasingly self-evident on applying dialectical explanations to more and more things in the world.

## Contextualising Kashmir

To understand the current conflict(s) in Kashmir, we must understand the social situations, and factors leading to them, that gave rise to the conditions that now host such conflict.

At the most basic level, we must understand its *geography*. Geography influences, among others, the interaction of the people in the area with others outside. Communications and trade in an out of societies is heavily dependent on surrounding terrain. Local flora, fauna, and soil conditions affect economy and way of life. In modern times, locations convey strategic value. This facet can be given less importance however; our primary concern is the examination of societal construction, and if information of such is available as evidence through a primary or secondary source then the historical geography, while useful, is not too crucial.

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<sup>1</sup> "Manifesto of the Communist Party - Marxists Internet Archive."

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>. Accessed 12 Sep. 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "Marxist Historiography | Karl Marx | Dialectic - Scribd."

<https://www.scribd.com/document/329191700/Marxist-Historiography>. Accessed 12 Sep. 2019.

The base-superstructure of society arises as a result of dialectical work through labour; and labour is influenced by the *climate* of a place. The availability of food is key. For instance, locales where only subsistence agriculture is viable do not have the luxury of surplus afforded by those societies built on fertile ground. Surplus allows for diversification, calls for specialisation, and when controlled by a limited subset of people - gives rise to class structures.<sup>3</sup> In short, the economy is dependent on weather, and basic economic structures (the base) modify the larger political and social constructs (the superstructure) created. It is thus important to get information on the climate of Kashmir and associated early societal structures, over time.

We now turn our attention fully to *class structures*. In most cases where surplus is generated it is controlled by a subset of people who are not usually the ones producing said surplus. This leads to two major distinctive classes. While rife with internal distinctions, in general, members of the classes strive to improve their social standing to control more of the surplus. All action can be explained as such an attempt by classes to control more. Peasants desiring better conditions revolt. Landowners looking to maximise profits take away freedoms and authority from their serfs. If the two classes achieve a form of class compromise as had happened in the Roman Empire, outsiders who are not under the purview of the class system are exploited<sup>4</sup>. For studying this, we need data on previous systems of government in Kashmir, wherein we focus on the makeup of the ruling classes versus the ruled, interactions within the community, and interactions and attempts at conquest. While getting data it might be useful to consider three forms of government: one, where the general area of present day Kashmir is partially or fully ruled as an isolated kingdom, two, where the region is part of a bigger kingdom with rulers not native to the land, and finally cases where the region is part of a bigger kingdom, but centered in the region. These types give us the range of distinctive interactions between the classes controlling the surplus and the ones producing it.

Now with an understanding of class structures and interactions native to the Kashmir region, we are better equipped to tackle the contemporary problem.

## Analysing contemporary Kashmir: The story of the Conflict

As the conflict is deeply rooted in the problem of territorial dispute, we need data from before independence. We know that at the time of independence Kashmir was an independent princely state, with a minority Hindu ruler in a predominately Muslim area. Did this affect class conflicts? Of particular interest to our study would be monographs and letters written on the matter of Indian independence and the autonomy of Kashmir. We know of major political figures at the time, primarily presiding monarch Maharaja Hari Singh, and Sheikh Abdullah, who can be seen as a representative of the “plebeian” class of the common Kashmiri based on apparent popularity at the time. Each had their own opinion on the matter of acceding to either

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<sup>3</sup> "Full text of "A Marxist History of the World - Neil Faulkner.pdf ...."

[https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-cwMYZ4g9iO0tln3y/A+Marxist+History+of+the+World+-+Neil+Faulkner\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-cwMYZ4g9iO0tln3y/A+Marxist+History+of+the+World+-+Neil+Faulkner_djvu.txt). Accessed 12 Sep. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "Full text of "A Marxist History of the World - Neil Faulkner.pdf ...."

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India or Pakistan, or remaining Independent. And the opinion was not static - Abdullah especially changed his stance over time for a multitude of reasons.

These opinions did not exist in a vacuum. At least three factors may have had a role in changing sentiments over time: the political stability and military situation in the states of India and Pakistan, public perspective on the matter as first one of autonomy and then of religious conflict, and the desire of autonomy versus security. This data is of paramount importance, and can help pinpoint changes in sentiment, and bring about correlations we have not explored yet.

Ideally we would take information at every point in time possible. But to accommodate for constraints of time, it might suffice to get regular updates at times of major historical events. For instance, during the attacks and accession to India in 1947, the events around Resolution 47 in 1948, the formal accession to India in 1953, the Indo-Pakistani wars. Other events would include the US invasion of Afghanistan (and an examination of militarisation of the region at the time), military coups of the government in Pakistan, and the such. Popular sentiment is a crucial takeaway to make from all observations, and links to revolutionary action at the time.

With all this information, we can look at the Kashmir problem as a three way class struggle. The ruling elite and commoners of the region as a class division. The Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese governments as entities seeking to maximise their surplus in the form of nation-level conflict. And the Indian government as an elite class in opposition to the local leaders of the state.

## Conclusion

It is important to keep in mind that just an examination of contemporary Kashmir would not do for a Marxist explanation. A proper understanding of the fundamental material conditions is needed for it.

"for Marxism, the understanding of history begins from understanding the material conditions in which human life is produced and reproduced, both biologically and socially ... how do they procure food and who procures it; who eats what and how ... From these and similar questions come other questions of what social relations do human beings get into to do these things; what do these social relations do and what do they hinder; how do these social relations affect the material conditions themselves and what impact do they have on the human beings involved; etc."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Marxist Historiography | Karl Marx | Dialectic - Scribd."

<https://www.scribd.com/document/329191700/Marxist-Historiography>. Accessed 12 Sep. 2019.