Kashmir's Saga
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HISTORY

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The Valley's afflicted people are one of Partition's as-yet-unsettled legacies

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Ancient stories and modern science agree that the Kashmir Valley, lying 5,000 feet above sea level in the shadow of the Himalayas, was once a vast lake. According to ancient Sanskrit texts, it was drained by the sage Kashyap Muni and came to be known as Kashyap Marg or the "Abode of Kashyap," whence the name Kashmir is derived.

The Nilamat Purana is the oldest text on Kashmir, followed by Kalhan's Rajtarangini, which deals with Kashmir from the Mahabharata period, circa 3139 bce. Relatively recent history begins with the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, a convert to Buddhism who built Shrinagari (present-day Srinagar) as his capital in 250 bce. Kushan Emperor Kanishka (129-160 ce) made Kashmir the seat of Mahanaya Buddhism, built the town of Kashikapura, now called Kanspura, and along with erecting numerous Buddhist viharas whose remains can be found near Harvana Lake, convened the fourth Buddhist Council. The Hun king Mihirgula occupied Kashmir's throne for some time, but

was driven out of the region in the fourth century. He later embraced Saivism. In the seventh century, Raja Lalitaditya built the famous Martanda Sun Temple on a plateau overlooking Anantanag and formed the city of Pharihaspura.

Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni attempted to conquer the area in the eleventh century, but was repulsed. However, Islamic preachers of Turkish, Persian and Khorasani descent entered the Valley. A critical turning point occurred in 1319 when Rinchan, a Laddakhi Buddhist Bhotia, dethroned the Hindu ruler Sahdev, and married Sahdev's wife, Kotarani. Kotarani convinced him to renounce Buddhism and embrace Saivism, but the local brahmin priests refused to accept him--perhaps the pivotal decision in Kashmir's history. Rinchan then took to Islam, and became known as Sadaruddin. When he died in 1323, Sahdev's brother, Udyan Dev, married Kotarani and held the throne until his death in 1338. Queen Kotarani then ruled briefly until overthrown by Shahmir, a court minister, in 1339. His Shahmiri dynasty ruled Kashmir for over 200 years. Up to this point, the introduction of Islam to the remote valley had been relatively peaceful, but no longer.

In 1393, 300 religious preachers were brought into Kashmir to convert the people to Islam. Under Sikander, who ruled from 1394 to 1416, Hinduism was almost completely eliminated by conversion, banishment and outright murder. The area's many temples and ashrams were leveled and Hindu scriptures destroyed. According to a common account, just eleven families of Kashmiri

brahmins remained in the Valley. Those who escaped went to Jammu, where their descendants live to this day.

The area continued under Muslim rule and in 1686 became part of the Mughal kingdom, then ruling large parts of India. In 1752, Ahmed Shah Abdali annexed Kashmir to his kingdom in Kabul, Afghanistan, from which it was ruled until Maharajah Ranjit Singh, a Sikh of the adjacent Lahore Kingdom, to the west, gained control of Jammu and Kashmir in 1819.

The series of events which most directly impact present-day Kashmir began in 1846. In that year, Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu became ruler of Kashmir and, in the same year, entered into a treaty with the British. The East India Company recognized him as de-jure master of lands east of the Indus and west of the Ravi rivers. This territory was taken over by the British after the first Anglo-Punjab war of 1845, in lieu of war indemnity of 7.5 million rupees (apparently equivalent to 80,000 kilos of silver) which the Lahore Kingdom was unable to pay. Critics later said that Gulab Singh "bought" Kashmir for 7.5 million rupees from the British. In 1856, his son, Ranbir Singh became governor of Kashmir and in 1858, became Maharaj upon his father's death.

Ranbir Singh unified the states of Hunza and Nagar, strengthened his army and brought about just civil and criminal laws to his populace. But the British, wary of his popularity and strength, falsely charged him with conspiring with Russia and forced him to hand over his powers to the British administered State Council. In 1905, Maharaja Pratap Singh, Ranbir's eldest son, regained full powers over Kashmir after a foiled conspiracy attempt. Pratap Singh oversaw the development of road and rail links to mainland India, as well as a hydroelectric plant at Mehura and holiday resorts in the Valley. Pratap was succeeded by his nephew, Hari Singh, who ruled Kashmir from 1918 up to the time of Independence.

As the British prepared to quit India in the 1940s, the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, called for each of the hundreds of semi-autonomous "princely states" within British India to decide if they were going to join India, Pakistan or remain independent. For the many kingdoms either wholly within India or within the about-to-be-created Pakistan, the choice was obvious. But the state of Jammu and Kashmir is geographically contiguous to both India and Pakistan. Culturally and socially, some areas were linked to India and others to Pakistan. The majority of the population was Muslim, with a sizeable minority of Hindus. The Maharaj, Hari Singh, was himself a Dogra Hindu.

The Muslim leader, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, claimed Kashmir for Pakistan based on its Muslim population, but Indian leaders were interested in retaining Kashmir based on its historical and cultural links with the mainland. Indian leaders, particularly Nehru, banked on Sheik Abdullah, a leading politician of Kashmir, and his Muslim Conference for support of ascension to India and tried everything in their power to keep Sheik Abdullah satisfied. Most unfortunately, as it turned out, no decision was made before the August 15, 1947, deadline. When the flags of the new countries of India and Pakistan were then hoisted, Hari Singh approached both nations for a Standstill Agreement. Pakistan readily agreed, but secretly continued plotting for Kashmir's accession, while India hesitated on the matter, hoping for a turn-around of opinion. Pakistan-backed tribals attacked Kashmir on October 21, Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession for Kashmir on October 26 and India sent troops to repulse the invasion. Almost immediately, the UN called for a cease-fire and for a plebiscite to determine the future of the state. The warring armies stopped at what is called the Line of Control. The situation has only adjusted slightly since that time, most notably with China's occupation of portions of Kashmir. Wars in 1965 and 1971 between India and Pakistan failed to change much, even though India gained the upper hand in both conflicts.

"Had Hari Singh acceded to India by August 14, Pakistan did not then exist and therefore could not have interfered," Lord Mountbatten said. "The only trouble that could have been raised was by nonaccession to either side, and this was unfortunately the very course followed by the Maharaja."

In the 1970s and 1980s, another kind of war slowly generated, involving armed militants trained locally or in Pakistan. Charges of political corruption and rigged elections generated support for the militants among the ordinary Muslims. In September, 1989, militants killed the first Kashmiri Pandit, Jia Lal Taploo. After a series of murders in 1990, 300,000 Pandits and 70,000 Muslims fled the Valley. The area remains extremely volatile, with neither feasible military nor political solutions readily apparent.

For a lengthy history:
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