Linguistic Persecution in South Asia: Historical and Modern Implications for Post-Article 370 Kashmir

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Introduction

Koshur, also known as Kashmiri, is a Dardic language spoken primarily in the Kashmir Valley of South Asia, the center of the international Kashmir conflict, in India-administered Kashmir. It has about 7 million speakers globally, and at least 14 dialects (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019) though sociolinguistic research into the dialect distinctions is nearly nonexistent. This is due to a variety of reasons, many of them politically charged and fraught with diplomatic faux-pas. In this thesis, I will explore Kashmir’s and Koshur’s linguistic history and examples of linguistic persecution and conflict in modern South Asia to compare them to Koshur’s current standing. I will also discuss the lack of dialect-sensitive, objective research in Koshur’s documentation and stress the urgency with which this research is needed. Additionally, I will explore the treatment of the largest and starkest dialect split, which is between the co-dialects of Koshur spoken by the Kashmiri Hindu and Kashmiri Muslim communities. While this split encompasses many smaller sub-dialects and varieties, this split is the most obvious and simultaneously least acknowledged.

Linguistic Diversity in South Asia

Qualifying and/or quantifying the linguistic diversity of South Asia is neither simple nor straightforward. According to some estimates, India alone has the second highest number of languages in the world at 780\(^1\), second only to Papua New Guinea at 839 (Economic Times).

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\(^1\) Ethnologue only cites about 460.
Pakistan has 74 recognized languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019), and other South Asian countries also have dozens of languages, dialects, and varieties from various families, including the Austroasiatic, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and the near-extinct Great Andamanese families. In addition, there are many as-yet-unclassified language isolates, especially those of the various nomadic mountain people. There is even a Bantu language (Sidi) that was spoken until well into the 20th century by the ethnic Siddis, a South Asian-East African diaspora group that traces back to almost 600 CE (The Sidi Project).

While this linguistic diversity is fascinating for modern linguists, when intertwined with histories of colonization, identity construction, and inter-ethnic regional struggle, it gives rise to great political, legal, social, and cultural turmoil in postcolonial nations. How do you communicate effectively with, much less govern, a people who speak a thousand different languages across unrelated language families, many of whom live in isolated forests and mountains? How best can minority languages be protected? What efforts should (or shouldn’t) be undertaken towards language revitalization? These questions are far beyond the scope of this thesis, but they are some of the many linguistic (and often ethnic) debates and problems that have plagued the subcontinent since even before British colonization.

A Western reader, especially a monolingual English reader, can only look in from the outside at the variously effective and ineffective attempts postcolonial South Asian countries have made to work with these issues, and it is important to be charitable to these endeavors. While I come from a South Asian ethnic background and don’t consider myself a monolingual English speaker, I believe it is important to acknowledge that I’m writing this from the lens of a Western academic. My hope for this paper is that it will restart the overall discussion about Kashmir and South Asian linguistics, conceivably sparking more conversations from people with different perspectives and walks of life.
While the Indian Constitution designates “Hindi written in Devanagari script” as the official language for government proceedings, English is used (as “allowed” by the Constitution) in most legislative procedures. There have been incidents where cases presented before the Indian Supreme Court have been rejected for being written in Hindi despite the Constitution, which speaks to the messy nature of endeavors at multilingual policy. Article 343 of the original Indian Constitution outlined plans for Hindi to eventually replace the extant English as the official language of the Indian Union—which is only slightly different than the official language for government proceedings—but The Official Languages Act of 1963 extended the use of English indefinitely. While no language is given official status for the republic as a whole, Hindi (usually Hindi-Urdu or Hindustani) is spoken by more than half of the population according to the 2011 census, mainly in the northern regions. Many Indians also speak English, typically the Indian variety, and casual Hindi also has many English borrowings. In the southern part of the country, the Dravidian languages (Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and others) flourish and are more commonly spoken than Hindi.

The Constitution officially recognizes 22 languages in its Eighth Schedule: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Koshur, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri. Several of these languages are spoken by many, many people despite being considered scheduled

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2 While there’s a theoretical difference between the two types of “official languages” on paper, I haven’t been able to determine how this translates to practice. My understanding is that English is understood to be the most generally-spoken language, especially considering the ideology of Hindi supremacy, which I will discuss later in this thesis.

3 “Pure” shudh Hindi is rarely used outside of academic/liturgical contexts. Vulgar, casual Hindi uses many English words. For example, while phrases technically exist for “please” and “thank you” in shudh Hindi, it’s much more common (and more easily understood) to just say them in English. There is a lot to unpack here regarding peppering spoken Hindi with English words as a sign of Western education (and consequently a class marker), however, that is beyond the scope of this paper.
(minority) languages (such as Marathi, with over 80 million speakers), and most are state-official languages (such as Assamese, the official language of the state of Assam). Sanskrit is not widely spoken, and remains mainly a liturgical language of the Hindus.\footnote{There have been recent attempts (with varying levels of success) at revival, but Sanskrit largely remains unspoken and still, to my knowledge, has no real "native" speakers.}

The official regional language of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, where the Kashmir Valley is situated, is Urdu (J&K Department of Tourism). Koshur is recognized as a "regional" language of the Valley. While language data specifically only for Jammu & Kashmir’s minority languages is difficult to find beyond overarching data for Indian minority languages, other languages spoken in the region include Indo-Aryan languages such as Dogri (spoken in Jammu), Punjabi (spoken in the neighboring state of Punjab), Pahari (spoken in western J&K and Azad Kashmir), Tibetic languages such as Ladakhi (spoken in Ladakh), and Dardic languages such as Koshur and Shina (the closest relative to Koshur) (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019), many are not recognized by either the Indian Constitution or the Jammu and Kashmir State Constitution.
Linguistic Landscape of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir

While a plurality (about 45%) of Pakistan’s population speaks Punjabi, the two official languages are Urdu and English (Pakistan 2008 Census). Urdu, while having relatively few first-language speakers (~10%), is spoken as a second language by most Pakistanis, and is a
compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools. English is also widely spoken, especially the Pakistani variant. There have been recent attempts to minimize the use of English as a lingua franca and replace it with Urdu, especially in government, but I haven’t been able to ascertain how successful these attempts have been.

While only Sindhi is officially recognized as a provincial language (in the Sindh province), the four provinces of Pakistan (Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) have many minority languages with massive speaking populations. For example, though Sindhi, Pashto, and Saraiki don’t have legal recognition or status, they each have more than 10 million speakers across the country (2008 Census). Some of the other languages spoken in Pakistan include Balochi, Brahui, Hazaragi, Chitrali, Kohistani, Hindko, Mirpuri, and Balti. Of these, Balti is a Tibetic language and Hazaragi is an ethno-dialect of Persian. Some language terms, such as Hindko, encompass a wide array of varieties that blur the lines between distinct language and mutually intelligible dialect (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). These statistics also don’t encompass the various transitional and immigrant languages, of which there are many. Historical languages and language influences include Persian and Arabic, both of which are often taught (though not compulsory) in schools.

Shina, the language most closely related to Koshur, is spoken by a plurality of people in the Gilgit-Baltistan province. Koshur is spoken by several hundred thousand people in Azad Kashmir, though they make up a tiny percentage of the region’s population at about 2% (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019).
At the surface level the linguistic policy and landscape of Pakistan seems far less complicated than that of India, especially as India also has to contend with the old linguistic laws of the British Raj\(^5\). However, Pakistan continues to grapple with the same issues of linguistic

\(^5\) Many, many old colonial laws still exist and contribute to overall inefficiency and bureaucracy. For example, the law criminalizing homosexuality, which was struck down in 2018, came from the 1861 Indian
diversity that India does; one of the case studies in this paper deals with a “failure” of early Pakistani linguistic policy. Additionally, many have expressed puzzlement about the decision to institute a “minority” language, Urdu, as one of the official national languages.

Other Considerations

While this thesis will mainly consider Indian and Pakistani (and peripherally Bangladeshi) language policy and linguistic ideologies as they relate to Kashmir and Koshur, the cultural and legal status of language varies greatly from country to country and is important to note in framing the treatment of language, especially minority languages, in the subcontinent as a whole. What is today India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and parts of Burma, Bhutan, and Myanmar (depending on the empire(s) in power) were historically all considered “India” as a region, and before a cohesive “India” they comprised numerous kingdoms, dynasties, and empires that all exerted various influences, including linguistic and cultural, on each other. To illustrate this point and to provide further background to the field of South Asian linguistics, I will briefly summarize the language cultures and policies of the other South Asian countries.

In modern Bangladesh, the official language is Bengali or Bangla, spoken by almost 99% of the population (Faquire 2010). Bangladesh is considered the only (largely) monolingual country in South Asia. In Bangladeshi government proceedings, English is only used in relation with foreign governments. The people of The Maldives speak English and Dhivehi (also called Maldivian), the official national language (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). Bhutan has at least 23 distinct languages, including its national language of Dzongkha (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). The only non-Sino-Tibetan language in Bhutan is Nepali, which is Indo-Aryan.

Penal Code, introduced under British rule. This red tape and legal clutter commonly characterizes many Indian legal proceedings, as the government has to manually strike down the old colonial laws that no longer suit the nation or make modern sense. I remember as a child listening to my mother complain about some of the colonial laws about boilers, heaters, and fireplaces in houses, which were so outdated and restrictively specific that her post-Independence family didn’t bother with coal or electric heating at all.
The 2011 National Census of Nepal lists 123 recognized languages (including the recently-discovered Kusunda language isolate), though the national language and lingua franca is Nepali (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). Interestingly, the Nepali Constitution designates that all languages, including “Indigenous languages”, must be written in the Devanagari script. Sri Lanka has at least seven recognized languages, including Sri Lankan Malay, an Austronesian-lexified creole (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). Its official languages are Sinhala and Tamil; Sinhala is overwhelmingly the more popularly spoken one. Ethnologue recognizes 41 languages in Afghanistan, and the Afghan Constitution designates Dari (a variety of Persian) and Pashto as official languages.6

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6 While Afghanistan isn’t always considered “South Asia” (rather, it’s sometimes grouped in with Central Asia) in the public eye for political/foreign policy reasons, I include it in this list because of the influence of various empires that spanned both Afghanistan and Kashmir and its membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an intergovernmental and geopolitical union of South Asian states.
What is Kashmir?

Kashmir is a contested region of South Asia that is divided into Azad Kashmir (known as AJK or POK) within the Gilgit-Baltistan region, Jammu and Kashmir (known as IOK or J&K), and
Aksai Chin, which are currently administered and governed by Pakistan, India, and China respectively. While the entire Gilgit-Balistan region is part of the larger area known as Kashmir, AJK is the most contentious district due to sharing a border with IOK. Some Kashmiris\(^7\) contend that Aksai Chin is not part of the larger historical Kashmir region, but China has also invaded and occupied parts of Jammu and Kashmir in the Ladakh district of IOK. Additionally, Pakistan ceded a small part of northeastern Gilgit-Balistan to China in 1963, a border challenge which India has never legally recognized. Regardless of China’s involvement, Pakistan and India are the biggest players in the conflict and have the greatest investment in the border dispute. This is due to the issue itself stemming from Partition in 1947, when the larger region formerly entirely known as India gained independence from Britain and was split into the countries of India and Pakistan\(^8\) with unclear, unpopular northern borders that foster international tensions and threat of nuclear war to this day (Bose 2003). Legally and politically, AJK is nominally considered part of Pakistan but is largely self-governing. J&K is overseen by the Indian government and had special rules of governance under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution up until mid-2019, when these considerations were revoked. I will discuss the ramifications of this change in a more detailed manner in the History section (subsection labelled “The Abrogation of Article 370”).

Kashmir borders several important international regions, such as Afghanistan and the Xinjiang region of China to the north of Gilgit-Baltistan and the Tibet region to the east of IOK. Map 2 shows the current administrative breakdown of the region. Many of these regions are also, on their own, hotbeds of political conflict and activity.

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\(^7\) I haven’t seen any academic sources for this claim, but I’ve seen several Kashmiris who live in the Valley say this on Twitter.

\(^8\) As well as several technically-independent political entities (“princely states”) that were very soon afterwards annexed by either India or Pakistan, such as Goa and Hyderabad, both annexed by India.
The Kashmir Valley, also known as The Vale of Kashmir in historical texts, is where Srinagar, the summer capital\(^9\) of the Indian state of J&K, is situated along Dal Lake and nestled up against the Himalyan Mountains. The Valley and its surrounding areas are the primary places where Koshur is spoken. The official governmental language of J&K is Urdu, a co-dialect with Hindi. The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India, which affords federal recognition to languages of the Republic of India, lists only Koshur (Kashmiri), Urdu, and Dogri\(^{10}\) as recognized languages spoken in J&K.

\(^9\) The winter capital is Jammu to the south. Srinagar is the capital from May to October, and Jammu from November to April. Historically, Srinagar was the capital of most Kashmiri rulers year-round.

\(^{10}\) Indo-Aryan language spoken mostly in the Jammu region of J&K.
Kashmiri People

It is difficult to speak of Kashmiri culture as a monolith considering just how far-flung many of its people are, such as the remote nomadic communities of the Himalayan mountains, who often go decades without any contact with the outside world. However, the distinct identity of the Kashmir region, especially that of the Valley, is commonly called *Kashmiriyat*. The peculiar uniqueness of this identity stems from centuries of isolation in the snowy Himalayas as well as temperance by the Kashmiri people’s expressions of unity and solidarity against foreign invaders and influences. For example, Kashmiri Pandits, who are mostly of the Brahmin caste, traditionally eat meat (including beef), which is a stark contrast from the vegetarian Brahmins of the rest of the subcontinent[^11]. Toru Tak, one of the leading researchers in Kashmiri sociology and anthropology, described it as “a centuries-old indigenous secularism” that rose in the 16th century, though the term itself wasn’t coined until the 70s (Tak 2013). While *Kashmiriyat* was originally coined explicitly to cut across ethno-religious divisions, it has been heavily politicized and has been subject to misinformation, ethno-nationalist propaganda, and other distortions in light of the modern Kashmir conflict.

