



IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER? A HYDROLOGICAL VERSUS IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE KASHMIR DISPUTE

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Abstract

India-Pakistan ideological differences have remained one of the most important aspects of the Kashmir dispute and the same has been projected in the wide literature available on the dispute. However, the dispute has a strong hydrological dimension as well which has hitherto been ignored in academic debates. This paper argues that the Kashmir dispute has been expressed and projected in different political, strategic, humanitarian, and ideological flavors. In addition to these facets, one important dimension of the dispute is its hydrological value. It is the waters of Kashmir that are vital for the economies of the two regional giants of India and Pakistan that have made the territory of Kashmir dear to both the contending states. Though, both the parties to the dispute have rarely explicitly stated their interests in the region of Kashmir in terms of water, yet, it is the



hydrological value that has made Kashmir a nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan.

Key Words: Hydrology, ideology, Kashmir, water, realism, Pakistan, India

Introduction

The Kashmir dispute owes its origin to the partition of India between India and Pakistan in August 1947. Great Britain divided the Indian subcontinent based on geographical situation and communal interests (Burke & Ziring, 1990). The areas inhabited by the Muslims became part of the newly emergent state of Pakistan whereas the areas which were predominantly Hindu became part of the state of India (Chaudhury, 2009). However, the accession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir became disputatious between India and Pakistan. The dispute surfaced because of the reason that its ruler was a Hindu and the majority of its population was Muslim. The irony of geography was that Kashmir lied on the border of India and Pakistan (Chaudhury, 2009). Its Hindu ruler acceded to India on 26th October 1947 when his rule was jeopardized by a tribal invasion from Pakistani tribal areas (Burke & Ziring, 1990). This accession is contested by Pakistan on the aforementioned principle of division of India particularly of the Muslim majority population of Kashmir (Roy-Chaudhury, 2009). As a consequence, both the states of India and Pakistan went to war from 26 October to 1 January 1949 until the UN intervened successfully and a ceasefire line (CfL) was drawn between the two states.

The CFL divided Kashmir into two parts with India having a two-thirds portion and Pakistan the rest (Chaudhuri, 2010). The issue provoked another war between India and Pakistan which lasted from 1 September till 23 September 1965. The war was followed by Tashkent Agreement according to which both the states restored the captured areas across the CfL and the status quo was maintained. The war of 1971 which was not as such fought over the issue of Kashmir but the consequent agreement-The Simla Agreement of 3 July 1972-converted the CfL into the Line of Control (LoC) with minor changes (Roy-Chaudhury, 2009). Another war was fought over the issue in 1999 known as the Kargil war however since both the nations had gone nuclear in 1998, the war arena remained confined to the mountains of Kargil.

On the diplomatic front, many efforts were made to resolve the issue of Kashmir, but India and Pakistan could not reach any viable agreement. In 2004 the famous composite dialogue was initiated which is considered to be the furthest walk in this regard (Chaudhuri, 2010). Once again a strategic frost happened between the two rivals when in November 2008, terrorists launched a daring attack in Mumbai and the composite



dialogue derailed. In a word, the issue is still hanging fire between the two nations. No regional issue in South Asia at present has exacted such heavy human and capital toll as the issue of Kashmir (Khan, 2012). Similarly, no issue has involved human rights violation as did the Indian forces committed in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The aforementioned history of wars over Kashmir and failed attempts to resolve it reflects the gravity of the dispute between the two states. Since both the states are laced with nuclear weapons, therefore, any misunderstanding between the two nations could snowball the circumstances into a nuclear catastrophe which would have serious ramifications for world peace. This paper attempts to analyze the hydrological dimension of the Kashmir dispute in comparison with other dimensions especially the ideological dimension of the dispute.

