

# Five Conceptions of Democracy: The Failure of Self-determination in Kashmir

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*Received August 31, 2024*

*Accepted October 15, 2024*

*Electronic access October 31, 2024*

This paper examines the conflicting conceptions of democracy held by primary actors during the Kashmir conflict of 1947-48, and explores the impact of these differences on the failure of self-determination in Kashmir. Through the lens of intellectual history, the study interrogates the perspectives of Maharaja Hari Singh, Sheikh Abdullah, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Lord Louis Mountbatten. I argue that democracy and self-determination in Kashmir were obstructed and undermined—and that the regional conflict was further entrenched—in part because the ideas of ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination’ meant something different to each primary actor. This project contributes to broader discourse on self-determination and international relations by highlighting the critical role of ideological discord in conflict resolution failures. I suggest that seeking convergence on the meaning of political concepts and intentions—especially by considering what democracy and self-determination mean to the Kashmiri people itself—can help with ongoing and future conflict-resolution efforts.

## Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir, romanticized as the ‘Switzerland of the East’<sup>1</sup>, is famed for its scenic landscapes and overwhelming beauty. Contrastingly, the state’s socio-political realities are grim: Kashmir has been immersed in conflict and has remained a source of tension to India and Pakistan since 1947.

In 1947, British India was partitioned into two independent dominions of India and Pakistan, as per the Indian Independence Act. The Maharajas of the princely states, being under the paramountcy of the British Crown, were given the opportunity to accede to either dominion. The maharajas squabbled to decide the fates of their states: accession to India, Pakistan, or independence? Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir defaulted the deadline of 15th August 1947, owing to complex geopolitical intricacies and conflicting wishes for the future of Kashmir<sup>2</sup>.

Though there exists a rich literature on the political history of Kashmir’s 1947 partition and its disastrous impact on Indo-Pakistani relations, historians have yet to view the conflict through the lens of political thought<sup>\*3</sup>. This lens allows for a deeper understanding of the ideological foundations that shaped the actions and decisions of key actors during the Kashmir conflict, which in turn influenced the trajectory of self-determination efforts. My methodology draws most from Sumantra Bose, who

uses both empirical and normative analysis to propose using democratic processes and the principle of self-determination to resolve the Kashmir conflict<sup>4</sup>.

This paper engages in a project of conceptual reconstruction. Though people often use the same words, those words may mean entirely different things to different individuals. I offer illustrations of what ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination’ meant to each of five primary historical actors in the 1947 accession of Kashmir to India, and explain how those differing understandings of the same words shaped each individual’s political project, motivations, and intentions. Rather than critiquing any actor’s understanding of ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination,’ or any of their historical decisions, actions, or strategies, I here highlight the important differences in democracy and self-determination meant to each individual<sup>†</sup>. The primary actors I will consider in this conflict include Maharaja Hari Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Lord Louis Mountbatten. The objective of this paper is to assess each actor’s envisioned ideal democracy and self-determination for Kashmir. I thus neglect to offer my own definition of democracy in favor of letting the characters’ thoughts speak for themselves. Corroborating this information, I will illustrate the real world impacts of their contrasting ideals.

I here wish to suggest that self-determination was and has been unsuccessful in Kashmir - at least in part - because every major actor held a distinct conception of what democracy and

\* I am primarily referring to the following texts: *A Disputed Legacy*, Alastair Lamb; *Incomplete Partition: The Genesis of the Kashmir Dispute 1947-1948*, Alastair Lamb; *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir*, Chandrashekhar Dasgupta; *Languages of Belonging*, Chitralkha Zutshi; *Slender was the Thread*, L.P. Sen; *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, Mridu Rai; and *The India-Pakistan Conflict*, Thazha Varkey Paul.

† With further time and resources, this project would have benefitted from consultation with primary source materials, such as archival material, in addition to the autobiographies, compiled speeches, and secondary literature on which I have chiefly relied.

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self-determination meant for Kashmir. This paper will elucidate how the diverging democratic ideals, religious beliefs, and strategic interests of the primary actors confused and complicated the outcome of self-determination in Kashmir.

## Maharaja Hari Singh

Maharaja Hari Singh was the last ruling Maharaja of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. A descendant of the Hindu Dogra dynasty, this Rajput leader ruled over a Muslim-majority population. He reigned from 1925 to 1950, finding his rule surrounded by heightened socio-political conflict<sup>2</sup>. He greatly wished for Kashmir to achieve national self-determination. This chapter will provide an alternative interpretation to the conventional reading of the Maharaja, leading me to label him as our ‘status-quo maintaining autocrat.’

The Maharaja had expressed desires for autonomy and sovereignty long before independence. In November 1946, Major C.B. Symonds, the British Resident in Jammu and Kashmir, noted:

“The Maharaja’s attitude is, I suspect, that once Paramountcy disappears Kashmir will have to stand on its own feet, and that the question of loyalty to the British Government will not arise and that Kashmir will be free to ally herself with any power - not excluding Russia - she chooses<sup>2</sup>”.

To the Maharaja, national self-determination seemed to be the ability to decide that his princely state would remain independent of India and Pakistan, thus respecting its autonomy and sovereignty, while also remaining neutral in the conflict. He wished for a kind of self-determination termed as external self-determination<sup>‡5</sup>. He was opposed to acceding to India, fearing he would lose authority to Abdullah and the National Conference. While Jinnah tempted the Maharaja to accede to Pakistan, promising to protect his power structures, the Maharaja was realistic in understanding that acceding to Pakistan would heighten resistance from the Muslim Conference.

According to historian Somnath Wakhlu, the Maharaja’s aspirations for external self-determination stemmed from his secular and liberal conception of democracy<sup>6</sup>. Wakhlu attributes the Maharaja’s visions for independence to his prevailing liberal and secular beliefs, declaring he was “first and foremost a secular ruler<sup>6</sup>”. Wakhlu describes the Maharaja’s liberal college education to have transformed him into a modern, secular, unorthodox man, even pronouncing him a “visionary who knew absolute monarchy was anachronism.” Wakhlu commends the

Maharaja on being the first prince of India who established a Praja Sabha (State Assembly)<sup>6</sup>. He defends this limited democracy by hypothesizing that if the Praja Sabha had been given the responsibilities of a government, it would have resulted in the rule of one party dictatorship and one ruler<sup>6</sup>. Further, he describes the Maharaja to have allowed freedom of conscience and worship to all religions, and even removed disparities protecting Brahmins and Rajputs from capital punishment<sup>6</sup>. He saw the Maharaja as an asset to Kashmir’s struggle for autonomy portraying him as a patriot who opposed British dominance<sup>6</sup>.