Some folk icons of Kashmir include Nund Rishi (a late 14th century Kashmiri Muslim mystic considered the patron saint of Kashmiris), Lal Ded (a Kashmiri Shaivite poetess and contemporary of Nund Rish), and Utpala (a 10th century mystic Hindu saint probably from Srinagar, of whom little is known historically though he is revered by tradition). There is also a

[^11]: Hindus of the rest of the subcontinent, regardless of caste, traditionally don’t eat beef because the cow is considered a sacred animal. As a child, I was told that Pandits eat beef because of Kashmir’s inhospitable, icy climate, which doesn’t lend itself easily to growing food crops, though I don’t know how materially true this is. Kashmiri cuisine is indeed largely meat-based to this day. The issue of beef-eating in India is a touchy political topic; however, Kashmiri Pandits have escaped this scrutiny, in my opinion, due to the controversy stemming from Islamophobia rather than real concern for cows.
rich, centuries-old tradition of Sufi mysticism at the core of Kashmiri Islam, and many Kashmiri Sufi saints are still revered to this day regardless of religious practice.

In terms of demographics, the majority of the Valley’s residents today are Kashmiri Muslims and mostly Sunni with a sizable Shia minority (BBC). Despite the Sufi history, there are few Kashmiri Sufis today. A Kashmiri Hindu population once thrived in the region, but by the end of 1990 the Hindu population had largely disappeared. I will explore the reasons for this in more depth in the history section. My family is largely from Srinagar and some assorted other areas of the Valley, and claim descendancy from the Saraswat Brahmin caste and community, who are Kashmiri Hindus also known as Kashmiri Pandits. However, I have good reason to believe, based on the surnames that are common in my family, that most of my Kashmiri ancestry is from the Kshatriya caste rather than Brahmin (Pandit) caste. Either way, mine is a typical Kashmiri Hindu family. There are also pockets of Christian, Jewish, Sikh, and Jain people, though it’s unclear how many of these communities remain in Kashmir in light of the factors that drove out the Kashmiri Hindus.

The first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru (1899-1964), wrote about Kashmiris in his preface to PNK Bamzai’s “A History of Kashmir” as follows:

*Kashmiris are known to be intelligent; they do very well in examinations. Their artisans are hard-working and have a sense of art and beauty. They love song and music. Perhaps because of these civilized traits they grew soft and other failings grew among them. They were not at all war-like and were thus very different from some of their neighbors. They liked a soft and quiet life…[They are] an attractive people in many ways who want to live their own lives and, now that they have tasted freedom, to*

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12 He was himself a Kashmiri Hindu. I’m unclear on whether he was specifically a “purebred” Pandit, as technically his father was and that’s how caste/regional identity usually gets passed down, but his mother was a Kashmiri Brahmin of some kind.
progress according to their own ways and maintain the blended culture which has been their hall-mark, whether they are Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs.

Koshur

Koshur is a Dardic language within the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European. Some of its key features include split ergativity and V2 word order. Today, it has about 7 million speakers globally (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). It is unclear how many of these speakers are Kashmiri Hindus and how many are Kashmiri Muslims, as previous data doesn’t distinguish between dialects. According to the 2011 Indian census, there are about 6.9 million residents of the Kashmir Valley, though Koshur is also spoken in the Chenab Valley and parts of Azad Kashmir and not all Valley residents speak Koshur.

Koshur is mostly an oral language. However, it currently technically has three scripts and a great body of historical literature. The historical Sharada script, which was probably the first script, is only used by Kashmiri Hindus in religious ceremonies and liturgical texts now and is mostly unused. The more common scripts are the Devanagari script, also used for Hindi and Sanskrit with some added diacritics, and the Perso-Arabic script, also used for Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. The Devanagari script is primarily associated with the Kashmiri Hindu community, and the Perso-Arabic script is primarily associated with the Kashmiri Muslim community. In informal contexts, such as Twitter, I’ve also seen Koshur romanized into Latin script.

“Koshur” is also a name ethnic Kashmiris, especially of the Valley, use to describe themselves, and in the language itself “Koshur” means Kashmiri as an adjective or a Kashmiri person.
Historical Background

Ancient History

The Kashmir Valley has been populated by human civilizations since before the advent of Hinduism and Vedic Aryans, and this proposed prehistoric tribe is today called the “Nagas” after the serpentine deities they worshipped (Bamzai 1994). The Nilamata Purana, an ancient Kashmiri text dated to somewhere between the 6th and 8th centuries CE, suggests that the Nagas eventually teamed up with the Vedic Aryans in prehistory to overthrow their rival clan, the Pisacas (Bamzai 1994).

It’s unclear whether the Manavas, the Vedic Aryans described in the Nilamata Purana who eventually migrated to the land of the Nagas, were the same community of Vedic Aryans as the ones previously allied with the Nagas. However, the incoming Aryans eventually became known as the Saraswats or Saraswat Brahmins (from whom my family descends), named after what was then called the Saraswati River (now generally known as the Ghaggar portion of the Ghaggar-Hakra River in Pakistan) upon which they originally settled (Bamzai 1994). Due to a variety of geological features, the river changed its course several times and eventually all but dried up, leaving the Saraswats to search for refuge elsewhere. The Naga king Nila allowed them into his kingdom in the Valley on the condition that they assimilate into the culture of the Nagas. Eventually, ethnic Nagas were pushed out of the region and the Naga kingdom began to

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13 The Nilamata Purana has a very detailed mythological story about the origins of the various following tribes and their conflicts that involves a demon living in a lake that was eventually drained by the gods and whose dry basin became Kashmir, but for obvious reasons I haven’t included that as an authoritative historical narrative. The mythological lake probably did exist, and the Kashmir Valley does appear to be part of a dry lake basin, but little else can be ascertained. There is another historical text on Kashmir’s dynastic history called the Rajatarangini, written in Koshur, but it draws almost entirely from the Nilamata Purana for its historical narrative up until the Karkota Dynasty (7th century CE). A lot of this early history is suspect, especially the more mythological and fantastic narratives. It also isn’t clear to me what language the Nilatama Purana was written in, though it is considered a quintessentially Kashmiri epic text.
decline, and Saraswats became the majority demographic of the region, albeit with a drastically
different traditions, culture, and religion than their ethnic communities in the rest of the South
Asian region (Bamzai 1994).

In the archaeological timeline, the earliest inhabited sites are on the floodplains of the
Kashmir Valley and date back to 3000 BCE (Singh 2008), but it’s disputed as to how these
archaeological sites fit in with the timeline and descriptions of population movements in the
Nilamata Purana. The physical and genetic evidence suggests that these sites were inhabited
by the Indus Valley Civilization, also known as the Harappan Civilization (Kaw 2004). The
Harappan Language isn’t directly attested, and the possibly-related Indus Script (found in other
regions of the Indus Valley Civilization’s settlements) is yet undeciphered. Thus, there is little
way of knowing which language these ancient civilizations spoke and which communities in the
Nilamata Purana they correspond to beyond theory and conjecture.

While this prehistory is far from settled and extremely difficult to date, it sets the stage for
the immense socio-political, ethnic, and religious changes that would characterize Kashmir and
the Kashmir Valley for centuries. There is also some evidence that modern spoken Koshur
retains several features from its ancestor Vedic Sanskrit¹⁴ (Kalla 1985), which is attested in the
Vedas, sacred Hindu texts compiled between the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE as well as in the
infamous Panini text¹⁵. Today’s ethnic Nagas¹⁶ speak various Tibeto-Burman languages, though

¹⁴ Kalla considers the partial maintenance of several sibilant consonants and a numerical prefix (du- and
dvi- in Koshur and Sanskrit versus ba- and bi in most other Indo-Aryan languages) examples of evidence
of these claims.
¹⁵ Panini himself was probably writing from today’s northwestern Pakistan, and his grammar treatise
mentions Kashmir by name (Kashmira).
¹⁶ It’s unclear if any of the tribes currently living in Nagaland consider themselves descendants of this
purported first Naga kingdom, though a Naga ethnicity still exists and constitutes the majority of the Indian
state of Nagaland’s population. Northeastern Indian states (including Nagaland and Assam) have a
similar and sometimes even stricter special legal status to that which J&K formerly had and consequently
are also at the centerpoint of several extremely touchy international political issues. For example, any
Indian citizen who isn’t natively from any of these several states requires special legal clearance to even
enter the region. Linguistically, today’s Nagas speak Sino-Tibetan languages, though this doesn’t
necessarily mean that the ancient Nagas, if they really existed, also did.
it isn’t clear whether they are related to the prehistoric tribe retroactively called the same name, as the ancient tribe is only attested in the Nilamata Purana and sources that cite it.

Hindu and Buddhist Dynasties

The next great wave of migration to Kashmir, which is much better documented, came with Ashoka the Great\(^{17}\) of the Maurya Dynasty of India, who converted to Buddhism following a revelation about the toll of war and conquest and sent thousands of Buddhist monks to Kashmir, considered a sacred place in both Buddhism and Hinduism; Hindus contend that the Gods live in the Himalayas around Kashmir. This is easier to date and place historically, as Ashoka the Great’s empire stretched across nearly the entire Iron Age South Asian subcontinent and definitively lasted from about 268-232 BCE (Bamzai 1994), and the Maurya Dynasty as a whole lasted from about 322 BCE to 185 BCE (Basu 2016). It’s presumed that prior to the introduction of Buddhism, the majority of the Valley’s residents were Vedic Hindus. Indeed, Kashmiri Shaivism, a distinct form of Kashmiri Hinduism for worship of the god Shiva, continued to flourish for many centuries following the Maurya takeover. However, this migration drastically changed the socio-cultural and religious fabric of Kashmiri life. For example, the caste system that Saraswats had previously adhered to was all but lost (Bamzai 1994). While Buddhism eventually declined in South Asia, Kashmir remains a sacred Buddhist site with many historical pilgrimage locations, and its effects on the subcontinent are evident even today.\(^{18}\) Ashoka’s legacy and records also give some of the first linguistic data on Kashmir, as there is little (if any) authoritative study on the historical origins of Koshur. The languages of the Maurya Empire

\(^{17}\) He may have founded the city of Srinagar (referred to as Srinagari in the Rajatarangini) or what would eventually become Srinagar (Qasba Raina 2014).

\(^{18}\) For example: it’s very much possible that reincarnation, for which Hinduism is famous, was originally a Buddhist concept and was folded into Hinduism (and Jainism) later. It was mentioned in early Hindu texts as an amorphous concept but probably coalesced and became a coherent religious tenet under early Buddhist influence.
were several “Ashokan” dialects of Prakriti, a now-extinct Indo-Iranian language and its many
dialects (Habib & Habib 1989), and there was heavy historical contact with the Greek empires
and languages, including contact between Alexander the Great and Ashoka’s Maurya
predecessors through wars and trade (Heckel 2003).

Figure 5: Map of the Maurya Dynasty’s borders

The next important dynasty in Kashmir was the Kushan Empire, most notably King
Kanishka The Great (Lawrence 2005), under whom Buddhism and Hinduism continued to thrive
together. Kanishka’s rule lasted about 127-150 CE. Little record remains of the Kushan Empire
other than their correspondence with (and descriptions by) other civilizations such as the
Roman Empire, the Sassanian Empire, and the Han Dynasty of China (de Laet & Hermann
1996; Danielou 2003) and scattered archaeological records dating mostly to King Kanishka. The Kushans were Central Asian in ethnic origin. According to the Rabatak inscription, a 2nd century description of Kanishka the Great and the Kushan Empire, the official language of the Kushan Empire was originally exclusively Greek. However, more people spoke, used, and understood Bactrian, a now-extinct Indo-Iranian language which was spoken in today’s Afghanistan and Tajikistan. According to the Rabatak inscription--which is itself written in Bactrian with Greek script--Bactrian was eventually given official language status alongside Greek. Considering the continuous survival of oral Sanskrit well past this point, it can be assumed that Sanskrit and its descendents were also still spoken throughout the empire.

Figure 10: Map of the borders of the Kushan Empire
After the Kushan Empire, there was a relatively brief period of rule by the Hephthalites, or White Huns, of Central Asia\textsuperscript{19}. The most famous of these rulers was Mihirakula (c. 502-530 CE), known for his immense cruelty\textsuperscript{20} and persecution of Buddhists, though very little is known of this empire itself, not even authoritatively what language was spoken (Lawrence 2005), as the “White Huns” may correspond to variously attested historical dynasties that spoke a variety of languages\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{19} Sources differ on whether these were the same White Huns referenced very scarcely in 5th and 6th century texts of Central Asia or a closely ethnically related tribe called the Chionites, who similarly lack almost any authoritative historical records. Indians of the time called all the Central Asian tribes that crossed the Hindu Kush \textit{Hunas} without distinguishing individual communities.

\textsuperscript{20} A folk story about Mihirakula speaks of his army traversing a narrow cliff. An elephant happened to fall from the high ledge and die, and he enjoyed its screams so much that he then rolled 100 more elephants down the cliff and took great pleasure in their suffering. The fact that this tale continues to be passed down despite the relative unimportance of the White Huns in Kashmir is testament to how important it is to Kashmiris to remember and mourn the injustices they’ve suffered.

\textsuperscript{21} It isn’t clear whether and/or how the White Huns differ from the \textit{Sveta Huna}, Kangju, and several other populations who were also active in the area at this time, and while historians and archaeologists have various educated guesses as to which languages dominated these empires, there is little consensus.
The Gupta Empire conquered much of the rest of North India around this time (3rd-5th century CE), but their expansion into Kashmir itself was fairly limited. Even if they had other influence in Kashmir, the Gupta Empire spoke various Prakrit varieties and Sanskrit\textsuperscript{22} (Mookerji

\textsuperscript{22} Though modern linguistics doesn’t typically associate spoken language with orthography, the Gupta Empire has an interesting script associated with it (aptly called the Gupta Script) that was used to write Sanskrit and Prakrit. This script was the ancestor to Devanagari, which developed around 1000 BCE, and Sharada, which probably arose around a similar time (Fischer 2003).
1989), which were otherwise already spoken through most of the subcontinent and thus very likely also widely spoken in Kashmir.

