Understanding the Polarisation in Kashmir

What is the issue?

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- Various incidents in Kashmir valley have spotted some long-term dynamics and regional differences in J&K.
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What is the account of diversified ethnic groups in J&K?

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- **Kashmiri speakers -** Muslims and Hindu/Pundits; these people view themselves more cultured and articulate voice of the state (valley based).
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- **Non-Kashmiri speakers -** These groups are from the erstwhile State of J&K.
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- They claim themselves the ‘Kashmiri’ in India, Pakistan, or in the diaspora (non-valley based).
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- **Gujjars groups -**Bakherwals are the third-largest ethnic group in the State.
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- They have always lived on the margins of society because of their nomadic lifestyle.
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- These people, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically would otherwise identify more with the Jammu region.
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- **Ladakhis -** These people are indigenous ethnic groups of the Leh-Ladakh region.
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- They live in the most remote parts of the state.
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What are the prevailing regional differences in J&K?

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- Valley-based Kashmiris feel it hard to acknowledge the presence and aspirations of other ethnic and identity groups in the State.
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- Most of the Bakherwals fear their marginalisation in an autonomous political set-up.
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- They are keen on getting some institutional assurance of their recognition as groups separate from the Valley Kashmiris.
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- Hindu communal sentiment operating within the broader right-wing nationalist framework has also been visible to bring the State under one flag and one Constitution.
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- The sense of deprivation and discrimination at the hands of the Valley and the communal sentiment have fed into each other.
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- With no institutional mechanisms to redress the former, the latter narrative has become predominant.
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- The binary of a Hindu-Jammu is dispossessed of its rightful share of resources and political power by a Muslim-Kashmir.
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- The broader national-level communal polarisation has reduced it to Hindu versus Muslim, in which any Muslim gets bracketed with the Kashmiris.
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What are the reasons for increasing conflicts in J&K?

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- Lack of better educational and economic facilities in other regions of the State made Jammu city the focal point of migration over the last two decades.
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- Even Ladakhis who logically should go to the Kashmir valley, given its geographical proximity, prefer Jammu for their higher education.
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- Due to better access to education and creeping urbanisation, many of them are settling down, especially in Jammu city and its adjoining districts.
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- These are the areas where there has historically been a distrust of the Kashmir Valley.
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- This is because of the real and perceived neglect by the political leadership of the State which has always been Valley-based.
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- The political parties have served to increase this divide as it resulted in a political vacuum in which there is no voice to speak for both regions and all communities.
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- Thus the nativist sentiment that it has engendered is fuelled by the already present communal fault lines in the region.
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What is the way forward?

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- Given the historical and socio-economic dynamics, it is inevitable that Jammu city would be where different groups would move.
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- The argument of demographic change does not make much sense if looked at in the broader context of the whole State.
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- As people who are moving to the Jammu region are only citizens of J&K itself.
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- It makes sense only if Jammu city and its adjoining areas are seen as a political entity separate from the rest of the State.
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- In fact, the forces working towards the division of the State have become more proactive in recent times.
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- And so this has heightened the question of demography.
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- Relations between various ethnic groups in Kashmir need to be nurtured to curb political and unhealthy agendas.
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Source: The Hindu

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