Different Dimensions of the Kashmir Dispute

The issue of Kashmir has multiple dimensions: A colonial legacy of an incomplete partition, a freedom movement for the right of self-determination, a boundary dispute, a proxy war, and an excuse for cross-border terrorism. (Chadda, 1997). Moreover, the Kashmir dispute is considered to be one of the most burning issues of human rights violation in the entire world. Similarly, the dispute also has a strong ideological flavor. India claims itself to be a secular and multi-ethnic state and garnering Kashmir-being a Muslim majority area- is to embolden its secularism. Similarly, Pakistan was created based on Two Nation Theory which viewed federating Kashmir with Pakistan as its ideological duty (Khan, 2012). However, in addition to its important ideological dimension, gaining control over Kashmiri water resources is also an important factor that needs explanation.

India and Pakistan's Hydrological Interests in Kashmir

History tells us that many of the conflicts and wars of the world have revolved around the acquisition of natural resources. Water in the bygone days of the 20th century has not remained the pivot of most conflicts, however, in the present century, water crisis due to climate change, increasing population, and urbanization; may become the purpose of most of the conflicts (Gleick, 1993). A similar warning has been issued by UNESCO Director-General Klaus Toepfer when he said that “more than overland or oil, it is over water that most bitter conflicts of the near future may be fought”(Blankenship, 2012). Such a scenario is most true about the South Asian region. As Ben Crow and Nirvikar Singh explain that “South Asian nations seek to control... great rivers of their region



because they offer a partial but tangible solution to ...fundamental problems of rural poverty, industrial constraints, and urban stress” (Qazi, 2012).

In the case of Kashmir, in addition to the ideological and other interests, both the states want to integrate Kashmir because of its water resources as well. Amongst their stated ideological, political, economic and, security interests in the region of Kashmir, water seems of prime importance as the economic, political, and social structures of the region are dependent upon the water (Qazi, 2012). Bakhshi and Trivedi (2011) argue that Pakistan wants to secure its water resources in Kashmir as Pakistan is strongly dependent on water. These waters flowing through Kashmir are vital for the provision of food, and hydroelectric service as well as ensuring the strategic interest of Pakistan. Even the inter-provincial tension in Pakistan is linked to its water security. The same point has been stressed upon by Ex-IRSA Chairman Engineer Fate Gandapur on 24th February when he said that “agreement on Kashmir-the source of water-is vital otherwise nuclear war is hanging like the sword of Damocles” (Bakshi & Trivedi, 2011).

The link between water and Kashmir is found ever since the independence of the two states. In 1951, the Assistant Secretary of the USA, George McGhee observed that the resolution of the water issue between India and Pakistan is of paramount importance for maintaining rapprochement between the two neighbors. He linked the water question to the Kashmir issue and called it a political one and not only a functional one (Alam, 2002). The British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden too mentioned that the resolution of the water issue between India and Pakistan could be a source of reduction of tension between them (Ali, 2008). Similarly, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Hussein Soharwardy established this link publicly when he stated that “there are as you know six rivers (in the Indus basin). Most of the rise in Kashmir. One of the reasons why, therefore, that Kashmir is so important for us is this water, these waters which irrigate our lands. They do not irrigate Indian lands” (Alam, 2002). The Prime Minister further made clear that the Indian action of terminating waters to Pakistan would be the worst kind of aggression and people would die of thirst and instead of dying in that manner, they would wish to die the other way (Alam, 2002).

However, there also exist instances when the Kashmir issue has been de-linked from its waters. For example, the prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan once stated that both the parties should “refrain from using negotiations in one dispute to delay progress in solving any other” (Alam, 2002). Similarly, Mohammad Sadiq, a senior spokesman on Pakistan’s foreign policy stated that “as for the Kashmir dispute, this is not a water issue. It relates to the inalienable rights of the Kashmir people to self-determination.” (Ali, 2008). A similar attitude has been adopted by Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister



of India. For example, he mentioned that “the canal water dispute between India and Pakistan has nothing to do with the Kashmir issue; it started with and is confined to the irrigation system of east and west Punjab”.