The next great empire to rise to power in Kashmir was the Karkota Empire, the last of the great Hindu empires, from about the 7th century to the 9th century CE (Lawrence 2005;
This empire is immortalized both in written record and Kashmiri oral traditions. Valley inhabitants still recite stories of the great Lalitaditya Muktapida (r. 724-760 CE), who conquered well into Central Asia and was instrumental in cementing Kashmir, especially the Valley, as a seat of political, economic, and socio-cultural power in the subcontinent (Wink 2002). While Hinduism was the main religion of the Karkota Empire, Buddhism also flourished and was well-tolerated\textsuperscript{23}. Though this empire was physically small, it commanded much power and is woven intricately into the Koshur oral cultures of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike. However, it isn’t known for certain which language was spoken or how much of the Rajatarangini’s account, from which most information on the Karkota Empire is derived, is fantasy or myth (such as stories of Lalitaditya Muktapida commanding a host of magical powers), and some contemporary accounts, such as those of the nearby Tang Dynasty of China, contradict some of the Rajatarangini’s claims or downsize Lalitaditya Muktapida’s conquests and power.\textsuperscript{24}

While there were two relatively short-lived Hindu empires that followed the Karkota Empire--the Utpala Empire from 855-1003 CE and the Lohara Dynasty from 1003-1320 CE--they were weak and didn’t exert much lasting cultural or linguistic influence (they both commonly spoke Sanskrit) and were plagued by constant Mongol invasion\textsuperscript{25}, infighting, and

\textsuperscript{23} The Martand Sun Temple (later demolished), the oldest known Sun Temple in India and one of the largest known temple structures of the time, was built under Lalitaditya Muktapida. According to the Rajatarangini, he built a temple “in every town, village, river, sea, and island”. He is also credited with commissioning many Buddhist temples, such as the rajavihara (“monastery of the king” as named in the Rajatarangini, unclear which temple structure this corresponds to today and not to be confused with the modern Ta Prohm in Cambodia, which was also formerly known as rajavihara but built much later).

\textsuperscript{24} The Rajatarangini was written in the 12th century CE, several centuries after the Karkota Empire, so this is plenty of time for oral histories to incorporate elements of fantasy and exaggeration, which often happens with oral traditions of beloved historical figures. It certainly is odd that I haven’t been able to find out which language was spoken by the Karkota Empire, despite all the fanfare it receives culturally. Much discussion has gone into trying to figure out why the Karkota Empire and Lalitaditya Muktapida have been largely “forgotten” by Indianologists despite their cultural impact, but those questions are beyond the scope of this paper.

\textsuperscript{25} These dynasties constituted a complicated and bloody back-and-forth exchange with the Mongol Empire and its various tribes, and Kashmir was briefly a dependent of the Mongol Empire. This period on
corruption. This final series of unpopular Hindu rulers spelled the end of Hindu rule and the rise of Islam in Kashmir (Hasan 2005).

Figure 9: Map of the various territorial holdings of South Asia at the time of the Karkota Empire

its own is a subject of much academic study in the field of Central Asian history inasmuch as it exerted influence over or was conquered by the various Central Asian dynasties, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. However, some of the following Muslim dynasties of Kashmir probably descended ethnically from the Mongols, such as the Mughals.
Further Notes on Hindu Rule

Regarding this predominantly Hindu early history, it’s difficult to authoritatively speak of the influences of minority ethno-religious communities such as the Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis (Zoroastrians), though they (probably) came to live in the area or previously lived in the region at this time. For example, the Parsis’ migration to India was spurred by the Muslim conquest of Persia (and subsequent persecution of Zoroastrians) through the early to mid-7th century. Another point of note is that Sikhism wasn’t a coherent religion until at least the 15th century in the Punjab region, which shares a border with southern Kashmir, though it’s possible the material conditions of its inception began much earlier. It’s also interesting to note that Kashmir briefly passed into Arab Muslim hands (a dynasty ruled by the then-governor of Sindh, located in modern Pakistan) a short time after Lalitaditya Muktapida’s reign but was reconquered (Bakshi 1997). This would set the stage for the next era of Kashmiri ethnopolitics: the rise of the Muslim Empires, the beginning of serious (documented) religious conflict, and the proliferation of Islam.

The Decline of Hindu Rule and Rise of Islam

While communities of Muslims lived in the coastal region of Gujarat far south of Kashmir since at least the seventh century CE (Gokhale 1979) and in other scattered pockets of the

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26 The origins of Jainism are murky at best, and they may have split off from a type of pre-Vedic proto-Hindu-Jainism (at the time a disorganized folk religion with no literature) by rejecting the Vedas in early South Asian prehistory, which is one of the few things that universally separates Jainism from Hinduism. Some modern Jains contend that several of the rulers of the dynasties that I contend are Hindu/Buddhist were actually Jains, such as Chandragupta Maurya (322-289 BCE), grandfather of Ashoka and founder of the Maurya Dynasty. Jain tradition states that Jainism is older than and completely distinct from Hinduism (despite obvious contact and what appear to be shared traditions), tracing its origins to the semi-mythological Rishabhanata, who lived more than 10^{1631} years ago. For mathematical reference, Googol, which is a 1 followed by 100 zeros, is 10^{100}.

27 The first Sikh Guru and founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, lived from 1469-1539.
subcontinent, the conversion of Rinchan (later known as Sadruddin Shah), though he only ruled for three years (1320-1323), is the stuff of Kashmiri legend.

Rinchan was a Buddhist\(^{28}\) prince, son of the then-chief of Ladakh, who became a minister in the court of the last Lohara ruler, Raja Suhadeva\(^{29}\) (1301-1320). Among the other ministers of Raja Suhadeva’s court was Shah Mir, a Sunni Muslim of (probably) Central Asian descent (Lawrence 2005), with whom Rinchan became fast friends. When Raja Suhadeva was deposed by his courtesan Ramadeva, Rinchan took advantage of the chaos and in turn assassinated Ramadeva, married his daughter Kota Rani, and became King of Kashmir\(^{30}\) (Lawrence 2005). Considering his Ladakhi Buddhist origins despite ruling from Srinagar, he looked to gain the approval of the Hindu masses by converting to Hinduism. It isn’t entirely settled why this didn’t happen. Hindu folkloric sources say that Rinchan approached the head of the Kashmiri Pandit community (Devaswami) to convert and was rejected for reasons that vary from story to story, such as Devaswami’s arrogance or Rinchan’s role in the violent death of Ramadeva\(^{31}\). Muslim folklore attributes Rinchan’s eventual conversion to Sufi Islam to a search for truth; he was dissatisfied with what he learned from Hindu and Muslim representatives in his

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\(^{28}\) While it’s unclear to me, with my limited historical knowledge and expertise, when exactly Buddhism declined and nearly disappeared from South Asia, the process was either virtually complete or well on its way to being complete by this point. Rinchan was definitely in the minority by being Buddhist, which is important to the story of his conversion. Today, Buddhists make up less than 1% of India’s population. While by itself this is a large number of individuals due to India’s massive population, their influence is very little. As mentioned previously, Buddhism thrived and enjoyed great popularity in earlier times, but a number of factors contributed to its decline (such as the invasions of various Muslim empires, dynasties, and tribes) that are beyond the scope of this paper.

\(^{29}\) Raja Suhadeva is remembered extremely poorly, even worse than the other Lohara rulers. The 15th century Kashmri Pandit historian Jonaraja called him a rakshasa, or demon.

\(^{30}\) Rinchan’s rule is sometimes placed under the “Zulchu Dynasty of Kashmir”, named for the Mongol chief who captured Kashmir by defeating Suhadeva. Under Suhadeva and even before him, during the Utpala and Lohara Dynasties, Kashmir was essentially a satellite of the larger Mongol Empire, though it changed hands between individual Mongol tribes several times. Rinchan is the only ruler of this proposed Zulchu Dynasty.

\(^{31}\) Kaw (2005) cites several possible stories for Rinchan’s conversion and disputes the idea of placing the sole blame on Devaswami, as Rinchan could’ve approached any other Kashmiri Hindu who was a Brahmin if Devaswami rejected him. The story I learned from my own family is that Devaswami rejected him on behalf of all the Kashmiri Hindus, though I don’t think I ever heard just one reason for the rejection.
court so he resolved to convert to the religion of the first person he saw the next morning, which happened to be the Sufi mystic and missionary Bulbul Shah. Regardless, his conversion to Islam was certainly influenced by both Bulbul Shah and Shah Mir (probably for political as well as religious reasons), and he took the name Sadruddin Shah (Kaw 2005). After Rinchan died, his Hindu widow Kota Rani took up the reins as ruler for less than half a year and tried unsuccessfully to rebuff Shah Mir’s founding of the Shah Mir dynasty (1339-1561), the first Muslim dynasty of Kashmir (Lawrence 2005).

Though his rule was extremely short, the socio-cultural impact of Rinchan’s conversion cannot be overstated. While the semi-nominal rule of the Mongols was Muslim, Rinchan was one of the first famous and influential Kashmiri Muslims, as thousands of members of his court converted with him. Further, His life and the aftermath of his death, especially the story of Kota Rani, has had a massive cultural impact on Kashmir and continues to be alluded to in modern culture. For example, Kota Rani is often nostalgically referred to as “The Last Queen of Kashmir”32. My Kashmiri Hindu family remembers her as a brave, smart woman who committed suicide rather than submitting to Shah Mir’s attempts to marry her to consolidate his power33, and credits her with commissioning the still-standing Kutte Kol canal in Srinagar to protect the capital city from floods.

Kashmiri Muslims probably remember Shah Mir and Bulbul Shah in a much more positive light. However, the documentation of early Kashmiri history in the academic world, especially that of the Valley, has largely fallen to Indian Hindu academics, who memorialize them neutrally at best. Additionally, most authoritative information about the decline of Hindu

32 “The Last Queen of Kashmir”, a book depicting Kota Rani’s life and death by Rakesh K. Kaul (a Kashmiri Hindu) was published in 2016.
33 One of the more dramatic stories about Kota Rani is that she initially pretended to accept Shah Mir’s marriage proposal, but when she entered his chamber and he approached her she stabbed herself to death.
rule in Kashmir comes from Jonaraja, a 15th-century Kashmiri Hindu historian and Sanskrit poet, who considered these changes very negative. However, many famously meticulous Muslim chronicles of Kashmiri history begin around this time, which provides an important alternative viewpoint to consider in the next several centuries.

Furthermore, the Delhi Sultanate, an Islamic empire that governed from the city of Delhi and lasted from 1206-1526 CE, began to conquer much of the northern subcontinent (well into today’s modern Afghanistan) around this time (Encyclopaedia Britannica). While the Delhi Sultanate was not a monolithic, continuous rule and was divided into five separate dynasties with varying borders, it probably made some excursions into Kashmir. I haven’t so far been able to ascertain its relationship (if one existed) with the Shah Mir dynasty and the subsequent short-lived Chak dynasty of Kashmir\textsuperscript{34}, but it points to the overall rise and influence of Islam in the subcontinent. Moreover, both territories were eventually united under the next great South Asian empire: the infamous Mughal Empire (Dahiya 2017).

\textsuperscript{34} I haven’t been able to find any sources (academic or not) that even mention them both in the same text, which is puzzling but not entirely surprising considering how the snowy, inhospitable mountains surrounding the region meant that Kashmir, especially the Valley, was often extremely isolated from the outside world. My search for any relationship between the Kashmiri dynasties and the Delhi Sultanate is further complicated by the fact(s) that the Kashmiri dynasties also called themselves sultanates, several regional sultanates broke off from the central Delhi Sultanate at the same time (such as the Bengal Sultanate), and Muslim rulers in almost all contemporary South Asian empires called themselves sultans (also often with the title \textit{Shah}). Based on some cursory research and Google Image searches for maps of the various Delhi Sultanate dynasties’ borders, I believe that there were probably periods of Delhi Sultanate rule in Kashmir at some point. However, I haven’t been able to find any academic sources that say so and I don’t know how long any of these periods of rule would have been, especially considering the documented history of the local Kashmiri rulers of the time. Sources on the Delhi Sultanate usually describe its northern borders as being vaguely in “Northern India” and sometimes “Northwest India”, which would theoretically probably include Kashmir. Regardless, I believe it’s safe to say that the Delhi Sultanate probably had at least some kind of influence on Kashmir due to its sheer size and massive political and economic power, though its influence on Kashmir may be historically grouped in with the larger influence of Islam overall in South Asia. The Delhi Sultanate is also linguistically notable in that spoken Hindustani coalesced around this period in the regions around Delhi, whose prestige dialect eventually became modern Hindustani/Hindi-Urdu, though it wouldn’t be widely spoken until the era of Mughal rule (Brown 2006), which I will discuss more in depth further on.
Muslim Empires

Shah Mir’s actual rule (r. 1339-1342) was short and largely uneventful, though reasonably prosperous (Lawrence 2005). Moreover, the Kashmiri people welcomed the calm after the previous decades of war, chaos, and bloodshed. After him came several equally unremarkable sultans who ruled a similarly peaceful land. It’s generally believed that these early Shah Mir rulers were very tolerant of their non-Muslim subjects, though Kashmiris increasingly converted to Islam and became the majority religion by the late 15th century, aided by several waves of Sufi Muslim immigration and their missionary efforts (Khan 1953). The only notable political developments in the first half century of Shah Miri rule were the conquests of the fourth sultan, Shihuddin Shah Miri (r. 1354-1372), who conquered “the Hazara District, most of the Northern Punjab, Gilgit, Baltistan, Ladakh, Kishtawar [sic], Jammu, and the hill-states on the southern slopes of the Pir Panjal mountains” (Khan 1953), all of which largely remained in Shah Miri hands until the late 15th century. Most of these regions are still considered part of the larger Kashmir region. Linguistically, Lal Ded, the 14th century Kashmiri Shaivite poetess and singer, was active during this period. Her works constitute some of the earliest surviving works in Koshur, though her poetry remained largely oral until the 1930s (Wakhlu 1994). She invented the vatsun style of mystic poetry.