Contrary to Wakhlu’s flattering and conventional interpretation of the Maharaja, my research finds that the Maharaja’s desire for self-determination was driven by a desire to preserve Kashmir’s rich cultural identity, especially his familial Dogra Dynasty.

At face value, the Maharaja’s efforts to retain Kashmir did seem steeped in its people. A unique term that helps us understand the Kashmiri people’s regional and cultural identity is Kashmiriyat. This term explains a syncretic identity possessed by Kashmiris that is meant to transcend religious divisions<sup>7</sup>. The majority of the Kashmiriyat agreed with his wishes for external self-determination: a high-ranking Cabinet Minister in the Government of India revealed,

*“About 7-8 percent of them want to stay with us. About 10 percent want to join Pakistan. The rest want independence<sup>4</sup>”.*

The Maharaja’s support for the Kashmiriyat indicates that their rich cultural heritage was a priority for him.

Indeed, the Maharaja’s vision for an independent Kashmir seems to align with Kashmir’s rich history: a long-standing independent hill state, with its own government<sup>8</sup>. At the very first Round Table Conference, in 1930, the Maharaja announced,

*“As Indians and loyal to the land of our birth, we stand as solidly as the rest of our countrymen for our land’s enjoyment of a position of honor and equality in the British Commonwealth<sup>9</sup>”.*

His efforts to ensure the honor of Kashmir and Hindu culture were seen in his efforts to enunciate Hindu culture and heritage in Kashmir. Temples were taken care of by the Dharmarth Trust, Sanskrit scholarship was promoted, and pandits and sadhus (holy scholars) were celebrated<sup>7</sup>. Evidently, the Maharaja’s wishes for autonomy could be seen as efforts to promote cultural democracy. In this context, cultural democracy is limited to preservation and promotion of a specific cultural aspect of Kashmir: Hindu culture. His reference to “Indians” rather than Kashmiris in his speech at the Round Table Conference indicates his cultural democracy fell short of the multicultural

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‡ External self-determination refers to the right of people to free themselves from foreign domination and determine their international status, such as forming a nation-state. Internal self-determination to the right of people within a state to freely choose their own political, economic, and social systems, without external interference. For more information, refer to: Senese, Salvatore. “External and Internal Self-Determination.” *Social Justice* 16, no. 1 (35) (1989): 19–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766439>.

democracy<sup>8</sup><sup>10</sup> that a modern, secular conception of democracy would demand. Clearly preferring monoculturalism<sup>11</sup> to multiculturalism, we see that the Maharaja is not liberal.

Historians argue that Muslims were disadvantaged in lifestyle, where the slaughter of cows was considered a capital offense. Even their basic rights were neglected—they were offered poor education and little administrative participation<sup>2</sup>. The Maharaja seems to prioritize Hindu nationalism over accepting Kashmiriyat. The purpose of the age-old Kashmiriyat was to override religious divisions. However in practice, the Maharaja ruled by acknowledging the religious distinctions within Kashmiriyat<sup>7</sup>. Here, the Maharaja's practice of exclusionary democracy<sup>12</sup> undermines secularity. Contrary to Wakhlu's laudatory reading, the Maharaja was closer to a conservative autocrat than a champion of secular multicultural democracy.

While maintaining Kashmir's structure and traditions, the Maharaja emphasises preserving its traditional power structure. No doubt, the Maharaja sought independence for selfish reasons as well. It is likely that he wished to retain his decision-making authority and prided his own royal status. He was concerned with continuing the Dogra dynasty<sup>4</sup>, which had enjoyed autocratic power in Kashmir. This sense of authority is understandable: the Dogras already enjoyed more independence from the British. Further, they maintained their own Imperial service troops<sup>8</sup>. In a way, the Maharaja's persistence to maintain autocratic rule in Kashmir can be seen as a version of monocultural democracy, preserving only an aspect of Kashmiri culture. Regardless of his intentions, the Maharaja's initial wishes to preserve Kashmir's autonomy, avoid accession, and limit international intervention reflect support for national self-determination.

The Maharaja's begrudging compromise towards democracy seems to present itself in the form of a constitutional monarchy, or limited democracy<sup>\*\*8</sup>. We know that the 1934 Constitution Act established the Praja Sabha (people's assembly) and underscored democratic principles and procedures including

freedom of speech and elections to the assembly. This constitutional democracy<sup>††</sup> was meant to be a compromise between the Maharaja and Abdullah. Even so, the Maharaja possessed an incomparable amount of power, overruling even the Prime Minister. The Maharaja reserved the right to veto power, where the act stated,

*“His Highness may declare that the bill or any clause of it or amendment or the resolution or question affects the safety or tranquility of the State<sup>9</sup>”.*

His continuing autocratic authority undermined his promises such as

“people may be more closely associated in our councils” in his Praja Sabha inaugural address<sup>9</sup>. This nominal adoption of a constitutional monarchy would enable the Maharaja to preserve the social and political construct of Kashmir.

My interpretation of the Maharaja as a monarch highlights that he was primarily interested in maintaining the heritage and tradition of Kashmir with rigidity. He wished to continue his family's dynasty, honor the history of Kashmir, and even maintain the divide between Hindu and Muslim Kashmiriyats, thus maintaining the status quo. For the Maharaja, the Dogra Dynasty's autocratic regime, as an aspect of Kashmiri culture, clearly took precedence over any progressive and pluralist ideals from his western education.

## Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was a renowned Indian nationalist leader and statesman, who played an active role in the Indian National Congress's (INC) fight for autonomy from the British. In 1928, Nehru became the leader of the INC, and in 1947, the first prime minister of independent India. In the Kashmir conflict, Nehru represented India, as its foreign minister<sup>13</sup>. He proposed that the future of Kashmir should be decided in accordance with the people's will, while maintaining that Kashmir's accession to India would be useful in promoting democratic principles within India. Nehru's ideals and will of establishing a lasting liberal democratic system in India lead me to conceive him as our 'liberal-humanitarian democrat.' Kashmir was his mere 'means to an end.' Nehru would use the accession of Kashmir to strengthen Indian democratic institutions.