However, such a separation of the two issues is conscious as both are interlinked because the headwaters of the main sources of Pakistani waters lie in the disputed territory of Kashmir. Moreover, the disputed projects between India and Pakistan as the Salal dam, the Kishenganga, Tulbul, Baglihar, and Swalkot projects are all located in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir (Ali, 2008). At the present, political leaders, academicians, and policymakers from Pakistan are trying to re-establish a link between waters and Kashmir. Such a link could be found by analyzing the following six factors.

First, let us analyze the ideological interest and the case of conflict of identities. Being created on different notions of nationalism-Pakistan on religion and India based on territorial Indian nationalism basis, both rivals were adamant to wrench Kashmir from the other party. Certain scholars such as Sahni hold that the issue is “an ideological issue inextricably linked with the two countries’ identities” (Sahni, 2006). Pakistan demands Kashmir on ideological and religious grounds as were agreed in the partition plan during the partition of India in 1947. Pakistan argues that since the majority of the population living in Kashmir is Muslim that is why it must become a part of Pakistan (Qazi, 2012). On the other hand, to prove itself a secular state that both Hindus and Muslims could live together in India and thereby invalidate the very basis of Pakistan-the popular Two-Nation Theory- India is trying to make Kashmir a part of India (Qazi, 2012).

However, in addition to the ideological interests, both the states of India and Pakistan have water interests in the territory of Kashmir as well. This fact has been ignored by most of the research done on the Kashmir dispute. Though water is not considered as the major thread in the maze of the Kashmiri dispute (Swain, 2004) yet with increasing scarcity, water would be stated openly as a key concern. Interestingly, some scholars consider the water interest as of paramount importance. One scholar proclaimed that “two reasons for Pakistan to control Kashmir stand out above all; development of hydel power and protection of water sources for irrigation in Punjab and Sindh.” (Qazi, 2012). Medha Bisht states that the Pakistani invasion of 1948 was also motivated to get control of rivers flowing to Pakistan from Kashmir (Bisht, 2011).

A similar link between Kashmir and water issues could be found in the statements of political leaders of Pakistan. While attending his course at Royal College of Defence Studies, London, Pakistan’s ex-president Musharraf expressed that the “issue of Kashmir and Indus are intertwined.” Sikandar Hayat- President of Azad Kashmir-stated in March



2003 that “freedom fighters of Kashmir are fighting for Pakistan’s water security” (Singh, 2004). The famous statement in 2009 by President Asif Ali Zardari is worth quoting here which read: “the water crisis in Pakistan is directly linked to relations with India. The resolution could prevent an environmental catastrophe in South Asia, but failure to do so could fuel the fires of discontent that would lead to extremism and terrorism.” (Qazi, 2012). A jihadist group holds the same opinion about the strategic importance of Kashmiri waters. Hafiz Sayeed-Head of Jammāt-u-Dawā said that “the only jihad can help get water released to Pakistan, so people should rise” (Bisht, 2011).

The second factor in this regard is the importance of water for the economies of India and Pakistan. According to hydrologists and oceanographers, the Himalayan glaciers are retreating sharply and maybe badly affected if the same pattern in global warming went on (Jeelani, 2008). As a consequence, the volume of rivers is decreasing as well. Further, the availability of water in springs and lakes in Kashmir (Wullar, Dal, and Mansbal) are also dwindling at an unprecedented pace (Jeelani, 2008). At the time of the independence, the total per capita water availability in India and Pakistan was 5000 and 5,177 m³ respectively (Sinha, 2010). Now, due to climate change and the subsequent retreat of the Himalayan glaciers, ballooning population, increased urbanization, and industrialization along with increased demand for the agro-based economy of the two nations, water availability has dropped down alarmingly. According to estimates, the total per capita available water in Pakistan has fallen below 1000 m³ currently (Iqbal, 2010) and is expected to go down to 700 m³ by 2025. In India, it has spiralled down to 1342 m³ (Sinha, 2010).