This peace lasted up until the rule of the sixth Sultan of Kashmir, Sikandar Shah Miri (r. 1389-1413), more commonly known as Sikandar Butshikan (“idol-breaker”). A zealous Sunni Muslim, he is remembered best for his extreme persecution of his Hindu and Buddhist subjects.

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35 Some historians, such as MK Kaw, reject the idea of the peaceful or semi-peaceful introduction of Islam. This is a very complex and heavily politicized issue in academic South Asian history that is far beyond the scope of this paper, but it’s worth mentioning.

36 Misspelled “Ladaskh” in the original text.
He imposed heavy jizya (tax on non-Muslims), destroyed many beloved temples\(^{37}\), banned Hindu prayer and symbols of Hindu faith, burned Sanskrit texts, forcibly converted or killed thousands, and forbade Hindus from practicing traditional burial rites (cremation), among other atrocities (Bakshi 1997). While Sikandar was considered “brave and cultured” as an individual and presided over a period of great Muslim learning in Kashmir, his cruelty to his Hindu subjects vastly overshadows his legacy (Lawrence 2005) and is still a painful memory in the Kashmiri Hindu consciousness. His rule marked one of the first major Hindu-Muslim conflicts, though it was more of a one-sided massacre than an equal conflict.

Terrible though Sikander’s rule was, it inaugurated a period of stronger legislation by subsequent sultans to reverse his policies (Lawrence 2005). In fact, the 8th sultan, Zainulabadin Shah Miri (r. 1418-1470), was affectionately known as Budshah (“great ruler”) for his religious tolerance, patronage of the arts and sciences in Persian and Sanskrit, and overall peaceful nature. He himself knew and spoke Tibetan, Persian, and Sanskrit as well as facilitated the translation of many important Kashmiri texts from Sanskrit to Persian, which also provides insight into the linguistic landscape of the time and the early rise of the Persian language in South Asia (Hasan 2005). This is notable because as Persian was introduced with the Persianized Afghan and Turkic rulers, such as the Shah Mirs, it eventually became a lingua franca of the entire subcontinent until British colonization and greatly influenced many South Asian languages that are still spoken to this day (de Laet and Herman 1996).

While it’s unclear when exactly the Perso-Arabic script began being used for Koshur, which was already widely spoken and had a robust literary tradition in Sharada and Devanagari

\(^{37}\) The Martand Sun Temple, mentioned in a previous footnote, was painstakingly destroyed under Sikandar’s rule. The story is that the old temple resisted all artillery efforts for several days, greatly frustrating Sikandar, until it was finally set on fire.

\(^{38}\) “Cashmere”, like the goat wool, is an anglicization of “Kashmir”. This fabric craft probably rose to popularity under the Budshah’s importing of skilled weavers, though it had been woven natively for thousands of years and is mentioned in texts from the third century BCE. It is usually natively known as pashmina, which is also a type of garment made from this fabric.
script by this time, it’s possible that it started with this early influence of Islamic rule in light of its use in the Quran, Modern Standard Arabic, and modern Urdu (albeit somewhat modified), which are all associated with Islam and its adherents.

After the rule of the Budshah, the Shah Mirs fell into chaos. From 1484-1530, Muhammad Shah ruled, was overthrown, and regained the throne five separate times (Khan 1953). Some historians call this period a protracted civil war (Bakshi 1997). Regardless, it was bloody and messy, leaving a power vacuum for the next dynasty to rise.

The Chaks’ rule was short (1555-1586), and they are not remembered fondly (Bakshi 1997; Lawrence 2005). Not much is known about their origin beyond the mythological oral traditions passed down by Kashmiris, one of which states that they sprang forth from an affair between a Kashmiri woman and a demon (Lawrence 2005). They were Shia Muslims, and they relentlessly persecuted their Sunni and Hindu subjects while whiling away their time and money in material pleasures (Lawrence 2005; Bakshi 1997; Kaw 2004). S.R. Bakshi described them as follows: “Excepting Hussain Shah Chak, all other kings of this dynasty were boors [sic] and heartless men who simply loved to inflict pain and torture” (Bakshi 1997).

In the field of Kashmiri linguistics, the Chak Dynasty had a silver lining: the Nightingale of Kashmir, Habba Khatoon (Wakhlu 1994). Historian SN Wakhlu begins his book on her life, titled “The Nightingale of Kashmir”, with the following fittingly poetic description: “After the death of Lal Ded, the great spiritual poetess of Kashmir, the Muse in Kashmir fell into a deep sleep for about two hundred years[,] and with the birth of Habba Khatoon it woke up again fluttering and singing, not the mystical experiences or mortal exhortations [of Lal Ded], but the lilting tunes of true romance.” Indeed, while Lal Ded is known for her mournful, esoteric Koshur poetry and song, Habba Khatoon is remembered for her yearning love songs, which were also composed in Koshur and survive in oral (and, recently, written) tradition to this day.
By the 1580s, the Shia Chaks were on their way out of Kashmir. The Sunni Mughals had already made several attempts to conquer parts of Kashmir under Humayun and Babur by this point that were either unsuccessful or only temporarily successful\(^{39}\), but were finally successful under Akbar (sometimes spelled Ackbar), son of Humayun, in 1586-1587 (Lawrence 2005). Akbar annexed Kashmir into the Mughal Empire, which at this point dominated the entire South Asian subcontinent.

The Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire\(^ {40}\) has long drawn awe and fascination worldwide, and their rule of Kashmir is no exception. In fact, Kashmir's distinctive culture today was largely shaped by the Mughals' Indo-Persian culture (Lawrence 2005). If you ask anyone who's familiar with Kashmir where the "must-see" places are, they'll almost certainly mention the sprawling, luxurious Mughal pleasure gardens that still stand to this day. The most recognizable structure in the entire subcontinent, the Taj Mahal, is a mausoleum in the city of Agra built by the fifth Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, for his favorite wife in 1632.

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\(^{39}\) For a detailed description of this process, which involves periods of Mughal control as early as 1530, consult Hasan (2005).

\(^{40}\) Sikhism began to develop as a coherent religion around the time of the early Mughal attempted conquests into northern India.
Figure 10: Map of the Mughal Empire’s conquests over time
Akbar (1542-1605), the third Mughal Emperor, in particular is remembered quite fondly overall. He was known above all for his religious tolerance—a precedent rejected by many of his successors—though he was also known for skillful leadership and patronage of the various fields of knowledge (Bakshi 1997). I myself grew up on tales of Akbar and Birbal, a Hindu advisor to Akbar who became a cultural folk icon for tales of his sharp wit and humor. Akbar built a meeting house called the Ibadat Khana and invited scholars of Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jewish, and Jain faiths to debate and discuss religious issues (Smith 1917). He abolished the *jizya*, or tax on non-Muslims (which primarily fell on Hindus), and founded a religion of his own called Din-i-Ilahi (“Religion of God” in Persian) that combined Hinduism and Islam as well as bits and pieces of Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity (Malleson 1899). Though this religion didn’t take off, it exemplifies Akbar’s (and by extension, the Mughals’) various attempts to unify a religiously, linguistically, ethnically, and politically diverse populace, which has fascinated historians for centuries.

This generally positive remembrance of Akbar and Mughal rule comes mostly from non-Kashmiris, such as Indians and western academics. I haven’t been able to ascertain a general Kashmiri consensus on Mughal rule. An aspect of note is their seemingly futile attempts to unify a religiously, linguistically, ethnically, and politically diverse populace, which has fascinated historians for centuries.

41 Ackbar and subsequent Mughal rulers famously loved Kashmir in particular. When his successor, Jehangir, was on his deathbed en route to Kashmir he was asked what he wished for. He replied, “Only Kashmir.” and died (Lawrence 2005).

42 There is some evidence that Akbar was particularly harsh on Muslim academics because he was aware of their majority status equalling a type of socio-political hedgemony (Malleson 1899). This type of social progressivism seems to have marked most of his career.

43 This is also notable because it marks some of the earliest reliable firsthand Christian/Western accounts of Kashmir. One of these Christian missionaries was Father Geronyme Xavier from Spain, who chronicled accompanying Akbar on his 1597 trip to Kashmir (Kaw 1996).

44 Opinions on Mughal rule in Kashmir seem to be extremely polarized, with some contending that they were terrible rulers who were religiously intolerant, incompetant, and/or any other number of negative leadership traits in regard to technicalities of ruling such as regulating the economy, while others point to Mughal rule as a “golden age” of artistic and literary merit. Both interpretations may be true at the same time; from Mughal rule onwards the historical narrative is less biased for or against the ruling dynasty in question and more “balanced” in that it offers many alternate interpretations and viewpoints (i.e. “Were the Mughals a positive or negative influence?” doesn’t have a generally accepted straightforward yes or no answer, and answers may vary from Emperor to Emperor as to their individual influence). This is unlike the previous dynasties, who are more emotionally charged in favor of one party or another in terms
struggle with the Valley’s geographic peculiarities. Their quasi-failure to adequately handle the yearly floods and subsequent famines marked a sharp departure from previous rulers such as the Shah Mir and Karkota Dynasties, which planned ahead of flood season and took various preventative measures, such as damming and dredging large bodies of water known to flood, to lessen possible damage (Kaw 1996). These were not pedestrian monsoon floods either; the floods of 1640-1642 reportedly wiped out over 400 Kashmiri villages (Kaw 1996). This inadequate response to monsoon season would characterize the next several empires to conquer Kashmir until the British Empire.

However, Mughal Kashmir also saw an outpouring of incredible artistic, literary, and textile learning and craft. Kashmir’s distinct culture to this day is heavily Indo-Persian, and many Western chroniclers noted the beautiful aesthetics of Mughal architecture in the Valley (Kaw 1996). A new form of “pastoral” poetry developed specifically to describe Kashmir’s natural beauty and the simple Kashmiri lifestyle, which was a far cry from the previous trends in Persian poetry of idealized and nonmaterial spaces (Sharm 2016). While cashmere shawls were already popular, Mughal-era Kashmiri shawls were so fine that a yard and half’s length of fabric could go through a small finger ring. These shawls are still sold as “Kashmiri Ring Shawls” (Andrabi 2017).

Despite administrative issues, the sociocultural and linguistic impact of the Mughal Empire on Kashmir (and indeed, South Asia as a whole) is immense as it is immortal. One of the most notable of these influences is the standardization of a coherent Hindustani (Rahman 2011).

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of academic opinion (e.g. the White Huns being remembered overwhelmingly negatively by most sources). As the Mughal Empire’s various emperors are each a thesis topic in and of themselves, I will not delve into the specifics of their rule beyond this small summary.
The Origins of Hindustani

The official language of the Mughal Empire was Persian (Conan 2007), but spoken Hindustani had already begun to coalesce in Delhi, during the final decades of the previous dynasty, the Delhi Sultanate (Rahman 2011). At the time, it was called Hindavi, Dehlvi, Khariboli, or Lakshari Zaban.

The origins of Hindustani (also called Hindi-Urdu), of which the Persianized register became modern Urdu and the Sanskritized register became modern Hindi, are not entirely settled in the historical narrative, nor are the historical relationships between the rise of each language. Some of the earliest surviving compositions of “proto-Hindustani” come from the works of poet Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), who wrote mainly in Persian but also knew and spoke the “people’s language” of what was then called Dehlvi (“the language of Delhi”) (Singh & Khan 2016). His works are also notable for mentioning Koshur (called Kashmiri at the time) by name, as he mentions several “regional” languages of India that are not mutually intelligible nor necessarily derived from each other. Before this, the history is vague at best. Rahman (2011) asserts that “The theory which is most credible is that there was a base language, call it Hindi.

This is still the name of the prestige dialect, or "standard" dialect. I've never heard it referred to this way, so I would venture that it's similar to the nomenclature around Mandarin Chinese, where "Chinese" can be used to refer to the Mandarin dialect(s) due to it being the "standard". It's (seemingly) less common to refer to it as "Mandarin", though more specific and "correct". When I asked my mom, she said that "rural people" in Delhi sometimes refer to Hindi as Khariboli. Rahman (2011) posits that there are over 50 dialects included under the label "Hindi".

I won't get into these complexities here, but there have been proposals for Urdu being a completely distinct, separate language that predates Hindi and even the Vedas. While this seems extreme, there are a wide variety of opinions on the origins of each language. While Hindi seems more easily and obviously traceable to Sanskrit, Urdu is much less so and, due to its nature as a co-dialect of Hindi, Urdu’s puzzling history complicates the history of Hindi as well. It isn't clear where "Hindi" and "Urdu" begin and end in the historical narrative, as they have been used interchangeably by different people for the same language. Rahman (2011) describes how the terms were vague up until even the 19th century, when the term “Hindi” was used to describe Gujarati, which we now know as a completely distinct and separate language. The most recognizable difference between Hindi and Urdu is their script(s), but it seems this distinction didn’t arise until much later, further complicating untangling their histories. For example, Amir Khusrau wrote in the Perso-Arabic script that would today be recognized as Urdu, but various historians claim it to be Hindi instead.
for convenience, spoken in pre-Muslim India which was a fully developed language in its own right.” Modern Hindustani (especially Urdu) traces the vast majority of its vocabulary, especially verbs, from a literary dialect of Prakrit called Sauraseni Prakrit, which itself is closely related to Classical Sanskrit (Woolner 1999); this seems to point to Classical Sanskrit and Prakrit as the proto-Hindustani languages, especially considering how much of this influences survives to this day.