In December 1946, Nehru announced,

*“Obviously, we are aiming for democracy and nothing less than democracy. What form of democracy, what shape it may take is another matter<sup>14</sup>”.*

<sup>††</sup>A constitutional democracy is a government in which the people vote for representatives or laws, and in which the laws are authorized and constrained by a constitution. For more information, refer to: F.E. Foldvary, "Democracy, Constitutional," in Encyclopedia of Global Justice, ed. D.K. Chatterjee (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5\\_42](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_42).

§ A multicultural democracy is a system of governance that ensures the representation, inclusion, and equal rights of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious groups within a democratic framework. for more information, refer to: Napel, Hans-Martien Ten. "The Concept of Multicultural Democracy: a Preliminary Christian Philosophical Appraisal." (Philosophia Reformata 71, no. 2 (2006): 145–53. Brill. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24709556>.)

¶ Monoculturalism can be defined as a strong belief in the superiority of one group's cultural heritage, history, values, language, beliefs, religion, traditions, and arts and crafts. For more information, refer to: University of Colorado Boulder Libraries. "Monoculturalism." Anti-Racist Collection Review & Acquisitions. <https://libguides.colorado.edu/anti-racist-collections-review-acquisitions/monoculturalism>.

|| Exclusionary democracy refers to a system of governance that, while democratic in form, systematically excludes certain groups or individuals from full participation in the political process, often based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. For more information, refer to: Patti Tamara Lenard, "Introduction: Democracy and Exclusion," in Democracy and Exclusion (New York: Oxford Academic, 2023), online ed., June 22, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197585818.003.0001>.

\*\* Here, democracy is 'limited' because although citizens have political representation, the monarch remains an integral part of the government.

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Nehru envisioned only the ‘fullest democracy’, fostering the basic democratic ideals of political liberty and equality through peaceful methods<sup>14</sup>. He saw this as key to India’s economic and political development. For India, Nehru chose the model of parliamentary democracy, for which he saw cooperation between groups as important<sup>14</sup>. He forged a close connection between democracy and human progress itself<sup>14</sup>. This indicates that Nehru’s actions aligned with John Stuart Mill’s theories of liberal humanist democracy, which centered around active and equal participation in decision making processes, for societal progress<sup>15</sup>.

The most defining of Nehru’s democratic principles was his staunch belief in the freedom of man<sup>14</sup>. During his fight for India’s freedom, Nehru aimed to achieve ‘human freedom’ which included the freedom of his own people and other people<sup>14</sup>. He supported popular sovereignty, general will, and national government<sup>14</sup>. Nehru’s beliefs led him to align with liberal humanitarian nationalists, who accepted the principle of national self-determination. To this school of democrats, national self-determination encouraged individual freedom, democratic constitutions and representative governments<sup>14</sup>.

Initially, in the case of the Kashmir issue, Nehru supported external self-determination. In a radio broadcast, in November 1947, Nehru announced, “We have declared that the fate of Kashmir is ultimately to be decided by the people.” He promised that he would not back out of this pledge<sup>2</sup>. He suggested the final decision to be in adherence to a referendum or a plebiscite<sup>16</sup>. Further, in communications with the Prime Minister of Kashmir, Mehr Chand Mahajan, Nehru specified that any conducted plebiscites had to be impartial<sup>16</sup>.

As a liberal humanitarian democrat, Nehru condemned fascist policies and violence. Nehru, underscoring the need for peaceful decisions, explained,

*“The method of democracy is discussion, argument, persuasion and ultimate decision and acceptance of that decision even though it might go against our grain”<sup>14</sup>.*

Nehru wished to fulfill his aspirations for Kashmir based on consent of the involved parties, rather than through conflict. This further resonates with Mill’s idea of humanist democracy<sup>‡‡</sup><sup>15</sup>, where Nehru asserts that freedoms are imperative for public good and the betterment of society. Nehru’s pledge to include the public sphere in decision making to enhance democratic legitimacy embodies Jürgen Habermas’s theory of deliberative democracy<sup>17</sup>.

However, we must point out Nehru’s hypocrisy regarding fair plebiscites and just consent. A plebiscite for the people was never held (although this could be attributed to resistance from Jinnah). The United States Department of State produced a position paper in November 1947 that criticized the hypothetical method of conducting a plebiscite in Kashmir. The plebiscite would be conducted under Kashmir’s present electoral laws, enabling only 7% of the population to voice their opinions. This 7% consisted of the wealthier educated Hindu minority, who were likely to accede to India<sup>2</sup>. This position paper diminishes the value of Nehru’s statements on the impartiality of plebiscites, and policies on equality of freedoms.

This leads to the debate that Nehru manipulated his democratic policies to better fit his developed ideals for Kashmir’s self-determination – accession to India. Nehru declared that the future of Kashmir was “vital to India’s very existence”<sup>16</sup>. It can be argued that Nehru’s desire for Kashmir to join the dominion of India was in efforts to enhance democracy in India. Nehru and his Congress party wished to create a secular and pluralistic state, transcending regional, religious, and linguistic barriers: the ideal India<sup>18</sup>. They were opposed to dividing British India based on the ‘two-nation’ theory. Nehru believed the integration of Kashmir into India was an effective way to dispute the two-nation theory, demonstrating to Jinnah and Mountbatten that multicultural democracy was possible in South Asia<sup>1</sup>. This would prove that a Muslim-majority region could live in tandem with a Hindu-majority nation, promoting the democratic principles of secularity and tolerance.

Eventually, Nehru’s wishes for external self-determination for Kashmir developed into hopes for the internal self-determination of Kashmir. He would encourage Kashmir to accede to India, whilst also granting Kashmir political, social and economic autonomy within India. This would allow Kashmir to have its own constitution and independent legislative and executive powers, in accordance with the Indian constitution<sup>9</sup>. In a speech to the National Conference, Nehru explicitly stated that the independence of Kashmir was integrated with the independence of India. He warned,

*“It can, if it so wishes, remain independent, but in the present world situation, that would be a very dangerous step. For this reason, inevitably this Mulk will have to stay connected to Hindustan”<sup>19</sup>.*

This further shows that Nehru saw the accession of Kashmir to India as important in India’s progress towards unity and a liberal democracy.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a staunch practitioner and believer in liberal humanitarian democracy. However, as the Prime Min-

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clusive, and reasoned discussion among citizens or their representatives. For more information, refer to: Olson, Kevin. “Deliberative Democracy.” Chapter. In Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts, edited by Barbara Fultner, 140–55, (Slough, Buckinghamshire, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2011.)