The groundwater is diminishing as in Pakistan its level has gone down in 26 out of its 45 canal commands (Waslekar, 2005). In India similar situation prevails as its groundwater level is going down at a rate of 5 % a year in Indian Punjab and Haryana. (Blankenship, 2012). Similarly, both nations have lost their water storage capacity because the Indus is the highest silt-carrying river. Pakistan has almost lost 50 % of its water storage capacity due to high silt. If on one side Pakistan and India are facing the shortage of water supply as is clear from the above statistics, on the other hand, both of the states demand water for their different needs. Following is a detail of such a demand in different sectors.

First is agricultural needs. Pakistan has an agro-based economy and water is critical to its sustenance and development. Agriculture constitutes 24 % of its GDP, 60-70 % of its exports (Bakshi & Trivedi, 2011), and employs 48.4 % of its labor force (Sinha, 2008). As Pakistan faces a food shortage of 4 million tons per year, therefore, if the water shortage went ahead for the next decades in the same pattern, then Pakistan may face a collapse of its agricultural productivity (Blankenship, 2012).



Moreover, 90 % of Pakistan's agriculture is depending on the Indus river system whose most of the giant rivers flow through Kashmir. It is in this perspective that Kashmiri waters are so vital for the life of Pakistani agriculture. Syed Salahuddin, chairman of the United Jihad Council, stated that "Kashmir is the source from where all of Pakistan's water resources originate. If Pakistan loses its battle against India, it will become a desert" (Sinha, 2008). A similar statement magnifying the importance of Kashmiri waters came from the president of Azad Kashmir-Sardar Muhammad Anwar Khan-as "Pakistani economy is dependent on agriculture and hence on water and therefore on Kashmir" (Sinha, 2008). The Indus river systems' waters are also important for India's agriculture though it receives only 20% of its total waters. Nearly 70 % of Indians live in rural areas whose only source of sustenance is agriculture which employs 200 million people (Miner, et al., 2009)

The second is hydel demand. According to estimates, in 2009 Pakistan had a deficit of 3500 MW whereas its total power potential rests at 40000 MW. To overcome this deficit, Pakistan is working on increasing the total power generation to 27000 MW by 2025 by building dams like Neelum-Jhelum (969 MW) and Diamer-Bhasha dam (4500 MW) with the assistance of China (Bakshi & Trivedi, 2011). These dams are located on rivers flowing through Kashmir. Even Pakistan's presently installed hydel projects-Mangla and Tarbela-which are primary sources of hydel energy are much dependent on water from Kashmir. Mangla is located in Azad Kashmir over the river Jhelum. Tarbela is located in KPK and is dependent on the river Indus. The origin of both of these rivers lies external to Pakistan and flows through Indian Kashmir.

Of similar importance is the power potential of the region for the rapidly growing economy of India. Since India GDP is increasing at 7% per year therefore it needs an increase in power generation by 10% a year. Moreover, India too faces the crisis of load shedding. Indian current installed power generation is 113, 00 MW, out of which 25 % is generated through waters. To meet its demand, India is planning to add 100,000 MW. Interestingly most of this demand would be met through hydel projects on the Indus river water system as according to Indian engineers this potential has not yet been tapped that much (Miner, et al., 2009).

The last demand is the demand from domestic use. Most of the cities in India and Pakistan face water shortages in one form or another as the economy of both the states is based on agriculture thereby giving priority to agriculture (Miner, et al., 2009). In Pakistan, 70 million people lack sanitation and 50 million people lack access to safe drinking waters (Mohammad, 2011). According to estimates, India's population would



reach 1.3 billion and Pakistan's to 270 million by 2025 (Klare, 2001). This huge population would need an ample supply of water for their domestic consumption, drinking, sanitation, and food as a large portion of the South Asian region is arid and receives sparse rainfall.