The first variety of what is recognizably “Hindustani” began to develop orally around Delhi, a historically influential city and current capital of India, as a transitional dialect in the 17th and 18th centuries (the time of the Mughal Empire) between Persian (which the ruling empires spoke) and the various languages of the people. This dialect was called Rekhta⁴⁷, meaning “mixed” or “scattered” (Brown 2006). Ghulam Hamdani Mushafi (1751-1844), a poet of the ghazal style of Urdu poetry, is credited with perhaps the earliest use (or at least the popularization) of the word “Urdu” to describe the language in which he was writing (Kate 1987). For contemporary attestations of the coherency of this language, consult the works and interpretations of the works of Siraj-ud-Din Ali Khan (1687-1756), a linguist in the Mughal court who wrote extensively on Hindustani, Sanskrit, Urdu/Hindi (he treated them as separate from each other and from the Rekhta version of Hindustani), and Persian.

Also of note is the language Braj Bhasha, which is still spoken today but was the literary language of choice in the northern and central regions until being replaced by Khariboli⁴⁸. I

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⁴⁷ There is a fascinating form of feminist Rekhta poetry that survives to this day called Rekhti (-i being the “feminine” adjective/verb ending) that focuses on women, women’s speech, and women’s experiences. It’s the “grammatically feminine counterpart” to Rekhta, with enough in common with modern Urdu that it’s now known as “Urdu feminist poetry” at the contextless level. While exploring this is far beyond the scope of this paper, this concept is intriguing. It was developed primarily by male poets and writers in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, it quickly became an “acceptable” means for women to write poetry and literature at a time when their voices and experiences were openly ignored and marginalized.

⁴⁸ I don’t have an academic source for this, I just know of its existence and some theories about its history from absorbing South Asian language information around me. Academia doesn’t seem to have a settled narrative almost at all, with language ideology and politicization reaching incredible extremes of polarization. For this reason, I also cannot date anything about Braj Bhasha because academics continue
haven’t been able to ascertain how Braj Bhasha fits into Hindustani/Rekhta/Khariboli exactly—and indeed, it seems to be a topic of heated debate—but it certainly played a serious role at various points throughout this history. Allegedly, it is most closely related to Urdu. It is still a point of serious cultural, linguistic, and literary pride for native speakers and the regions it is spoken in. Many of the literary figures I’ve mentioned before, such as Amir Khusrau, also (arguably) wrote in Braj Bhasha, among their other languages.

The modern Hindi-Urdu split (and subsequent politicization) didn’t happen until around the time of Partition (1947). However, these early origins represent an important turning point in South Asian historical linguistics, especially as Persian, the lingua franca of this time, would later be consciously and intentionally obliterated from the subcontinent and replaced with Urdu under British Rule. For a detailed look at Persian’s influence on Hindi (specifically, rather than on Hindi-Urdu or Urdu), consult Shantanu Phukan’s work on the ecology of Hindi in the world of Persian.

The Century Following The Fall of the Mughal Dynasty

There were two empires of note after the eventual fall of the Mughal Empire (a topic which by itself warrants at least a dissertation’s worth of discussion that I will not, with my amateur research, attempt to speak of) before British rule: the Afghan Pashto-speaking Durrani Empire (called “Pathans” or “Pashtuns” in older academia) and the Punjabi-speaking Sikh Empire49. While these two empires ruled Kashmir for about a century combined (1750s-1847), the various conditions and factors that would eventually lead to British colonization were already assembling under the late Mughal Empire, and these two ruling empires’ influence in the

49 There was some interplay with the Maratha Empire in the south, but this did not greatly impact Kashmir beyond the impact it had on the Mughal Empire’s ability to govern the region.
historical narrative of Kashmir is relatively limited compared to the influences of their era’s predecessor (the Mughal Empire) and successor (the British Empire). Colonization had already effectively started towards the middle of the 1600s in terms of both financial conquest (taking control over local economies and building factories) and military campaigns. While I could delve into this historical period—which leads into the entire field of Central Asian history, as the Durrani Empire was the direct predecessor to the modern state of Afghanistan—this seems to be too far removed from my current topic to warrant an in-depth analysis in this paper.

Kashmiris remember neither their Durrani rulers nor their Sikh rulers particularly fondly. Indeed, the Afghans in particular are remembered as cold-hearted murderers who slaughtered their religious minorities such as Hindus and Muslim minority communities. The back-and-forth between the Afghans and Sikhs was also bloody and merciless. The Punjabi Sikhs are also remembered for their unreasonably high taxes that preyed on the poor, a precedent that the subsequent British regime reinforced and worsened as they squeezed profits from the subcontinent. However, a point of note is the rise of Sikh “warrior culture” in response to Afghan conquest into the subcontinent, which led to the brief period of Sikh rule in Kashmir and is still a very distinctive feature of Sikh culture to this day.

After the Anglo-Sikh Wars of the 1840s, the Sikh Empire was destroyed. South Asia was parcelled off through various treaties to ambitious British merchants and eventually, the British Crown. This made way for the next period of South Asian history: British imperial hegemony.

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50 This is background information to me because of family history. I also don’t believe it is worth it to try to understand, with my very limited knowledge of academic history in a thesis on South Asian linguistics, Central Asian academic history. While these recollections can vaguely be corroborated by bits and pieces of historical narratives of Kashmir, I haven’t seen anything substantial written about these empires’ influence on Kashmir specifically. Most Kashmiri histories somewhat gloss over this period because it falls between two “bigger”, more important empires.

51 An event that summarizes this period in regards to Kashmir is the Sikh Genocide of 1762, which, while it didn’t impact Kashmir itself very much, was a terrible and awful thing on its own. It’d be disrespectful to the memory of the people murdered during this time to relegate them to an “unimportant” part of Kashmiri history or do them the disservice of my shoddy amateur analysis.
Britain in India: Some Introductory Notes

The period of British colonization still engenders intense and detailed study to this day, but I will attempt to summarize the most relevant information to the situation of Kashmir and language-related issues specifically below. In fact, everything only gets more complicated, touchy, and violent from this point onwards for Kashmir even well beyond independence.

Please be advised that colonization was a very complicated and multi-faceted process that is difficult to verbalize into a single general narrative. The history of British rule is still a freshly bleeding wound in the South Asian subconscious as is the Kashmir conflict, and unfortunately I cannot reasonably detail each massacre, human rights violation, historical interpretation, and riot here. Indeed, the levels of economic and financial colonization, which began long before any outright military or governmental action, are far beyond the scope of a single paper of any kind, much less this one. Bryn Mawr’s very own Madhavi Kale is a specialist in British imperial history, and her work is a great place to start learning more about this process and modern South Asian issues.

Furthermore, history remembers this period as “British rule in India” even though the regions that fell under the British Empire later became Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other countries. However, modern politicization and regional identities mean that today’s non-Indian South Asians bristle at being called “Indian”; for example, a Pakistani or Nepali person would resent this label. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I will refer to these subjects of imperialism as “Indians” and the region as “India”. Indeed, the vast majority of the region was historically grouped under the label “India” with some notable exceptions such as the Kingdom of Sikkim, which was absorbed into British India after more than two centuries of (semi-)autonomous independence and a few periods of Nepali and Tibetan nominal rule.
However, I stress the need for cultural sensitivity and acknowledge that this nomenclature may feel alienating or exclusive.

The first colonizers of India were a corporation called The British East India Trading Company. The company had been formed as a private company complete with shareholders and the like in 1600, but as it seized military power and British frustrations grew against the huge profits its corrupt officials were collecting (at its peak it constituted half of the world’s economy), the British Crown passed Pitt’s India Act of 1784, effectively giving control of the company to the government (Rorabacher 2017). The shortest summary of their rise to power is that they bought their way into the Indian economy as the Mughal Empire and other large empires began to lose power, then ramped up to militias and armies once they realized they could destabilize local rulers and turn them against each other to topple them all at once and then leap into the resulting power vacuum. At their peak, they seized control of virtually the entire subcontinent, large swathes of Southeast Asia, and all of Hong Kong. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which was a large-scale (but ultimately unsuccessful) rebellion that alarmed British investors, the company was formally abolished and the Crown took direct control of India with the passage of the Government of India Act of 1858. I remember asking my mother about British colonization as a child, and she always replied, voice heavy with grief, “They bought us, then turned us against ourselves.”

Before annexing Kashmir, the English Education Act of 1835 was passed. This made English the compulsory language of schooling (and government proceedings by de facto) across the region, in an effort to stamp out “inferior” indigenous culture and language and “westernize the savages”. Its most lasting effect was virtually ending the use of Persian in the subcontinent. Government proceedings and high-brow literature were typically in Persian in the past empires, but the people spoke “Hindustani” to each other. Thus, when the language of
governance and education officially changed to English, the contexts in which Persian was used disappeared and people stopped being educated in its use. Thus ended Persian in India, making way for the meteoric rise of Hindi-Urdu, which I will discuss in a later case study.

After the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1845, the Treaty of Amritsar was signed and the Jammu and Kashmir region was sold to Gulab Singh52, the then-raja of the nearby Jammu region who had long coordinated with British powers, for 7.5 million rupees53. With this, he founded the Dogra Dynasty of Kashmir, which was subservient to the Company54 and populated by ethnic Dogras55. Professor Mridu Rai begins her award-winning book “Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir” as follows:

On 16 March 1846, a treaty conjured into existence the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in the northern reaches of the Indian subcontinent. The only fully consenting parties in this act of creation were the English East India Company and Gulab Singh, raja of Jammu. Disparate territories stripped by the Company from the Sikh kingdom of Punjab were cobbled together to bring into being this state. While the realignment of territorial frontiers to create new dominions was far from unfamiliar in India, the consequences of this particular act in Kashmir were to resonate for a long time after.

52 Gulab Singh was a military general in the Sikh Empire who was gifted governance of Jammu for his service. When the Sikh Empire began to fall into disarray, he quickly began negotiating with the Company behind the scenes to secure his position in the inevitable power vacuum that would follow. As this incident would suggest, I cannot say that historical accounts of him and his rule give much to praise him for beyond, very cynically, opportunistic ambition.

53 Information on inflation rates during colonization, especially in the beginning, transitional periods between local rule and British rule, is very limited and perhaps nonexistent. I would venture this amount is a bit less than $100k USD today. This is an optimistic estimate. I believe it would actually be closer to $80,000, but I’m not confident in that number. In today’s rupees to today’s USD, this would transfer to about $104k.

54 The Dogras were so subservient to British power that they supplied troops to crush native rebellions across the country and even sent regiments into WWII. The then-raja was a sitting member of Churchill’s “war cabinet”.

55 Dogras speak an Indo-Aryan language called Dogri. This is still widely spoken in their native Jammu region today.
The Dogra Dynasty

Kashmiris resented the foreign Dogras from the beginning even beyond a general disdain for their hand in British colonization. The area had just come out of centuries of being ruled by Afghans, Punjabis, and Mughals, who were all outsiders in some sense. These past regimes had absolutely failed to govern the remote region effectively (at best) or consciously
exploited them (at worst) (Rai 2004). With the amalgamation of several regions into the newly minted state, that also meant outsiders from Jammu, Ladakh, and other J&K regions would flood into the Valley. Additionally, it was not lost on them that Gulab Singh (and by extension the Dogras as a whole) had literally bought them.

As soon as Maharaja Gulab Singh was settled in J&K, he began squeezing profit out of every corner of his new state. The high international demand for Kashmiri shawls had turned the Valley’s peasantry and weavers into near-serfs working themselves raw for low wages, high taxes, and high profit by their masters under the Sikh regime. The Dogra Maharaja continued this precedent, and consistently ruled against striking workers in favor of their rich employers. What’s more, he ramped up taxes to the ends of reason, such as instituting a labor tax that was collected daily from anyone who made a living. Rice crops (shali) were taxed at 50% of their yield, and singhara (water-chestnut) at two thirds, despite the latter being a daily staple in Kashmiri peasant food (Rai 2004). When desperate farmers tried to sell their land and flee, the Maharaja instituted taxes on the sale of land equivalent to the sale value, sent in the army to break up protests and kill agitators, and banned emigration (which he enforced by militarizing the entire border)56.

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56 Interestingly, Rai’s account is the only one I can find from an Indian academic that is openly critical of the Dogras. Other Indian sources prefer to gloss over it with rhetoric (i.e. describing the rajas’ characters rather than their policies) or not address it at all. Pakistani and other non-Indian sources usually reference it and try to situate it in the reality of oppressive governments. Objectively, the vast majority of Kashmiris suffered greatly during this time. Sources that avoid criticizing the Dogras usually also have less-than-nuanced analyses of the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus that completely fails to address the privileges afforded to them, preferring to cite long-debunked propaganda about Pakistani terrorism (which did happen, just not at the extremes these sources seem to believe) rather than consulting legitimate sources. However, non-Indian sources sometimes run the risk of conflating Kashmiri Hindus, the Dogras, and the British and assign complete victimhood, rather than semi-autonomy by numbers, to the Kashmiri Muslim community. In constructing a narrative beyond this point in history, I have had to heavily consult family traditions and opinions to find a personal voice in the opposing academic viewpoints. My viewpoint on the exodus is very different from that of my family in a removed, academic sense, but many of my grandparents’ and even my parents’ generation remember these times. I wanted to be true to their experiences while also sticking to the facts as best as I can make them out.
Rai dedicates a considerable amount of space in her book to feigning bemusement at the British historians and travellers who documented the plight of Kashmiris in excruciating detail but failed to do anything about it at all. Indeed, Walter Roper Lawrence, who was writing in 1895, glosses over these oppressions in a (retroactively) laughably obvious manner, calling Gulab Singh a “just” ruler who “improved the lot of the people” as compared to the “lot of the people” under the Sikh Empire, which was one of the lowest points in Kashmiri history. Many travellers noted the harsh and oppressive rule of the Dogras following Gulab Singh (many of whom compounded and even worsened the greed and corruption) and how badly it affected the populace, but didn’t voice their concerns beyond carefully neutral written observations.

Kashmiri Hindus Under the Dogras

“Divide and conquer” was a favorite strategy of British colonizers, and historically has been one of the most effective methods of toppling indigenous infrastructure and governments (see South America, Africa, and the Middle East). India and Kashmir were no different.