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‡‡ Humanist democracy can be defined as a democracy that emphasizes the importance of human dignity, individual rights, and the ethical treatment of all people. For more information, refer to: Ten, C. L. “Review of Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government by Nadia Urbinati, and Mill on Nationality by Georgios Varouxakis.” *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2: 345-347.  
\*Deliberative democracy is a system where decisions are made through informed,

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ister of India and India's foreign minister in this conflict, his primary objective was establishing such a refined democracy for India. His support for external self-determination changed to internal self-determination. To Nehru, Kashmir served as but a pawn in demonstrating India's ability to uphold a multicultural democracy.

## Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was the 'Sher-i-Kashmir' (lion of Kashmir), 'Baba-i-Quom' (Father of the Nation), and the symbol of the Kashmiri people's emancipation<sup>19</sup>. He founded the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932, to address the socio-economic and political concerns of the Muslim population in Kashmir. In 1939, this conference transitioned into a national body named the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, in efforts to secure support from the INC<sup>19</sup>. His progressive education coupled with his intrinsic understanding of Kashmir made him a secular, liberal Muslim leader who eventually propelled his Muslim majority state towards joining the Indian Union, whilst retaining a degree of autonomy. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the title of 'secular socialist democrat' is an apt description of Abdullah.

Abdullah was primarily a socialist democrat. His cornerstone policies when he became Prime Minister of Kashmir (1948) serve as a testament to his commitment to socialism. He made it his mission to improve the socio-economic conditions of oppressed classes through land reforms and abolishing forced labor<sup>20</sup>. Abdullah sought to replace autocracy with an empowered working class—we can thus best understand his conception of democracy as taking a Marxist stripe, or as 'democracy from below'<sup>21</sup>.

Despite being a Muslim leader, Abdullah worked for the welfare of all communities. He wished to destroy communalism, which he saw as a divisive ideology that emphasized religious identities over national and social unity<sup>19</sup>. He was staunchly against Jinnah's two-nation theory<sup>20</sup>. It was his commitment to secularism that prompted him to alter his political party's name from the Muslim Conference to the National Conference. Although Abdullah claimed the conference was a national organization from its inception, this transition formalized the creation of an inclusive organization that represented all communities

in Jammu and Kashmir<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, Abdullah's commitment to secularism was so intertwined with his public identity that at his funeral in 1982, admirers chanted: "What is the command of Sher-e-Kashmir? Hindu, Muslim, Sikh unity"<sup>6</sup>.

In 1944, Abdullah presented the New Kashmir manifesto to the Maharaja. This revolutionary document laid out his wishes for the socio-economic and political transformation of Kashmir, emphasizing democracy from below and the decentralization of power. It highlighted both Abdullah's socialist and secular democratic policies, encouraging redistribution of land, decentralization of power, and non-discrimination<sup>22</sup>. We must also note that Abdullah initially desired external self-determination for Kashmir. He expressed wishes for the conversion of Jammu and Kashmir to an independent state. Abdullah proposed that the State should be an independent and secular sovereign constitutional monarchy with the Maharaja at its head<sup>22</sup>. Through this manifesto, Abdullah made efforts to compromise with the Maharaja, as seen from the significant shift from the earlier demands for more autonomy. This manifesto was reflective of Abdullah's broader vision for Kashmir, thus balancing the interests of the various communities in Kashmir while maintaining a degree of autonomy.

However, the Maharaja rejected the National Conference's manifesto<sup>20</sup>. The Maharaja might have believed the manifesto undermined his power. In general, the Maharaja and Abdullah resented each other's political ideologies and plans for governance. Abdullah's ideal State seemed to be a Kashmir independent from the Dogra Dynasty. In his 'Quit Kashmir' speech in 1946, Abdullah declared that "the tyranny of the Dogras has lacerated our souls," and pointed out that "sovereignty is not the birthright of a ruler"<sup>9</sup>. In many ways, Abdullah and Maharaja were one another's arch foes. As a proponent of secular socialist democracy, Abdullah saw the Dogras as staunch communalists<sup>6</sup>, who discriminated against their Muslim-majority populace. In fact, Abdullah's very motivation for founding the Muslim Conference was to oppose the Dogra dynasty's autocratic rule<sup>16</sup>. Although Abdullah dreamed of replacing the autocratic and feudal system with a democratic and socialist government, he had to compromise with the Maharaja, proposing mere constitutional monarchy.

While the Maharaja's wishes to preserve 'Kashmiriyat' can be contested, Abdullah was decided on creating an equitable government that was representative of the people's interests. Abdullah's party and policies had sufficient support in Kashmir, especially in Srinagar<sup>16</sup>. Abdullah attracted masses to propaganda meetings, presenting himself as a "silver-tongued mob orator," who was gifted with the power of convincing people. His Quit Kashmir movement was "on the lips of every Kashmiri," resonating with every section of society<sup>20</sup>. This wide-spread support is a testament to Abdullah's legitimate democratic model.

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\*For example, he suggested an independent judiciary that would comprise a High Court, District Courts, and even Village Panchayats (council).

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\*In his autobiography, Abdullah reports that he abolished 396 big jagirs, took away four lakh acres of land from landowners, and redistributed property holdings to two lakh peasants. Abdullah made it his mission to improve the socio-economic conditions of oppressed classes. Demonstrably, he abolished forced labor and declared it unlawful. The people and the working class were definitively Abdullah's priority.

\*\*'Democracy from below' refers to a political movement where democratic change and decision-making are driven by grassroots activism and participation of citizens rather than by elite leadership. For more information, refer to: August, Norton. "Democracy from Below," in Contemporary American Society. University of Wisconsin-Madison: Social Science Computing Operative, 2022.

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Nehru and the INC observed Abdullah's growing popularity and were taken by him. Nehru saw in Abdullah "something of a reflection of himself," Wakhlu marveled:

*"Nehru's obsession for him and his tremendous respect and love descended like a manna from heaven into his outstretched hands"*<sup>6</sup>.

