

Gallup Pakistan History Project - Weekend Read 2 ' Pakistan and Kashmir in 1979: Divided in the shadows of war and peace': by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project

As the sun finally began its descent on the once-mighty British Empire in the aftermath of the Second World War, the process of divesting out of the colonies was a painful affair everywhere. Perhaps, no single instance captures the complexity of the death of the British colonial empire than the division of the Indian subcontinent. Two states, India and Pakistan, borne out of the crumbling edifice of British colonialism, were bequeathed grievances and unmet aspirations that are the hallmark of many territories and cultures colonized by European powers. The division of India into two states was achieved through the arbitrary application of boundaries in Northern and Eastern India. The unique colonial penchant for arbitrary “*boundary-drawing*” has produced deep pangs of socio-cultural and political angst in many parts of the world. However, in the Pakistani-Indian context, the withdrawal of the British following the creation of the Radcliffe line produced the sites and frontiers of rivalry and enmity between India and Pakistan.

Kashmir, since 1947, has been the *piece de resistance*; the eternal remaining grudge of the haphazard, ill-planned, and ambiguous partition of the Indian subcontinent. The Kashmir question epitomizes the pain and angst borne out of a blood-drenched partition; achieved on the back of the largest population exchange in human history – 14.5 million crossed the newly-minted borders in both directions to seek the safety of a religious majority. In the chaos of this epochal event in South Asian history, Kashmir’s fortunes remained undecided and unresolved. This suspended and outstanding jurisdiction became a bitter bone of contention between Pakistan and India. Both sides lay claims to being the legitimate parent state for Kashmiris. In their hasty retreat, the British left the two young post-colonial states, separated along religious lines, to find a resolution to the future of Kashmir. Unable to find a mutually acceptable resolution, by 1979, India and Pakistan had already fought three wars against each other.

It was in that same year that Gallup Pakistan reached out to the Pakistani public to tap into their opinions on the Kashmir dispute with India. The majority opinion – 39% - converged around the consensus that the Kashmir issue should be resolved via dialogue with India. The context behind this majority opinion is crucially important, and two explanations come to mind. First, at the end

of the 1970s, with the Soviet Union occupying Afghanistan on Pakistan's western border, the country was wary of contending with two opposing forces simultaneously. Second, Pakistan had already lost its eastern half (by now Bangladesh) in a direct confrontation with India in 1971 and had 90,000 of its armed forces imprisoned in India. However, in 1972, both countries signed the Simla Agreement, which stipulated that both countries will settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations. Having fought three wars, the Pakistani public in 1979 was in all likelihood wary of further direct confrontation, and saw bilateral negotiations and engagement as the only route to finding a resolution to the Kashmir dispute.

Notwithstanding this majority opinion gravitating towards bilateral negotiations, a significantly high proportion of the Pakistani polity believed in the opposite end of the spectrum: armed confrontation. 33% of Pakistanis asserted that the Kashmir dispute ought to be resolved via armed confrontation with India. This finding suggests that Pakistan's public was highly polarized in its opinion and experience three decades after gaining independence. Having fought three wars with India, a substantial proportion of the public still supported armed confrontation as the tool to settle the Kashmir question. This highly polarized and divided state of affairs on Pakistan's most critical foreign and regional policy issues shows that Pakistan's public had been unable to develop a consensus on what route provided the best option for resolving the Kashmir dispute.

Crucially, Pakistan's birth was achieved in an environment of insecurity, underscored by undecided fate of Kashmir, which Pakistan viewed as vital to the new state's viability and stability. It was then no coincidence that Pakistan began its journey as a security state, defined by its military strength and capability to defend its borders, and the ability to wage war, if needed, to bring Kashmir into the state. It was in this environment of (in)security, tussle for hegemony, and armed confrontation with India that the Pakistani polity shaped its post-independence perceptions on regional relations and issues. That a significant third of the country's population still supported war and armed confrontation with India as the pathway to settling the Kashmir dispute in 1979, is not too surprising. However, when juxtaposed with the majority's support for bilateral dialogue with India, 32 years after its independence, Pakistan's society appeared as deeply divided in its understanding of what constitutes the most desirable option for finding a resolution to the Kashmir dispute.

The same survey results also show that 19% of Pakistan's public in 1979 believed that the Kashmir dispute ought to be resolved via the dispute resolution mechanisms and options provided by the United Nations. Whilst propping up and strengthening the military as the most important institution in the country was the favoured internal policy in Pakistan, in its foreign policy, the country has always reiterated and reinforced the need to implement relevant United Nations resolution on the Kashmir dispute. This non-binding document exhorts both India and Pakistan to allow the people of Kashmir the right to self-determination of their political future. This resolution has been a key feature of Pakistan's position on Kashmir for several decades after independence. In 1979, nearly one-fifth of all Pakistanis still supported the idea of having the United Nations intervene as a mediator in this sensitive and volatile dispute between the two neighbors. Unfortunately, this mechanism has never been acceptable to India, as it has always maintained the position that Kashmir is inherently a bilateral issue between the two countries, and as such the resolution to the Kashmir question can and should only be achieved via bilateral channels.

What is most telling from the 1979 survey on Pakistanis' opinions on the Kashmir dispute is that only 6% of the polity supported an indigenous resolution i.e. the initiative to resolve the Kashmir dispute should come from the people of Kashmir. This finding suggests that in the heat and clamour over the Kashmir dispute, the Kashmiris have always been largely been ignored and muted. The fate of Kashmir is viewed as a function of the India-Pakistan relations, while the people of Kashmir have always remained deprived of having an input in this process. Curiously, having stressed the need to implement the UN resolutions on the right to self-determination for the Kashmiris, Pakistani public ignored the option of having the people of Kashmir come up with their own formula and mechanism for settling their political future.

By 1979, thirty two years after independence, Pakistan had arrived at some distance from its origins, and had experienced several changes and transformations. On this most vital of all of Pakistan's security and foreign policy issues – Kashmir – the Pakistani public was divided on what constituted the most desirable option for resolving the Kashmir dispute with India. This divisive contestation between war and peace in 1979, illustrates the very experiences that Pakistan had already accumulated in its journey and development since independence in 1947.