In various attempts to consolidate their power, the Dogras turned to the sizable Kashmiri Hindu community, which was by and large a minority in the Kashmir region. The Jammu region, where the Dogras came from, was majority Hindu. However, there was more to it than shallow religious solidarity. Kashmiri Hindus had largely taken to accounting-esque jobs, whether privately or in government, by this time, so they became the “public face” of the Dogras’

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57 My family oral tradition on our last name is approximately thus: “In the beginning, all Kashmiris had the last name Kaul/Koul. The name Jinsi comes from the word jinnis, for gold coins, because many of us were in charge of money matters.” I have no idea when this occurred and haven’t been able to find mention of jinnis gold coins anywhere, but I’ve found the suffix “-jinsi” in several words in a manner that seems to mean “miscellaneous” and are often associated either with cash crops and their taxes or various forms of Mughal artillery. This might mean my family was associated with keeping charge of the various cash crop taxes, the military, or perhaps less-than-Brahmin caste roots, the latter two suggesting that my family history is “Brahminized” and at least partially false.
oppressive taxes (Rai 2004). Sources disagree on whether or not they were also exempt from some of the more cruel taxes. However, the fact that it is a possibility paints a picture of frustration by the masses being pointed at their own people rather than at British overseers.

This was the case all over India, as ruling bodies made conscious efforts to polarize ethnic and regional identities to prevent the populace from uniting against their regime. This is also evident in modern South Asian politics, post-Partition race riots, and even (and especially) in Partition itself.

However, while Kashmiri Hindus seemed to the Muslim masses to be enjoying the same comforts as the Dogras, behind the scenes they were still marginalized. Kashmiri Hindus were allowed to do “lower” jobs in the royal government such as keeping taxbooks and treasury records, but they were almost always barred from “higher” jobs of “skill” such as academic, political, and legislative roles. After all, even though they were Hindus, they were still Kashmiri subjects. This fits contemporary British colonial strategies of stirring up ethnic tension against religious minorities by seemingly affording them “privileges” (refer to the Alawites, Maronites, and Assyrian Christians in the Middle East) to make all parties involved distrust each other. In effect, this had a double-oppressive outcome. Kashmiri Hindus felt superior to Kashmiri Muslims because they were “privileged” above them, including being more educated, and Kashmiri Muslims were

58 For example: when Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India from 1980-1984 was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards, thousands of Sikhs across the country were brutalized and murdered in retaliatory violence. The stereotypes about Sikhs among South Asians reflect this issue quite transparently. They are stereotyped as warlike, quick to anger, and violent, even in movies. A more sensitive phrasing that I’ve heard my family use is that they are “protective”, “hardworking”, “likely to join the (Indian) army”, and “loyal”, but even as a child I could read between the lines about the underlying prejudices. While Sikh stereotypes are the ones I’m most familiar with from my own family, this characterizes the entire subcontinent. It’s common practice among South Asians (even in meeting each other outside of the subcontinent, such as in the USA) to surreptitiously ask for your last name to glean your caste background, religious upbringing, regional/ethnic identity, and a multitude of other things upon which to base your first impressions.

59 I attended a talk by Professor Teren Sevea from the University of Pennsylvania's South Asian Studies department about Kashmir, and this was a point he mentioned specifically. Unfortunately, my limited knowledge of academic history makes it difficult to backsorce this claim. However, it would fit with the narrative my family has of their fleeing/escaping the Valley.
Muslims resented them for being the face of oppressive Dogra taxes as well as being “better off” in terms of aligning with the regime. In short, each community was the scapegoat to the other.

There are many people who have written pages and pages and books upon books about this period of ethnic polarization who are far more knowledgeable about it than I, thus I will not attempt to further qualify this analysis beyond my limited understanding of both sides’ initial grievances against each other. However, I stress that planting racial prejudices and scapegoating behaviors consciously was the intention of these Dogra and British administrators to make their subjects easier to rule, and these prejudices continue to be perpetuated to this day in the modern Kashmir conflict.

1947: Independence, Partition, and the Aftermath

The number of details as to how Partition and Independence happened are as infinite as they are debatable, thus I will settle for simply describing Partition and summarizing its effects as relevant to Kashmir and Koshur. This requires painting the Partition and the Kashmir Conflict in broad, vague strokes that give an introductory look into the issue, but I strongly urge any readers to research further the various viewpoints and details of this timeline instead of taking my shallow narrative at face value.

At midnight on August 14-15, 1947, two new republics sprang to life. The region that was formerly British India was divided into the transitional dominions of East and West Pakistan, India, and several smaller independent-in-name princely states (including J&K) that were eventually absorbed by either Pakistan or India. Both stretches of “Pakistan” were classified as Muslim majority regions by demographic, thus they were grouped into the same state despite
being separated by hundreds of miles, having wildly different cultures, and being completely different ethnic groups.

The name “Partition” is pretty literal, but as much as it describes the larger geo-political forces at play, it masks the bloodbath that ensued on the ground. Since Pakistan was now a designated Muslim state and India was now a designated Hindu state, thousands upon thousands of people were forced to pack up what little they could carry in their hands and move across a dangerous and militarized border...away from their ancestral homelands and into the absolute unknown. The pent-up rage, ethnic prejudices, and negative emotions of the people exploded in the most horrific way possible. Every South Asian family has horror stories about Partition. One that stuck with me when I was a child was that across both nations, angry mobs would break into a house and forcibly undress the males of the house. If they were circumcized, they were Muslim. If not, they were Hindu. Either way, if they were in the “wrong” region, the entire family would be tortured and murdered in cold blood. When I took an Indian history class with Professor Madhavi Kale, she stressed to us that it remains “the bloodiest migration in recorded history”.

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60 Sikhs, Jains, Christians, and other religious minorities fell somewhere in the middle, most either migrating to India or staying far away from the border.
61 A personal family story from my great-aunt, who is not Kashmiri but Indian, dates her as eight or nine years old when Partition happened. She and the women of the household were gathered in the basement while the men took their rifles and rotated a constant watch of the outside perimeter of the house. After three days of huddling in the dark and praying, they were finally forced to leave the house to get food and other supplies. My great-aunt still remembers that the entire time she was outdoors (nearly an entire day), there was constant, uninterrupted screaming from every direction.
Theoretically, Kashmir would have experienced the worst of it due to straddling the proposed border(s), which were drawn inconsistently depending on which map you looked at. Puzzlingly, very little record has survived of how Partition affected Kashmiris beyond the general slaughter happening everywhere and anywhere\textsuperscript{62}. However, J&K was one of the small “independent” princely states that initially rejected both India and Pakistan and continued under Dogra rule, so the strict laws against emigration were likely still in effect. The then-raja, Hari Singh, had delayed deciding who to side with, meaning that his subjects were trapped and couldn’t escape the slaughter until he made up his mind.

\textsuperscript{62} Teren Sevea, mentioned in a previous footnote, has studied this hole in the historical narrative extensively.
Kashmiris knew that he would never consider them in whatever choice he ended up making. He was a Hindu, so many (perhaps correctly) assumed that he would side with India against the wishes of the majority-Muslim populace. Within a month, an armed rebellion backed by Pakistan was advancing on the raja’s palace. Hari Singh, outmatched, appealed to India for help. India agreed to send its army, but in return Hari Singh had to give the entire territory of J&K to the brand new Hindu country. Hari Singh agreed, and on October 26, 1947, he signed The Instrument of Ascension and formally handed J&K over to the Indian state.

The provisions of the document vaguely outlined that J&K, while still an Indian state, would maintain a “special” status with restrictions and privileges beyond those of the other states. The most specific provision is that the Indian government cannot seize land from Kashmir without requesting it from him first.

As promised, India sent its army to quell the Pakistan-backed uprising, and thus began the First Kashmir War (1947-1948), one of many armed border skirmishes. It was a messy, desperate war. The two countries hadn’t even existed for two months before going to war. Ultimately, the conflict was inconclusive. India kept about two thirds of the land it had been in control of before, and the rest was ceded to Pakistan in the negotiations for a cease-fire. A UN Commission peace talks and drew up a formal resolution with the following three-step process:

- Pakistan would immediately withdraw all troops.
- India would progressively withdraw troops to the “minimum necessary to keep law and order”.
- India would hold a plebiscite as overseen by a UN-picked, objective administrator regarding ownership of the region.
From here, much of the conflict is made up of legal and political bickering and technicalities\(^63\). Pakistan did virtually withdraw from the region in response (save for a few brigades, which was against the resolution rules), but neither party was happy with the outcome and felt that the other was “given too much”. India did not, finally, substantially reduce its armed forces, citing concerns about safety and rule of law. Additionally\(^64\), the promised plebiscite was never held. Finally, both countries agreed to further renegotiation talks. A heavily modified and watered-down resolution was drawn up that mandated the cessation of all hostilities and planned future talks with the Commission regarding ownership.

These later talks in 1948-1949 devolved into petty squabbles and finger-pointing almost immediately. Pakistan insisted on India withdrawing first (as it hadn’t withdrawn when directed to before), and India insisted on Pakistan withdrawing first. India demanded the regions that Pakistan had taken de facto control over (Gilgit-Baltistan) be returned to J&K. Pakistan refused, saying that the Instrument of Accession had been passed illegally, against the wishes of the populace who had entered local, democratic agreements with Pakistan. As these grievances would suggest, neither side was actually willing to cede anything or meet in the middle.

Ultimately, communication broke down to an irreparable extent. The US and Britain also drew harsh criticism when declassified British communications revealed that the two countries had let Cold War tensions heavily influence their policy in the UN regarding the issue, as Kashmir was on the border with Afghanistan and, more importantly, a gateway to the Soviet

\(^{63}\) South Asian politicians still have screaming matches with each other over what Kashmiri opinion at this time was, so I won’t delve into that here.

\(^{64}\) This issue by itself continues to be a touchy topic. Indian political news in particular (i.e. the equivalent of political consultants and politicians debating on American TV) devolves into screaming pretty quickly as soon as this is brought up. Everyone felt that they were being treated unfairly, and both sides pointed fingers at the other for ultimately not following the resolution. Pakistan claimed that India knew the Muslim-majority populace would vote to be absorbed by Pakistan and thus stalled plebiscite negotiations, and India claimed that Pakistan funded terrorist groups operating in the area.
Union. Armed standoffs, unrest, and military skirmishes continue to this day along the Line of
Control, which informally separates the Indian and Pakistani sides.\footnote{China stepped into this conflict with the Sino-Indian War of 1962, when it consolidated control of Aksai Chin and claimed a few other swathes of land such as the Trans-Karakoram. As India claims legal right to the entirety of the region, it has never recognized Pakistan ceding small stretches of land to China. However, India and Pakistan are by far the biggest players in the conflict, and Aksai Chin has historically generally been under Chinese control. There are multiple Line(s) of Control that separate this “Chinese Kashmir” from Pakistani and Indian Kashmir.}

On November 26, 1949, the Indian Constitution Assembly passed and adopted the Constitution of India, formalizing and inaugurating a new Indian Republic.\footnote{It would take several months and millions of rupees for the Constitution to be implemented after this formal agreement.} Article 370 of this document outlined a number of rules specific to Kashmir, such as semi-autonomous local governance, exemption from certain laws, and local control of land sales. While this section as well as the rest of the Constitution were amended over the years, J&K retained its status as a “special” administrative region.

Pakistan took longer to formally stabilize as a constitutional republic; its first constitution was passed in 1956 and was quickly abrogated in 1958 with the establishment of martial law and a military coup. Another constitution was drafted and passed in 1962 and then abrogated by the institution of martial law (again) in 1969. Then, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 (which included the Bangladesh Liberation War) exploded onto the international scene, further delaying the ratification of a constitution. After the war and separation of East Pakistan (which became the modern state of Bangladesh), a constitution was passed in 1973 that remains current to this day. Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan had some special considerations, but these have been wildly unstable over the many years and constitutions and continue to cause conflict.

\footnote{Remember, the two states of India and Pakistan that existed before this didn’t have documents of governance and were meant to be transitional.}
Kashmir Today: From The Kashmiri Hindu Exodus to The Abrogation of Article 370

You’d be better off counting the individual stars in the sky by hand than trying to list and detail every period of unrest, conflict, and insurgency in Kashmir since Partition. There have been accusations of rigged elections, human rights abuses, and war crimes committed against Kashmiris by both Pakistani and Indian governments and armies--especially on the Indian side--which these countries vehemently deny. Several “mini-wars” have happened between India and Pakistan, India and Kashmiris, Pakistan and Kashmiris, Kashmiris and other Kashmiris, etc. Pakistan and India permanently have their nuclear arsenals pointed at each other right over Kashmiris’ heads. Periodically, tensions ramp up and the world holds its breath, wondering whether it’ll come to blows. Usually, this doesn’t amount to anything beyond small military and/or political squabbling, then fervor dies down once again. This process repeats ad nauseam.

However, there are some key events of note, especially those that have been in the news recently.

The Exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus

If you ask a South Asian person about the Kashmir Conflict, the first thing out of their mouth will probably be about the Exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus. It’s one of the most visible and politicized events in the entire history of Kashmir.

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68 From third-party watchdog organizations, the UN, and Kashmiris themselves.
69 As always, a disclaimer that my ability to analyze these multifaceted and complex events is limited. There are books longer than this entire thesis dedicated to just this event.
Almost nothing is generally agreed upon about this exodus/genocide, not even among Kashmiris\(^70\). Thousands of books, academic publications, and opinion pieces continue to try to sort the facts from the fiction and truth from propaganda. The only unarguable fact: there was a community of Kashmiri Hindus in the Kashmir Valley that numbered in the tens or hundreds of thousands that all but disappeared in an unusually short period of time towards the end of the 20th century. Most would also generally agree that this process ended by 1990. The issue lies in why they disappeared, whether they were killed and forced to flee or whether they left by choice due to nonviolent reasons.