Nehru saw Abdullah as a people's leader, with a political vision capable of transforming communalism into secular nationalism<sup>3</sup>. The New Kashmir manifesto's emphasis on socialism and secularism aligned Abdullah's political ideology with Nehru and the INC. The prospect of a secular and independent Indian state attracted Abdullah towards the notion of acceding to India, whilst maintaining internal self-determination.

The manifesto asserted that the Muslim majority of the Kashmir State would abstain from communal politics as enunciated in Two Nations Theory, deeming it impossible to join the dominion of Pakistan. The manifesto placed emphasis on equality for citizens regardless of nationality, religion, race, or birth<sup>22</sup>. Embracing secular democracy, Abdullah believed accession to India would push Hindus and Muslims to live harmoniously<sup>20</sup>. This support for accession to India further propagated Nehru's visions, negating the two-nation theory and proving that South Asian Hindus and Muslims could co-exist.

Still, we must note that scholars have called Abdullah's democratic ideologies and decisions for Kashmir's self-determination capricious. Later, he would be criticized for changing and reversing his position without any moral, political, or constitutional justification<sup>6</sup>. This unpredictability must have complicated the already problematic accession of Kashmir. However, for the period explored by this paper, he maintains socialist and secular policies. These would manifest in him closely aligning with Nehru's ideals, but directly opposing the views of his Maharaja, and fellow Muslim leader Jinnah.

## Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, popularly known as 'Quaid-I Azam' (great leader), was an influential politician, known for his legal astuteness. He is most famous for his dominant role in founding Pakistan and his 'two-nation theory.' Jinnah was elected as the President of the Muslim League in 1916, and upon the partition of India became Pakistan's first governor general<sup>23</sup>. Conventional readings present Jinnah's two-nation theory as radical and portray him as a communal leader. In this chapter I will delve into the multifaceted aspects of Jinnah's political ideology: a communal leader - but also a pluralist democrat, and possibly even an opportunistic politician. My reading of Jinnah presents him as an 'ethno-nationalist democrat.' To Jinnah, Kashmir was not merely a territorial claim, but an integral component to his vision of a Muslim Pakistan.

Jinnah had been a member of the INC since 1906 and joined the Muslim League in 1913. He was elected as the President of the Muslim League in 1916. Initially, Jinnah was an advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity and a part of the INC campaign for a unified India against the British. His enthusiasm was soon replaced by disillusionment – he was against the separate electorates granted to Muslims in 1909. He aligned better with the Muslim League, believing, "this great communal organization (was) rapidly growing into a powerful factor for the birth of United India." Still, as a member of both the League and the INC, he encouraged dialogue against separatism<sup>24</sup> at the Lucknow session. Here, he declared he had always been a "staunch congressman," and that 'separatism' was "singularly inept and wide off the mark"<sup>25</sup>. By 1920, Jinnah decided that the INC, with Gandhi at its helm, had begun confusing politics with religion<sup>25</sup>. He resigned from the INC to demonstrate resentment for the lack of recognition of Muslim interests<sup>8</sup>. We will see that not only was Jinnah's political party orientation inconsistent, but also his ideology.

Jinnah went from considering himself to be a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity to believing that cooperation between the two would compromise political stability. Upon failing to find common ground between the INC and the League in 1927, Jinnah decided to find a way to reconcile the conflicting demands of the Muslim provinces and the INC<sup>25</sup>. Through the 1930s, Jinnah passionately continued striving to empower Muslim minorities, where he increasingly focused on regions with substantial Muslim populations, including Kashmir.

A significant turning point for Jinnah's fight for Muslim independence was the Lahore Conference and Lahore Resolution (March 1940). Jinnah called for the creation of independent states in the northwestern and eastern states of India, which were Muslim-majority areas. Jinnah used this resolution as a "bargaining counter," which was likely to be accepted by Muslim majorities, though not by the National Congress or the British<sup>25</sup>. He employed pragmatic political maneuvering to appease various Muslim factions<sup>26</sup>.

Jinnah's actions and the Lahore resolution highlight his primary objective: empowering and liberating Muslim minorities

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\*Still, as a member of both the League and the INC, he encouraged dialogue against separatism

\*\*He was eager to give up separate representation in exchange for the creation of a Muslim province in Sind, a higher status for the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan (N.W.F.P) and Baluchistan, representation for the Punjabi and Bengali Muslims, and a third of the seats in the central legislature for Muslims. For more information, refer to: Jalal, Ayesha. The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan, 10.

\*\*\*He rallied politicians in Sind and N.W.F.P, promising that 'Independent States' would remain 'sovereign and autonomous.' He addressed the concerns of several others including Muslim minorities, the Sikhs, the British, and Congress critics in a statement to the press (April 1940). For more information, refer to: Jinnah, Muhammad Ali. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches, statements, writings, letters, etc. (Edited by Muhammad Haneef Shahid. Urdu Bazar, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1976), 10.

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in India, through the creation of an Independent State. In his statement to the Press, he explained, “the Mussalmans, wherever they are in a minority, cannot improve their position under a United India or under one Central Government.” He instead offered to, “bring the homeland and six crores of the Mussalmans under one government,” where they could be a majority, rather than a perpetual minority. He saw this as an opportunity for Muslims to develop their spiritual, cultural, economic, and political life<sup>26</sup>. This ‘opportunity’ is better known as Jinnah’s two-state theory.

Jinnah said, “it is a dream that Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve as a common nationality,” reiterating the cultural and religious distinctions between the two groups<sup>27</sup>. Jinnah’s two-state theory primarily demanded a sovereign Muslim state based on the existing provincial boundaries, with Muslims in charge of their fates<sup>25</sup>. He emphasized the need for a transfer of power, and the dissolution of India’s unitary structure of central authority<sup>25</sup>. He firmly believed that Indian-controlled Muslim-majority states, such as Kashmir, if given the right to decide, would choose to join Jinnah’s Pakistan<sup>28</sup>. Jinnah also rejected the idea of a “moth-eaten Pakistan” - he was against dividing great provinces<sup>1</sup>. His fight for a legislatively independent nation made to enhance the rights of Muslim minorities without disrupting existing provincial borders reflects his vision for the external self-determination of the Muslim community as a whole, and internal self-determination for Kashmir within this Muslim nation.