Kashmir has the promise of much-needed water. Out of the six rivers of the Indus basin, four including the Indus have their way to Pakistan through Kashmir. These rivers are the lifeblood of Pakistan. Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan are also dependent on these rivers (Blankenship, 2012). River Indus while originating in Tibet, flows through Indian Kashmir, Laddakh, and then crosses LoC and enters the northern areas of Pakistan. It then enters KPK and then reaches Punjab- the breadbasket of Pakistan- at Kalabagh (Malik, 2002). River Jhelum originates from Chashma Veri Nagh located in the Indian Kashmir, flows into Wullar Lake, and then crossing the LoC enters Azad Kashmir. It then flows into the river Kishenganga and then after flowing along the AJK and Pakistan border enters the Pakistani Punjab. After taking its origin from the Indian Himalayan range of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, the Chenab flows into Indian Kashmir and then into Punjab, Pakistan. Ravi and Sutlej originate in India but do not flow through Kashmir due to which they are irrelevant here (Qazi, 2012). Therefore, due to its aforementioned flow across Kashmir, Pakistan needs to get Kashmir to secure the headwaters of these rivers.

Next point to prove the central argument of the paper is the security dimension of Kashmiri waters. The geo-strategic location of Kashmir is of immense importance for the territorial integrity of Pakistan. Its falling in the Indian lap would make Pakistan strategically vulnerable on four counts. One, its high latitude location makes Pakistani territories very vulnerable to an Indian invasion. Two, it would make Pakistan exposed to India on many fronts as south-eastern, eastern, and north-eastern Punjab and KPK's northern border as well. Three, Pakistan would lose its geographical contiguity to China and all of its trade route as well (Qazi, 2012). Finally, Pakistan would lose natural boundaries against India as that of the Sutlej and Ravi rivers. This point has been made clear by the first prime of Pakistan-Liaquat Ali Khan-as, "the very position of Kashmir is such that without it Pakistan cannot defend itself..." (Mayfield, 1955). Indeed in such a scenario "Pakistan's independence would not remain a reality" (Qazi, 2012).

In addition to these vulnerabilities, the river waters flowing through Kashmir are also strategic and Indian control over these rivers poses a serious security threat to Pakistan. As Indian structures on the three western rivers would enable the Indian side to control the strategic maneuverability of the armed forces of Pakistan by flooding Pakistani terrain. Similarly, it could create enough space for the Indian forces to move against



Pakistani territories by stopping the flow into the canals that have been built along the Indo-Pakistan eastern border from upper and lower Chenab canals in the Sialkot region to Panjnad in the south to act as a defense against Indian armed invasion.

The effectiveness of these canals against the Indian invasion of Pakistan in the war of 1965 proves the strategic dimension of the waters of Kashmir. Similarly, during the 2002 military stand-off between the two rivals, Pakistan released waters into these defense canals to deter the Indian invasion (Bisht, 2011). The present Pakistani objections against Indian projects on the western rivers owe much to such a security dimension. Salal dam, Kishenganga dam, Baglihar Dam, and Wullar barrage are apprehended by the Pakistani side because it feared that these dams are constructed for geostrategic considerations directed against Pakistan (Singh, 2004). Analysts also link water scarcity to terrorism and certain scholars hold that with the spiralling water crisis, terrorism would also get steam (Waslekar, 2005).

The fifth factor highlighting water as the main resource that makes Kashmir so precious is the inter-federating units' discord in both India and Pakistan. India is facing an inter-state water crisis from the states of Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan whereas in Pakistan, Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, and Punjab are at loggerhead over water distribution (Swain, 2004). Many in Pakistan believe that such internal tensions could only be reduced when the rivers flowing into Pakistan are secured. Similarly, the Indian side also tries to acquire its share of the Indus rivers to assuage inter-state feuds over water sharing amongst the mentioned Indian states.

Finally, the consideration for Kashmir waters in the resolution proposals of the Kashmir dispute. Indian water expert Uttam Kumar Sinha opines that Kashmir is water and water is Kashmir (Sinha, 2008). Pakistani military and political leadership consider water as an important component of the Kashmir dispute. She treats both water and Kashmir as inseparable and suggests that any future solution of the issue must be based on an equitable distribution of waters (Sinha, 2008). Such a strong water dimension in the Kashmir issue could also be assessed from different proposals about the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