India insists that Pakistan funded and trained terrorist groups that threatened the Hindus, forcing them to leave or brutalizing and murdering them by the thousands if they didn’t comply. They point to the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), an armed separationist faction that advocated a Kashmiri state without Indian or Pakistani rule, as the aggressor, as evidenced by their assassinations of Indian government figures (especially those bringing legal repercussions against separationists), commitment to violent protest, and black market arms trading. JKLF was also accused of raping, abusing, and murdering Hindu women of the Valley for “anti-Islamic actions” such as not wearing the veil (Swami 2007), but sources differ on whether this actually happened or not\(^71\). Kashmiri Hindus and their sympathizers point out that on January 4th 1990,

\(^70\) For example, the opinions of my older family members, who lived through this time and grew up in Srinagar, are the polar opposite of those of the majority of Kashmiri Muslims of the same age. From anti-Muslim Indians, this is usually framed as an unjust, one-sided genocide and reign of terror by a monolithic Muslim establishment. From my Kashmiri family members, it’s more often framed as an unfortunate and sad betrayal and misguided retaliation by the individual Muslim friends and neighbors they grew up with. The younger generations of both Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims are beginning to meet in the middle a little more, but it’s a slow and painful process.

\(^71\) JKLF did claim the assassinations as well as several armed standoffs and skirmishes with the Indian army, but denied the accusations of targeting Kashmiri Hindus specifically. The assassinated officials were all non-Kashmiri Indians, as far as I can tell. JKLF has never claimed responsibility for the subsequent unsolved deaths of several prominent Kashmiri Hindus, though local Pro-Pakistan forces have (sometimes untruthfully) claimed some of them. JKLF usually denounces these groups and reasserts its pro-Kashmir (anti-India and anti-Pakistan) stance if asked. An interesting point of note is that the militant arm of the Communist Party of India and the militant arm of the Communist Party of India...
several Srinagar-based newspapers published threats against Kashmiri Hindus in front-page ads sourced to Hizbul-Mujahideen, a pro-Pakistan militant group. The newspapers denounced this message in subsequent publications and stated that allowing the group to take out ads in their papers did not mean endorsement. Some sources claim--while others dispute--that a blackout happened across the Valley on the night of January 18-19 1990 that spared several popular mosques, which blared inflammatory messages and threats all night against Kashmiri Hindus if they didn’t leave the Valley (Evans 2002).

Pakistan insists that these actions and groups are an indigenous uprising against Indian rule and that it has no hand in it whatsoever. They also assert that many of the more extreme claims about targeted violence against Kashmiri Hindus are fabricated or exaggerated, and they place the total number of possible casualties at about 200-300. What follows this argument is that there are far fewer actual “terrorists” than India claims, and that it retroactively labels dissenters killed by its military forces as such to sweep these human rights abuses under the rug. According to the most extreme supporters of this stance, Kashmiri Hindus were not victims of violence at all but left due to a variety of factors such as lack of economic opportunity.

Realistically, there is probably some truth to both stances. Indian claims of the extent of violence against Kashmiri Hindus are probably exaggerated in light of how politicized they are, and some reports sound almost too outlandish to be true. It also seems unreasonable to say

(Maoist) attempted to step in on the side of JKLF, but were thoroughly rebuked by local forces. (Yes, those are two separate communist parties with nearly the same names that command similar militias.)

72 For a more detailed look at January 1990 specifically, especially the night that seemed to be the “breaking point” in anti-Hindu sentiment, look into the Gawkadal Massacre and the night of January 21, 1990.

73 One that I find most absurd is the claim that Pakistan distributes a menu-style reward system for Kashmiri agitation. Supporters of this claim state that a Kashmiri gets 5 rupees per rock thrown at Indian forces, more for larger rocks, 3 rupees for spitting on a soldier, and even more for larger-scale actions. The implication being that, of course, the Kashmiri writes down each anti-Indian action they take and cashes this receipt out at some caricature of a Pakistan-funded “shop for terrorism” or similar. It sounds akin to American right-wing claims of powerful individuals paying “crisis actors” (i.e. Alex Jones on the Sandy Hook shooting) and “paid protestors” to agitate the American public.
that among the hundreds confirmed jailed without trial or charge and/or executed by the Indian government, including children as young as twelve years old, that all of these individuals were the caricature of “terrorism” that India claims (promoting Sharia Law and non-Muslim genocide, violent and owning many guns, etc). However, this period was definitely quite unstable, and the mysterious murders of various Kashmiri Hindus seems to add credence to the theory that there were resentments built up against them that may have led to retaliatory violence.


This is the most recent “big” event in the conflict, and it managed to make international headlines because of how severe the local backlash against it was. It includes a lot of legal technicalities that I won’t attempt to discuss here, especially as the issues are still touchy and ongoing. However, the broadest summary is that at the end of 2019, Jammu and Kashmir’s special status was revoked, formally folding it into the Indian Union and subjecting it to all Indian laws. This meant a number of changes, such as that non-Kashmiri Indians could buy land in Kashmir. At the time of writing this thesis, February 2020, local demonstrations and unrest continue, as does a government-enforced internet ban.

As perhaps the most contemporary of these events, I urge readers to read more on this from as many different sources as possible. Updates are still coming out about it even within the past few days. The situation on the ground in the Valley isn’t clear to anyone looking in from the outside and no one seems to have all the facts. As a linguistics student, I cannot reasonably delve into this any further in a non-history thesis. It would also be unwise for me to verbalize opinions that are uninformed or jumping to conclusions about such a live and sensitive topic. However, it is an issue close to my heart and very important in understanding the Kashmir conflict as a whole.
Comparative Case Studies

Now that we’ve established at least a basic understanding of the historical, linguistic, and geo-political situation of Kashmir, we can delve into analyzing Koshur as a political construct. The sociolinguistic research on Koshur—and indeed, research on Koshur at all—is unfortunately limited and often biased. However, by comparing it to other examples of ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious conflict in South Asia, we circle closer to an objective and truthful understanding. To avoid falling into the trap of generalizing across the subcontinent and treating each situation as “the same”, I will focus on different aspects of each case study only as they relate to Koshur and Kashmir. As I’ve stressed thus far in the history section, this means that my summary of the contextual background for each case will be limited in scope by relevance to Koshur and my own ability to navigate academic history.

Geopolitics, Ethnolinguistic Identity, and Persecution: Bengali in Bangladesh

It isn’t entirely accurate to say that Partition’s only outcome was the creation of India and Pakistan. While deciding how to divide the subcontinent, the majority of considerations went to religious homogeneity. Thus, the Muslim-majority swathes of the Bengal region in the east were carved out of India and combined with the Muslim-majority regions of the far west. Despite their remote distance (nearly 1,500 miles) and wildly dissimilar cultures, they were termed the East and West wings of the new nation of “Pakistan”\textsuperscript{74}, with administrative power disproportionately concentrated in West Pakistan. After the Bangladesh Liberation War, East Pakistan seceded from the West and became the modern state of Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{74} To learn more about this process, consult historical research and interpretations of the Pakistan Movement as it related to Partition.
Background and Conflict

After the creation of the transitional “Muslim state”, “Hindu state”, and independent princely states in 1947, the subcontinent underwent a period of intense instability as everyone scrambled to create their own governments. Both Pakistan and India immediately looked to annex the princely states in their area and consolidate their countries. Pakistan had a much more difficult time with this than India, as none of their proposed constitutions seemed to last. Because of this, the loosely connected provinces of “Pakistan” operated semi-independently for several years, including East Bengal, as it was called at the time. However, early attempts to unite a single Pakistan foreshadowed what would soon come; in the few months after Partition before his death by tuberculosis, Governor-General Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared Urdu the official language despite the fact that less than five percent of Pakistan’s population spoke it (Shah 1997), including the Punjabi-speaking western provinces from which he delivered the declaration. He further lambasted those who promoted Bengali as anti-Muslim communist traitors. The backlash against this was as intense as it was immediate, and West Pakistan reluctantly granted secondary official status to Bengali in 1956.

This tension burst into the open with the introduction of the “One Unit” programme by the prime minister Muhammad Ali Bogra in 1954. This programme was the first serious attempt at geopolitical union of the non-contiguous provinces. It united the west wing under the name “West Pakistan”, renamed East Bengal “East Pakistan”, and made provisions for future cultural, linguistic, and religious “unity” (homogeneity) (Ranjan 2016). Bengalis resented this transparent

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75 Jinnah was the public face of the creation of Pakistan and spearheaded the legal side of the push for a post-partition Muslim nation.
76 This sentence doesn’t do justice to how messy and bloody this was. There were several violent protests that were forcibly broken up by Western Pakistani soldiers, resulting in the martyrdom of dozens of protestors—the majority of whom were students. After the Indo-Pakistani War of 1956, where Bengalis received little to no protection from central government armies against Indian incursion, these tensions reached a fever pitch. Only after several years of this did Western Pakistan relent.
attempt to yet again impose foreign ideals on their region, such as styles of dress, religious practices, language, and government. Under this system, East Pakistanis were also wildly underrepresented in administrative and government positions (centered in West Pakistan) despite constituting the majority of the nation’s population. Bengali nationalist movements began to brew, and many of them centered on the Bengali language as an identity and cultural pride that separated them from their West Pakistani masters.

Bengali resentment simmered for about a decade and a half with intermittent outbursts of violence and unrest but no lasting armed conflicts. Bengali nationalist movements continued to grow in size and momentum, perturbing West Pakistan immensely. Finally, in March of 1971, West Pakistan executed Operation Searchlight, envisioned from the beginning as a one-sided quick-and-dirty massacre of any and all dissidents. President Yahya Khan was quoted in a February 1971 conference as saying, “kill three million of them and the rest will eat out of our hands.”

Unsurprisingly, this began the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971. Surprisingly, however, local guerilla militias fought back fiercely enough that it also began the Bangladesh Liberation War (Ranjan 2016). West Pakistan disproportionately targeted religious minorities such as Bengali Hindus, who were slaughtered, raped, and tortured by the hundreds of thousands7. Millions of refugees flooded across the border with India, who took keen note of the fact that the majority of victims and refugees were Bengali Hindus (Shah 1997). Generally, it was assumed to only be a matter of time before India got involved.

7 For a cursory idea of the scale of this bloodbath, take a look at the Wikipedia page titled “List of Massacres in Bangladesh” and count 1) how many individual massacres happened just in 1971 and 2) how many hundreds of thousands of people were killed in them. If that doesn’t drive it home enough, check out the Wikipedia page titled “Rape in the Bangladesh Liberation War” to read about the dozens of “rape camps”.

India officially stepped into the conflict after a preemptive strike against several Indian airfields by the Pakistani Air Force on December 3, 1971. Neither country ever formally declared war on each other, but India openly acknowledged this as an informal act of war. India had previously repeatedly appealed to the international community for aid to little avail. Nonetheless, Indian forces swept into the conflict with such force and numbers that West Pakistan was forced to surrender in just thirteen days (Rajan 2016). With this final surrender, the state of Bangladesh finally came into legal being.

Pakistan continues to deny to this day that any war crimes were committed or, at other times, that they were at the scale witnessed. The dialect of Bengali spoken in Bangladesh is now sometimes called Bangla, to distinguish it from the perhaps-only-slightly different dialect spoken in Indian Bengal.

Analysis: Comparison with the Standing of Koshur

The rise of Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi identity is contemporaneous to the rise of Kashmiri nationalism (defined as Kashmiriyat in the introductory section) in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. The construction of the ethnolinguistic Bangladeshi identity was centered around many of the same factors as that of the Kashmiri identity, such as language, religion, and outsider rule. Koshur and Bengali were/are both considered “minority” languages despite being spoken by literally millions of people and the majority of their respective regions, leading to agitations for recognition of the language in the legal, political, and educational spheres. While Koshur is technically recognized by name in the Indian Constitution and the J&K Constitution directs the enrichment of “regional languages” (including Koshur), I haven’t seen this translate to any

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78 India’s involvement turned the conflict into the larger Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.
79 While the Constitution doesn’t say how to do this, it did establish a body dedicated to doing so called The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages.
practical recognition or efforts towards treating Koshur like a legitimate language, just as West Pakistan’s “recognition” of Bengali was pragmatically useless and simply divided them further.

The ethno-religious identity and culture of Bengalis and that of Kashmiris is what starkly separates them from their perceived oppressors. Just as Bengalis were continually frustrated with being dismissed and underrepresented in governance, Kashmiri opinions on their own administration are constantly and totally ignored, such as the continued demands for a democratic plebiscite. Following in the tradition of Bangladesh’s indigenous resistance to remote rule, Kashmiris (especially those of the Valley) have blisteringly and consistently resisted Indian occupation for decades, which rules from Delhi hundreds of miles away. Moreover, Kashmiris and Bengalis both ultimately became proxy-pawns in the ongoing Cold War-esque ethno-religious standoff between India and Pakistan. This, too, they incorporated into their ethnolinguistic identity.

However, there are also some key differences between the two situations. While Koshur is (reportedly) taught as a secondary language up to the intermediate level in Valley schools, I haven’t been able to ascertain whether this was ever the case in East Pakistan beyond hearsay. In terms of ethnolinguistic identity, Bangladesh constitutes an intriguing and unique perspective because it was portioned off from a region with the same ethnolinguistic identity (the region of Bengal, home to Bengalis) and forced into two different countries based on religion. Ethnic Bengalis in India (majority Hindu), who also speak Bengali, are legally and politically discouraged against Bangladeshi identity and have had messy religious conflicts in (relatively)

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80 To read more about West Pakistan’s attempts to stamp out Bengali culture beyond language policy, consult Ranjan 2016.

81 For an example of India overtly imposing religious practices on Kashmir, read about the 10-day Ganesh Chaturthi Puja/Ganpati Puja held in Srinagar (sponsored by the Indian government) on September 2, 2019. The Valley was under military-enforced curfew, major roadways (and the one major highway) were blocked off to make room for the festival proceedings, and outside non-Kashmiri Hindus were bussed in for the ceremony. Note also that Kashmiri Hindus still have yet, by and large, to return to the Valley despite the lip service paid to their exile.
recent memory, such as the unsuccessful Partition of Bengal of 1905. However, the term “Bangla” as used to describe the dialect of Bengali spoken in Bangladesh is a less common endonym than simply “Bengali”, which would imply that they see themselves as speaking the same language. Indeed, Bengali nationalism (which includes Indian Bengalis) is much more popular and well-known as a movement than the more restrictive Bangladeshi nationalism. While Kashmir was also divided into Azad Kashmir and J&K, Kashmiris are not united under one specific language and are known to argue internally over who is “Kashmiri” and who isn’t because there are no obvious non-geographical features that connect them universally. Despite Koshur being called “Kashmiri”, it isn’t a lingua franca of the region and is mostly confined to the Valley and surrounding rural areas.

