India’s Role in Kashmir’s Woes

What is the issue?

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- The evolution of the Kashmir conflict is a complex one that successive governments have failed to address comprehensively.
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- It needs to be recognized that Pakistan is not the only problem factor in Kashmir and that there is an internal crisis too.
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How did Kashmir accede to India?

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- While Pakistan was aggressive to get Kashmir to accede to it, kashimiri leadership wanted to retain their independence.
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- Due to Paksitani aggression and the tribal invasion of 1947, the Kashmiris leadership was left with no option but to accede to India conditionally.
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- Hence, Kashmir acceded to the Indian union under unique circumstances that defied the logic of religion based partition of the sub-continent.
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- Because of this, article 370 was provided as a special protection in order to safeguard its cultural and ethnic composition.
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- Notably, despite strong opposition, the charismatic Sheik Abdullah had convinced the Kashmiris that joining India was the best option for Kashmir.
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What caused the alienation of Kashmiris?

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- Hindu communal forces, led by the Jan Sangh, began agitating from 1950 for the removal of Article 370, which was seen as a threat to the Kashmiri identity.
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- This had a major psychological impact on the Valley's population and on Sheikh Abdullah personally, which marked the beginning of internal strife.
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- While Mr. Abdullah became Kashmiri Prime Minister in 1951 (the head of the Kashmiri state was called PM then), his government was dismissed in 1953.
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- He was also imprisoned by the Nehruvian government on the suspicion lobbying internationally for creating an independent Kashmir.
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- For two decades after that, New Delhi rigged elections and appointed its own proxies as Chief Ministers, eroding the valley's faith in Indian democracy.
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How did militancy start?

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- While the Indian state was engrossed with Pakistan's foray in Kashmir, it failed to rectify its meddling in the valley's polity, which strained its legitimacy.
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- An agreement reached between PM Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah in 1975 granted some autonomy to the valley and did promise a new beginning.
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- But with Abdullah's death and his son Farooq's rise, the India government under PM Rajeev Gandhi soon backtracked and the progress was stalled.
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- These actions eroded the legitimacy of the Abdullah clan, which was the face of moderate Kashmiri sub-nationalism and provided impetus to extremists.
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- The elections of 1987 were openly rigged in order to diminish the anticipated performance of the extremist party "Muslim United Front" (MUF).
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- But this action contrarily increased the popularity of the MUF, and people came to the streets and subsequently took to arms from 1990 onwards.
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- In the midst of this internal churn, Pakistan, unsurprisingly threw its weight behind the proponents of "Free Kashmir", although it was against its stand.
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Source: The Hindu

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