In 1950, Pakistan gave its plan for the solution of the Kashmir dispute according to which India would get Laddakh; Pakistan would gain Gilgit, Baltistan, and the part of Kashmir located on the Pakistani side of LoC; A plebiscite would be arranged in the Kashmir valley, and Jammu would be divided along with the flow of river Chenab (Kiesow & Norling, 2007). India rejected this proposal as its successful implementation would give Pakistan control of the rivers (Kiesow & Norling, 2007). Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto,



while addressing UNSC in 1965 made it clear that the main stumbling block in the resolution of the Kashmir issue was water (Singh, 2004). The 1999 track II level talks between Nawaz Sharif and Attal Bihari Vajpayee also revolved around the resolution of the Kashmir issue on the lines of the Chenab formula which was later on refined and presented by president Musharraf as well (Bisht, 2011).

In 2005, President Musharraf gave his Chenab formula which is based on Dixon's plan. According to this formula, the partition of the region would be done along with the flow of the river Chenab. The formula proposed that the territories of Ladakh were to be given to India, Gilgit Baltistan to Pakistan, a free and fair election in the Kashmir valley, and the division of Jammu into two parts. The half that was supposed to fall in Pakistani lap would be based on the catchments area for the river Chenab (Bakshi & Trivedi, 2011). Similarly, Pakistani chief of army staff, General Ashfaq Kiyani mentioned in March 2010 in PAK-US strategic dialogue that “reality will not change until the Kashmir issue and water disputes are resolved” (Bisht, 2011). In 2011, Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) chairman, Hilal Ahmad War presented PPP’s roadmap in this regard which is called as Hilal formula. This formula also considers the Chenab formula presented by president Musharraf in 2005 as a possible solution for the Kashmir dispute (Bisht, 2011).

Conclusion

Kashmir is the main bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Both the states have fought several wars over the territory of Kashmir. Pakistan claims Kashmir on the ground that since Kashmir is a Muslim majority area therefore it must become a part of Pakistan as Pakistan was established based on the Two-Nation Theory. India claims itself as a secular state and considers federating Kashmir with India its ideological duty to invalidate the Two-Nation Theory and validate its territorial Indian nationalism. In addition to these ideological interests, both the states have important interests in the waters of Kashmir. The agro-based nature of the economies of India and Pakistan makes the two states dependent on the water resources of Kashmir.

Both India and Pakistan have agro-based economies and incessant flow of water is necessary for their sustainable economic development. In addition to agriculture, pressures from other sectors of the economy like hydroelectric generation, industrial needs, and domestic consumption also make India and Pakistan dependent on the waters of Kashmir. Moreover, the demand and supply gap of water supply, resulting in crisis and its implications for the inter-federating units’ feuds in both India and Pakistan is also related to economy and water resources. Therefore, to meet these needs of the burgeoning population of the two regional powers, the security of water resources is a natural



corollary and Kashmir has enough water resources which could fulfill different water demands of the two states.

Pakistan has repeatedly tried to resolve the issue by dividing Kashmir across the river Chenab. However, India is reluctant to negotiate Kashmir on such terms. Whenever Pakistan insisted to include the water issue in any dialogues, India tried to freeze the negotiations (Kiesow & Norling, 2007). India feared that the nature of the water issue and the location of the headwaters augmented Pakistan's claims over Kashmir (Sinha, 2000). Contrary to Pakistani proposals, India has been insisting on converting the LoC into a permanent border whereas Pakistan has been rejecting such an arrangement because it would keep the headwaters external to Pakistan. In the wake of terrorist attacks on the Indian parliament in 2002, India threatened Pakistan that it would pull out of the Indus Water Treaty if Pakistan failed to bring the terrorists to book (Blankenship, 2009). Pakistan retaliated that if India stopped water flow to Pakistan it would use nuclear weapons (Blankenship, 2009). Hence, without resolving water disputes, resolution of other disputes would be difficult (Blankenship, 2009). Any move on Kashmir is directly linked to the water issue especially from the Pakistani perspective (Waslekar, 2005). It is high time to realize the hydrological perspective of the dispute of Kashmir so that a more realistic and sustainable solution could be chalked out.



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