We can agree that Jinnah’s wishes to protect Muslim minorities by making them a majority acknowledges pluralist democracy<sup>29</sup>. He effectively identifies the existence of religious groups within India, with their own interests, and aims to ensure that these groups have a say in their governance and representation<sup>26</sup>. His propaganda efforts are further seen in his bargaining and compromising with the interests of varying religious and political groups to bend government policy to his will. This leaves us with the question, what was to happen to non-Muslim minorities in Pakistani territories?

The idea of the two-nation theory as a means to address the needs of the Muslim minority is criticized for ethno-nationalism and neglecting secularity<sup>26</sup>. INC leader Rajagopalachari asserted:

*“Surely he (Jinnah) can ask for many things other than the cutting up of India into two parts, based on a*

*medieval conception in order to attain this laudable desire”<sup>26</sup>.*

The very creation of Pakistan meant that Jinnah believed Hindus and Muslims could not co-exist peacefully, in contrast to typical pluralist-secularist ideals<sup>25</sup>. Still, in a press conference (July 1947) Jinnah reassured that he would protect every minority and their rights, including their property, culture, and religious freedoms. He promised against discriminating on the basis of caste, color, religion, or creed, and even laughed at the concept of theocracy<sup>26</sup>.

For Jinnah, Kashmir was a linchpin in the creation of Pakistan—a Muslim-majority region where Muslims could exercise self-determination and build a future aligned with their cultural and religious values. In 1941, over 90% of Kashmiris were Muslim<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, he saw Kashmir as strategically significant: Kashmir was his chance to gain military and diplomatic parity with India, freeing him from inferiority to the powerful Indian hegemony<sup>28</sup>. He denied Mountbatten’s requests for a plebiscite, believing that on the grounds of religious demographics dividing the British Raj, the State had to be acceded to Pakistan<sup>3</sup>. However, this notion could be seen as flawed; Jammu had a Hindu-majority population and Ladakh had a Buddhist-majority population<sup>3</sup>.

Jinnah’s ideological inconsistencies lead me to believe he was a highly opportunistic leader. He greatly conflicted with his own political ideology: he considered himself a liberal and a ‘congressman,’ but left the secular INC to join the communal Muslim League. Could this perhaps be attributed to his promotion to President of the Muslim League? It is hard to justify his change of stance from initial disregard of separatism to pursuing the creation of a state on the very basis of separatism. The idea that he refused to allow Muslims to remain a minority in India, but welcomed non-Muslim minorities into Pakistan can contest the idea of a Muslim-centric nation. Yes, we can plainly state that Jinnah’s policy gradually evolved from one campaigning for Hindu-Muslim unity to one demanding a separate state for Muslims because of growth in knowledge, and the attitudes of Congress leaders. More simply, opportunism can explain his sudden ideological turnaround.

## Lord Louis Mountbatten

Lord Louis Mountbatten was significant to not only Britain’s 20th century military and political history, but also to India’s. His career spanned many critical roles, of which I will be exploring his role as the last Viceroy of British India (February 1947 – August 1947) and first Governor-General of independent India (August 1947 – June 1948). His tenure as viceroy was characterized by his efforts to ensure a smooth transition of India into independence<sup>30</sup>. As the Governor-General of India, he remained actively involved in the Kashmir conflict, determined to protect

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\*Pluralist democracy is a model of democracy in which no one group dominates politics and organized groups compete with each other to influence policy. For more information, refer to: Paul H. Conn. “Social Pluralism and Democracy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 2 (1973): 237–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2110519>.

\*\*Secularism and pluralism do not entirely overlap in this context. Secularism promotes the fair and equal treatment of all religions without state influence, while pluralism recognizes and accommodates diverse religious and cultural groups within a society, ensuring their representation and participation.

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India and Pakistan from any harm. Chandrashekhar Dasgupta describes Mountbatten casting himself in the role of the “unofficial mediator of the Kashmir conflict”<sup>16</sup>. To a great extent, this chapter buttresses Dasgupta’s interpretation of Mountbatten’s role in the Kashmir conflict, pronouncing Mountbatten as a ‘pragmatic and constitutional mediator.’

Mountbatten’s primary goal was to oversee the transfer of power from British colonial rule to democratic self-governance. He wished to mitigate risks of political instability and communal violence<sup>30</sup>. This understanding of Mountbatten’s aim is rather simplistic. Mountbatten claimed to be against the abrupt division of British India, emphasizing the need for legal and procedural efficacy. Still, he hastened the process of dividing India into two dominions, allotting only 73 days for this important feat<sup>1</sup>. He advocated for democratic self-governance, but limited princely States to a binary choice between acceding to India and Pakistan. Mountbatten assured he was a fair and unbiased mediator, but we can question his political and strategic priorities. Mountbatten, explaining this approach to partition as “stark realism;” he was “less interested that India should be handed over on lines which might ultimately prove correct than that mechanism should be set up to avoid bloodshed after the departure of the British”<sup>25</sup>. As a mediator, prioritizing pragmatism over idealism could be justified.

Mountbatten placed emphasis on proceduralism<sup>31</sup> to ensure the working of democratic frameworks<sup>32</sup>. Mountbatten proposed a plan that made logical decisions regarding the division of British India and the transfer of power. This plan amounted to the creation of two independent dominions, India and Pakistan, based on religious demographics. He decided that all government assets such as the Armed Forces, Civil Services, and Police were to be divided between the two dominions. Until this division, he established a transitional government in charge of making critical decisions pre-transition. Predicting that areas would be bitterly disputed, he drew up legal provisions for the establishments of ‘Boundary Commissions’ to draw frontiers<sup>30</sup>. By ensuring not only the content of laws, but also their standards of execution remain consistent, Mountbatten’s actions support proceduralism. Mountbatten’s undemocratic decision of expediting the timeline for the division of British India can best be understood against the background of growing chaos and orders from the British Government<sup>25</sup>. Thus, in line with proceduralism, Mountbatten balanced democratic ideals with procedural checks.

Mountbatten promised to help decide the future of British India through representative and participatory democracy<sup>33</sup>. He

believed the British administration was no longer capable of carrying out Direct Rule in India<sup>30</sup>. He encouraged Indian leaders to decide their own affairs in India itself was necessary. Further, he established democratic frameworks such as legislative bodies, judicial systems, and administrative mechanisms, allowing the public to indirectly participate in decision making<sup>30</sup>. Fostering an environment that allowed leaders to be chosen and held accountable by their citizens is a core principle of representative democracy. As for participatory democracy, Mountbatten made efforts to negotiate a plebiscite held by the United Nations to determine the future of Kashmir. However, his efforts were resented by Jinnah, and the plebiscite remained but an ideal<sup>16</sup>.