Most shallowly, Bangladesh succeeded fairly quickly in disentangling itself from Pakistan once violence erupted, whereas the Kashmir conflict has roiled on for more than 70 years. The Bangladeshi struggle was an inter-Muslim cultural conflict, unlike the overtly Hindu-Muslim conflict of Kashmir.

In my experience, Bangladeshis seem to feel a type of kinship with Kashmiris. They relate heavily to the history of oppression and war and the struggle for self-determination. Of course, pro-Pakistani Kashmiris are usually met with Bangladeshi scorn. However, the parallels between their situations speak to the larger problems of culture, identity, and language conflict in South Asia.

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82 In 1905, British administrators attempted to split Bengal into two administrative regions in order to divide the Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority neighborhoods.
83 All of the Bangladeshi people I know refer to it as Bengali, usually in the accent of the language itself as [beŋgaˈli]. I’ve heard them refer to it as Bangla before, but Bengali seems to be more common.
84 When I introduce myself as a “Koshur” in English, it means that I’m a Kashmiri from the Valley, specifically, even though the word “Koshur” in the language itself means a general Kashmiri person. Also, as I said in the introductory section, the boundaries of what constitutes the greater Kashmir region are debated. I’ve even seen Kashmiri Muslims from the Valley on Twitter argue that Kashmiri Hindus were and are outsiders and that Kashmiri Muslims inhabited the Valley first. For a sneak peek into this type of infighting, step into the (very polarized) conversation about whether Islam historically came to South Asia through peaceful and nonviolent missionaries or through military conquests and forced conversions.
Language Ideologies and Dialect Classification: The Hindi-Urdu Controversy

Linguists today recognize Hindi and Urdu as the Sanskritized and Persianized registers, respectively, of the same spoken language (King 2001) that I’ve previously referred to as Hindustani. However, if you state as much to a particularly patriotic Pakistani or Indian, they may well get very angry very quickly that you dare to conflate them. Indeed, each side laments the “defilement” of their language by influence and loanwords from each other and/or the other’s linguistic predecessors, and nationalistic elements intermittently call for “purity” in their respective languages.

The issue of language classification being distorted through politicization and language ideologies is not unique to South Asia. The Balkan countries of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro have long clashed over the Serbo-Croatian language since the division of Yugoslavia, each insisting that their mutually intelligible variety or varieties constitute a completely separate and distinct language for geo-political, ethnic, and historical reasons. Similarly, the Hindi-Urdu split stems from the larger ethno-religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims since Partition.

Background and Context

As I described in the previous section on the origins of Hindustani, it’s nearly impossible to tell where Hindi begins and Urdu ends and vice versa in their early forms. The main difference that proponents of their disparity point to is their wildly different modern scripts (digraphia). A secondary material difference lies in their modern language influences; Urdu draws on Persian and Arabic while Hindi draws on Sanskrit. Beyond this, however, their differences are few. As Paul R. Brass notes in his novel titled “Language, Religion, and Politics in North India”, “The Hindi-Urdu controversy by its very bitterness demonstrates how little the
objective similarities between language groups matter when people attach subjective significance to their languages.” (2005)

The differentiation of South Asia’s Hindus and Muslims is an ancient and labyrinthine issue. Refer to the history section, especially the sections following the proliferation of Islam, for an idea of how religious conflict has waxed and waned to both extremes over the centuries.
As discussed before, British colonizers made use of this history and intentionally alienated various South Asian communities from each other. A major driving force behind the creation of Pakistan (i.e. Partition) was the rise of ethno-nationalist movements that pulled Hindustani to both sides of the stratification of post-Independence identities. For example, the Urdu Movement was an ethno-linguistic nationalist movement under the British Raj that aimed to enshrine Urdu as a universal marker of the Muslim socio-cultural and political identity. This in turn was in response to the increased agitations of Hindus in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for official language status to be conferred on Hindi, specifically with the Devanagari script. Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), an Islamic pragmatist, reformer, and philosopher, was one of the most fervent critics of the Hindi movement. His vocal dissent actually intensified and popularized the movement to a degree, as he couched his concerns in terms of Hindi threatening Muslim cultural hegemony and was fiercely loyal to the British East India Company colonizers that the common people resented (Upadhyay 2003).

Immediately post-Partition, Hindi and Urdu diverged rapidly. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, spoke Hindustani (Urdu, in his own words) fluently as his first language. He often complained that he couldn’t understand the increasingly Sanskritized broadcasts of Indian public radio, and on one occasion told the Indian parliament that he couldn’t understand Hindi broadcasts of his own speeches (King 2001). This process was most extreme at the “highbrow” cultural levels, as upper-class, educated intellectuals and religious leaders were best equipped to affect the Sanskritization and Persianization of their respective languages; they were the most likely to know Sanskrit and Persian, which were no longer commonly spoken but still regarded as important literary languages and markers of education and class. However, at the casual, interpersonal level, Hindi and Urdu remain almost entirely mutually intelligible. I’ve
never seen an Urdu speaker and a Hindi speaker misunderstand each other beyond accommodatable vocabulary differences.

Today, modern nationalists on the Hindu and Muslim sides bicker continually about the superiority of their language and the perceived “invasion” of the other’s influence into theirs. Politically biased researchers still squabble over which language’s script or vocabulary is “better” or “indigenous”. In the more laughable sense, much of the “bad linguistics” on the internet comes from misinformed right-wing Hindi speakers who claim that Sanskrit is “the mother of all languages”, has special healing properties because of its phonology\(^\text{85}\), and other such Hindu nationalist propaganda\(^\text{86}\).

However, in my experience, there has been even more linguistic exchange over the years, including with non-Hindustani languages, despite the political backlash. Bollywood movies, which usually claim to be exclusively in Hindi, very commonly use well-recognized words in Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali, and other languages. In diverse cities and metropolitan areas, it’s common to understand at least three or more languages at an intermediate level due to years of unconscious exposure. While “pure” and technically different Sanskritized and Persianized versions of many common words exist, it’s awkward and clunky to use them in casual speech and akin to a native English speaker using Shakespearean English regardless of context. An example that comes to mind is the word for “train”, which I know as \textit{rail-gaadi} (“rail car”). I’ve been taught the “pure Hindi” word before, but I cannot remember what it is because I’m so unused to using it. In Urdu, train is usually just said in English with the appropriate accent.

\(^{85}\) No, I am not joking. I was told this as a child as a point of cultural pride about the “healing frequencies” of Sanskrit...I’ve never met a Hindi speaker who didn’t at least partially believe this, and older Hindi speakers will swear on it.

\(^{86}\) Reddit’s bad linguistics subreddit (r/BadLinguistics) is notoriously populated with this type of content.
Analysis: Comparison with the Koshur Dialect Split

Considering how polarized the identities of Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims have become, it's surprising that this dialect split hasn't been explored further or even fully acknowledged. Braj Kachru coined the terms “Sanskritized Kashmiri” and “Persianized Kashmiri” in his 1969 grammar of Kashmiri, but didn't explain or explore any further. He didn’t use the terms in the rest of the grammar or subsequent publications. It has many similarities to the politicized Hindi-Urdu split, which, at its core, is a simple dialect split rather than two separate languages, necessarily.

The reason this dialect split is important for Koshur is that there is no dialect-sensitive research in the field as of yet. The majority of the burden of research has fallen to Indian government bodies dedicated to language and culture, which have a vested interest in “Sanskritizing” the Valley’s culture and inhabitants to assimilate them into India. Language is a very subtle and effective way to do this. Almost all of the academic documentation of Koshur that I’ve read is written in Devanagari, which is disingenuous considering that the data for these publications is almost certainly elicited from Valley residents, who are overwhelmingly Muslim and would speak the Muslim dialect. If they were to write their own grammars, Kashmiri Muslims would almost certainly write in the Perso-Arabic script. Intense scrutiny and research has gone into the research of Hindi and Urdu’s differences and separating them as languages for political reasons, but none of this concern has gone into Koshur, whose speakers have communities that are (today) just as disparate.

Just like Hindi-Urdu, I’ve often seen Kashmiris squabbling over which script is “superior” or “came first”. For example, I’ve seen Kashmiri Muslims on Twitter (in now-deleted threads) assert that Koshur isn’t suited to Devanagari because it requires extra diacritics for sounds that Hindi and Sanskrit don’t have. On the other side, King (2006) argues that “Semetic scripts” don’t
suit Indo-European languages because as they rely on context rather than written graphemes to convey vowels, which are an extremely fundamental part of understanding both Koshur and Hindustani.

I don't say this to argue that this dialect split should be politicized in the same divisive and ethno-nationalist manner that Hindi and Urdu have been. That would probably spell disaster for any future attempts to reconcile Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims. However, the current state of Koshur linguistics is equally insincere, as erasing Persianized Koshur while calling it Sanskritized Koshur has the double marginalizing effect of both failing to address the dwindling fluency and usage of Sanskritized Koshur and failing to accurately document Persianized Koshur.

Other Notable Linguistic Conflicts in South Asia

There are many other examples of linguistic conflict and persecution in the region that could be comparative case studies for Koshur as well. For example, South India's native languages are of the Dravidian family rather than the Indo-European family. South Indians have long resented attempts to standardize Hindustani, especially Hindi, as the universal language of India. There is a long history of “anti-Hindi agitations”, or periods of unrest, protest, fasting, and discontent with the imposition of Hindi supremacy. Another example from across the border is Shina, the language most closely related to Koshur, spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan within the larger Kashmir region. The Shina people have long sought legal recognition and protection for themselves and their language to no avail. Historically, the disappearance of Persian from the subcontinent represents an intriguing example of a language declining nearly overnight. Usually, even overt attempts to destroy a language are not immediately successful. Within a few decades, however, Persian was eradicated from the subcontinent.

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87 Most commonly associated with the Tamil Nationalist movement.
The Future of Koshur

Sanskritized Koshur is nearly extinct, as far as I can tell. I don’t know anyone younger than my eighty-year-old grandparents who speaks it anymore. In fact, I don’t know anyone of any age who can write Sanskritized Koshur in the traditional Devanagari script, much less even recognize the Sharada script. This is partly intentional on the part of speakers; as the speaking community was very quickly displaced and (possibly) targeted by ethno-religious nationalists, they had to “blend in” with the culture of the regions in which they settled. Drawing attention to yourself as a Kashmiri was highly undesirable and unsafe.

This also had the covert effect of crushing the Kashmiri Hindu psyche. When I told my Kashmiri grandmother that I was studying Koshur, she actually got angry with me and started shouting that it isn’t a real language and I’m wasting my time. I was confused and hurt at first, as I knew that she is privately very proud of being Kashmiri and spends much of her time wistfully watching videos about Kashmir. In hindsight however, I understand this self-marginalization as a coping mechanism. She grew up in Srinagar and misses it dearly, as do the rest of my family. Seeing me approach it from the perspective of an “outsider” pursuing academic pursuits probably reminded her of how little cultural and linguistic transmission there has been between the generations. It’s less painful to think of this as an unimportant and inconsequential happenstance than as the tragic and sorrowful loss that it truly is.

It took me quite awhile to break past the initial confused attempts at support from extended family members who didn’t understand why I was so interested in learning about Koshur. I had to point them to academic work and dictionaries that seriously analyze and study the language for them to realize how precious the knowledge of Koshur is on both the global and personal scale. Once they understood, there’s been an outpouring of support for my work
among them and a visible renewal of their sense of cultural pride. Legitimizing their language through academia sparked a sense of personal wellbeing and a motivation to celebrate their roots rather than hide them.

I cannot speak so confidently on the future of Persianized Koshur. It doesn’t seem to be in any danger in the oral form (as much as I can tell). However, celebrating Kashmiri identity and the linguistic culture of the Valley can only improve the lot of Kashmiris as a whole. Pointing fingers at each other’s dialects as “wrong”, “bad”, or “invasive” only leads to further division and alienation from each other.

Conclusions

Koshur as a sociopolitical concept is just as convoluted as the Kashmir conflict itself. I’ve had to brush over and broadly summarize many intricate issues and events that deserve detailing beyond the little I can do here. What isn’t complicated, however, is how valuable linguistic diversity and accurate language documentation are. When I began an interview I did last year with a Koshur-speaking family friend, I referred to it as “Koshur”, the uncommon endonym, rather than as “Kashmiri”, the common exonym. There was a beat of silence, and I could hear the emotion in his voice when he finally said that he was so, so glad that I referred to it as such.

Kashmiris have had their voices and lives exploited, dismissed, and restricted for centuries. One of the first steps to healing this generational trauma is “listening”, simply “hearing” with an open mind. This is what makes the need for dialect-sensitive documentation so important. Kashmiri Muslims no doubt resent their dialect being represented by the Devanagari script. They probably see it as yet another “privilege” awarded to Kashmiri Hindus, the imposed “prestige script” used to ignore and erase their unique identity. For Kashmiri
Hindus, legitimizing their language is vital to healing the hurt that they’ve been forced to suppress and deny, reawakening their sense of diasporic community, and uniting the Kashmiri community as a whole.

The state of the Valley and its inhabitants, current and former, is absolutely heartbreaking to me. This thesis is a labor of love, intending to bring to light the plight of Kashmiris and inaugurate new conversations about community, identity, and solutions. Language is one of the most fundamental parts of bonding with others and developing a sense of self. The way forward is not through erasing differences and noncompliant cultures, but through celebrating and analyzing differences and communities with open, unclouded eyes.


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