Mountbatten’s primary objective was constructing stable democratic and self-governing dominions post-independence. While he advocated for democratic self-governance and the liberty of the dominions to mold their futures, he advised princely States against independence, and encouraged them to accede to India and Pakistan. Considering geopolitical implications, this verdict is understandable. Kashmir was a land-locked princely state that was considered over-sized and over-populated. Having two rival countries for neighbors, Kashmir was at risk of escalating tensions and ending up as a battlefield<sup>6</sup>. Still, this binary option of accession to either dominion eliminated the possibility of external self-determination for Kashmir, and left only the possibility of internal self-determination. Further, the Maharaja’s dominant role in deciding the future of Kashmir reduced Mountbatten’s ability to fulfill the wants of the public. Even though Mountbatten urged the Maharaja to consider the wishes of his population, he agreed that the Maharaja had the final word concerning accession. This undermined participatory and representative democracy. In line with pragmatism, Mountbatten was willing to trade potential geopolitical stability for limited democracy.

As a mediator, Mountbatten never outrightly supported Indian claims to Kashmir over Pakistani claims. Supporting his mediating, Dasgupta explains, “Mountbatten was in some ways a friend of India, but he was in no sense a foe of Pakistan.” Even so, there were suspicions that Mountbatten’s close friend Nehru had influenced him with numerous arguments in favor of an Indian Kashmir<sup>3</sup>. Contrastingly, the Maharaja recalled that Mountbatten preferred the idea of Kashmir being acceded to Pakistan. Seeing the Maharaja’s opposition to accede to Pakistan, Mountbatten reminded him that 90 percent of his population was Muslim<sup>6</sup>. Strategically, this geopolitical position would be useful to Britain, and reduced the possibility of communal riots from Pakistanis. Of course, Mountbatten had to keep in mind the impacts of favoring Pakistan on Anglo-Indian relations<sup>3</sup>. Thus, despite being the ‘ex-vice-roy of the British Raj’, a duality of interests conflicted Mountbatten’s objectivity, undermining his efforts to remain objective.

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levels For more information, refer to: Council of Europe. “Participatory Democracy.” Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/participatory-democracy>.

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\*Proceduralism justifies rules, decisions, or institutions by reference to a valid process, as opposed to their being morally correct according to a substantive account of justice or goodness. For more information, refer to: J. Rocheleau. “Proceduralism.” In *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, edited by D.K. Chatterjee. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5\\_367](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_367).

\*\*Participatory democracy aims to promote and assist the implementation of standards and mechanisms to engage citizens in political decision-making at all

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We can also discuss exactly how warranted Mountbatten was in undertaking this role. Could Hindus and Muslims have created a fairer future for Kashmir without Mountbatten's procedural guidance and limitations? I believe Mountbatten was instrumental in preventing the collapse of negotiations between the primary actors in the Kashmir conflict. By 1947, the deep mistrust between the INC and the Muslim League had reached a point where unmoderated negotiations alone were unlikely to yield a fruitful outcome. Even if his involvement introduced certain limitations, he fulfilled his role as a just mediator.

Considering Mountbatten's ability to remain greatly neutral despite conflicting stances, alongside his pragmatic approach to conflict-resolution, I agree with Dasgupta's portrayal of Mountbatten as a mediator in this conflict.

### Evaluating the conceptions of democracy

Each discussed leader had differing political visions and contrasting aspirations for the future of Kashmir, with the Maharaja embodying our 'status quo maintaining autocrat'; Nehru our 'liberal humanitarian democrat'; Abdullah our 'secular socialist democrat'; Jinnah our 'ethno-nationalist democrat'; and Mountbatten our 'pragmatic constitutional mediator.'

At the heart of Kashmir's hopes for self-determination lay the question: accession to India, Pakistan, or independence? Here, accession to India or Pakistan would be in accordance with internal self-determination, and independence would translate to external self-determination. The Maharaja initially wished for external self-determination, believing independence would enable him to preserve Kashmiri autonomy and traditions, specifically the Dogra rule. Jinnah campaigned for the external self-determination for all Muslim minorities in his two-nation theory. Assessing the Kashmiri religious demography, he fought for Kashmir's internal self-determination to Pakistan. Nehru, Abdullah, and Mountbatten all respected the autonomy and will of the Kashmiri people, but favored Kashmir's internal self-determination over external self-determination, considering geo-political impracticalities.

This question was complicated due to Jinnah's two-nation theory and contesting views of secularism and pluralism. Jinnah's prioritization of ethno-nationalist or communal principles as a form of 'pluralism' served as the backdrop for his claims to Pakistani entitlement of Kashmir. Abdullah wished for Kashmir to accede to India greatly because he saw Kashmir prospering within India's secular environment. Nehru, who was closely aligned with Abdullah, realized that Kashmir's accession to India would help legitimize his pluralist and secular visions for India. The Maharaja's lack of pluralist policies contributed to internal unrest and influenced his need to accede for protection.

Jinnah's campaign for Kashmir to accede to Pakistan led Pakistani tribal troops to believe invading Kashmir would support Pakistan's efforts to acquire Kashmir<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand,

Nehru and Abdullah staunchly opposed the two-nation theory. In exchange for Indian military support against Pakistani tribal invaders, the Maharaja signed the instrument of accession, acceding Kashmir to India<sup>9</sup>. This was meant to secure Kashmir's internal self-determination within the dominion of India. Mountbatten and Nehru decided that this accession would be further formalized through a plebiscite, but this plebiscite never took place<sup>2</sup>.

The lack of a plebiscite can be attributed to disagreements with participatory democratic ideals. Plebiscites can be considered as a form of participatory democracy, as they would have allowed citizens to directly partake in decision making by voting for or against accession to a dominion. Mountbatten encouraged a plebiscite, believing that it would justly ascertain the wishes of the Kashmiri people. Initially, Nehru and Abdullah were in favor of a plebiscite allowing the Kashmiri people to determine the future of Kashmir. However, the Praja Parishad movement pressured the Indian government to assure accession of Kashmir to India<sup>19</sup>, thus, only observing participatory democracy on face value. At first, Jinnah too seemed to embody participatory democratic ideals, assured that the Muslim majority population would want to join the Muslim dominion. However, he was opposed to a plebiscite conducted by the United Nations, finding this notion insulting to Pakistan. By demanding a plebiscite overseen by only Mountbatten and himself, Jinnah undermines the principles of participatory democracy<sup>16</sup>. Worried about the idea of losing his authority, the Maharaja was reluctant to conduct a plebiscite and embrace participatory democracy.

The failure to conduct a plebiscite also indicates compromised democratic ideals, that is, limited democracy. While Nehru and Abdullah seemed to welcome liberal democratic frameworks, the Maharaja, Jinnah, and Mountbatten all seemingly allowed limited democracy to protect their interests. The Maharaja's autocratic style of governance was characterised by limited democratic principles. Jinnah's demands for the accession of Kashmir were based on a form of limited democracy, which he justified as a means to protect the interests of Kashmiri Muslims. Mountbatten also endorsed limited democracy, prioritising an orderly transition of British India to partition over full-fledged democratic institutions.

The lack of a conducted plebiscite also showcases the differences in regard for the Kashmiriyat. My research proves that the Maharaja was perceived as oppressive by the Muslim community, causing internal dissent. Consequently, Abdullah would pressure him to abdicate his throne in 1949, and officially denounce the Dogra regime in 1952<sup>2</sup>. Jinnah was more concerned with the Muslim minorities than the Kashmiriyat itself. Abdullah, Mountbatten, and Nehru valued the Kashmiriyat and wholly supported Kashmiri autonomy, as reflected in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Still, they did not respect the Kashmiriyat enough to hear their pleas for independence, or even conduct a plebiscite. The overall disregard for the Kashmiriyat and the

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lack of a plebiscite is a significant impediment in the promise of free self-determination for the Kashmiriyat.

To understand the failure of self-determination in Kashmir, we can attribute a conception of freedom to each actor, as per Isaiah Berlin's work on freedoms. Though Berlin's analytical conceptions of freedom are obtained at the individual level, they are instructive at the collective level too vis-à-vis self-determination. Nehru and Abdullah seemed to advocate for positive freedoms. Nehru's vision of positive freedom emphasized the empowerment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir through internal self-determination and autonomy. Similarly, Abdullah's leadership was marked by efforts to secure greater autonomy from autocratic rule for the region. Contrastingly, the Maharaja was seen to celebrate negative freedoms, driven by a desire to maintain his autonomy and authority over Kashmir without external interference. In line with his confused policies, Jinnah advocated for both positive and negative freedoms. Jinnah's vision of positive freedom was seen in the creation of Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims. At the same time, Jinnah emphasized negative freedom for the Muslim majority of Kashmir by advocating against Indian control and supporting armed tribal invasions to influence the region's accession to Pakistan<sup>34</sup>.

I believe that these conflicting desires for the future of Kashmir - alongside differences in democratic ideologies - led our primary actors to determinedly defend their interests. Jinnah's campaign for Kashmir to accede to Pakistan manifested violently in Pakistani tribal invasions of Kashmir. In exchange for Indian military assistance, the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession, acceding Kashmir to India. Jinnah refused to acknowledge the Instrument of Accession, arguing that it was illegitimate and that the final decision ought to be taken by a plebiscite<sup>16</sup>. Consequently, the conflict intensified, emerging into a full scale war between India and Pakistan. In January 1949, the conflict reached a stalemate, leading to intervention of the United Nations. The United Nations established the Line of Control, which effectively divided Kashmir between India and Pakistan<sup>2</sup>. India retained control over the Kashmir valley, Jammu and the Ladakh regions, while Pakistan gained control over Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Balistan<sup>2</sup>.

The line of control mandated division violated the principle of external self-determination as it ignored the will of the Kashmiri people, who were never given a direct opportunity to decide their political future through a democratic plebiscite. Instead, a division was imposed upon the Kashmiri people, effectively dividing them. The principle of sovereignty was sacrificed by dividing the region between two countries. The conflicting views on democracy held by the major actors led to a denied plebiscite and military intervention. This eventually culminated in United Nations involvement and the unfair geopolitical divi-

sion of Kashmir.

## Conclusion

The Kashmir conflict remains a persistent and deeply relevant issue. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought four major wars over Kashmir<sup>35</sup>. The repeated wars over Kashmir reflect the broader failure of both India and Pakistan to reconcile their differences in democratic principles and to prioritize the self-determination of the Kashmiri people. Recently, in 2019, the Indian government abrogated Article 370, effectively revoking Kashmir's special autonomous status. Subsequently, Kashmir saw a crackdown on political and civil liberties<sup>36</sup>. This move is an affront to the promised internal self-determination for the Kashmiri people.

Despite decades of dialogue, military confrontations, and international interventions, the conflict has not only persisted but has also evolved into a symbol of the broader struggle between competing national visions of democracy, sovereignty, and self-determination. Existing literature has denied the productivity of peace talks over Kashmir amidst terrorism. Despite being necessary and even desirable, bilateral conversations between India and Pakistan over Kashmir so far simply deliberate facts and end in deadlock<sup>35</sup>. My research addresses the root causes of the Kashmir conflict through political theory: diverging conceptions of democracy. By political convergence, negotiators can explore the juxtaposing democratic principles that shape each nation's approach to Kashmir. Conceptual clarity can provide deeper insight into political intentions, allowing efficient communication, and strengthening conflict-resolution efforts.

Existing literature primarily focuses on the perspectives and demands of major parties, institutions, and actors. The Kashmiriyat's movements, voices, and experiences are neglected in the current conversation. Considering the Kashmiri people's desires for self-determination is necessary to reveal pathways to peace that are currently overlooked. Thus, bilateral conversations<sup>35</sup> discussing the implications of political conceptions coupled with insight into the desires of Kashmiriyat may pave the way for a more sustainable resolution.

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\*Bilateral conversations can be defined as discussions between two parties aimed at resolving issues or advancing mutual interests. Although policy analysis is outside the scope of this paper, the following case studies illustrate the efficacy of bilateral conversations in conflict-resolution and reconciliation: The Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland, 1998; Colombian Peace Talks with the FARC Guerrillas, 2016; South African Negotiations to end Apartheid, 1990-1994; and the Aceh Peace Talks, Indonesia, 2005.

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