



## Book Review: Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris Written by Christopher Snedden

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Kashmir studies have been the subject of debate for researchers and authors across the globe. The researchers and authors wrote about the significance and historical background of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Christopher Snedden is one of those authors who wrote about different aspects of Jammu and Kashmir. He is an Australian academician /researcher who made a reasonable contribution on the issue of state of Jammu and Kashmir through his writings. This book is based on the different resources of knowledge including empirical studies and historical writings by researchers and historians the world over. The first-hand narratives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir have also been taken to make it engage the readers. It has been thus argued that the Kashmir dispute was initiated by the people of Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir before the ill-famed tribal invasion. Similarly, there are different historical and academic writings where the issue is presented as an untold story with the research-based evidence and the opinion of the people of Kashmir is less likely narrated. The book titled, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir* narrates that the struggle for the liberation of Kashmir from Dogra rule was initiated from the Poonch uprising and some notable people played a role against the

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unrest created by the Maharaja Government. In this regard, some background studies of historical writings have been the building blocks to the writing of Christopher's book. The title of the book was criticized and modified by the Indians when it published there.

Christopher wrote the third book on the untold stories of the people of Azad Kashmir, which was massively critiqued by the Indian government, scholars, and researchers. Consequently, Christopher wrote another book titled, *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris* (2015) by putting an overview on both sides of the divides of Kashmir covering all the regions. Almost all the historically significant aspects have been covered in the book except a few either censored or misinterpreted. In the beginning, the antecedents of the Kashmir conflict are converted on the starting pages. Reflecting on the British intention and Russian confrontation while showing the Gulab Singh and his successor's empire. All these pictures are showing the British intention for the Dogra regime and fame of the Kashmir valley for ages.

As all the authors struggled with jargon and terminologies in Kashmiri language, Christopher also faced the language barrier to understand the local terminology and he called it a very sensitive case. Many of the terms were quite confusing for him i.e., Pakistan/Indian Held Kashmir (IHK), Pakistan/Indian Occupied Kashmir (POK). Moreover, international press and electronic media, academicians, and researchers mostly use Pakistan-Indian administered and controlled Kashmir terminologies; ; similarly, the other confusing terms for researchers are Jammu and Kashmir and Azad Kashmir which confuses researchers about the territory. Christopher thus used "Jammu and Kashmir" for the representation of the entire Kashmiris.

In the last book written by Christopher, he argued that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are in this dispute for three main reasons: (a)

Pakistan has been standing by the people of Kashmir on the diplomatic grounds while influencing through the international community and rejecting the Indian claim of tribal invasion on Kashmir conflict; (b) what hindered people of Kashmir to make Kashmir independent was the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh, he never empowered his state and economy depending on the British rulers; and he was unable to decide because of the British influence. "...never empowered the people of Kashmir while they were incapacitated and mainly relying on...British aid to nurture and protect the regime (p: 153); and (c) while in the State, diversified ethnic and religious and political aspirations were found which weakened the cause of freedom. Due to those dependence on external elements of rule and control, the Maharaja always depends upon the British support and has been found conditional to it; as a result, he could not strengthen himself politically which later became a problem and he could not make a timely decision. Snedden sees things from a broader perspective while his book gives a clear understanding of the Kashmir conflict. The role of Kashmiri native leadership has also been important regarding the denial of the basic rights and human rights violations of the people of Kashmir. With the eye of a historian, he has an interest in native and political culture but has ignored the socioeconomic concerns which is important to understand the Kashmiri people. Similarly, the structures of the political and cultural movements were excluded. While the political culture may reveal the significance of uprising in the region and the motives undertaken against the succeeding governments. It cannot provide the social angle of political resentment; for example, the ethnic and communal relocation of non-Muslim communities into the valley. Furthermore, the uprising of 2008 is entirely missing which is the important internal dynamics of the conflict. This missing information is due to Snedden's bias regarding Kashmir.

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It has been justified by the researchers in their books on Kashmir, arguing that the people of Kashmir were supposed to have autonomy under the Article 370 while unrest is among the unemployed and educated youth due to the refusal of rights and so-called democracy that the suppressed brutal Kashmir's never accepted the rigged polls of 1987, was the actual case. Snedden justifies that there are problems with state parameters as the state is not doing good with people which moves towards the failure of the institutions. Kashmiri community is denied the autonomous political rights and all the agencies have failed to comply with the wishes of the Kashmiri community.

Identifying and emphasizing on Kashmir' collective self-identity and group security of the Kashmiri community which has lost its integrity and structure due to a prolonged conflict. It is pertinent to mention that structural paralysis is created because there is no reconciliation between the deserved groups. Hence, it created a vacuum in which oppression is justified by the ruling elites.

The movement of liberation is confronted with the state structure only due to not providing the decentralized form of autonomous political participation and denial of the state narrative because there is a monopoly of the democratic processes. So, the dominating discourses of state politics have been influencing the nature of movement for a long time. Furthermore, there are popular discourses of the state which influence the movement politically. In this way, political formations lose their legitimacy when engagements are not reflected in state discourses. As the plebiscite was the popular demand but not delivered by the states? It is a fact that when the demands are opposed, political mobilization is disrupted by the state apparatus and creates disillusionment and people fall to militancy against the state.

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Human rights in Kashmir are very important because of their violation in Kashmir. Snedden did not present the different reports by the international agencies while mainly depending on the Indian official reports. In this regard, some other international neutral institutions or groups may be focused to know the actual situation in this regard i.e., Asia Watch, Amnesty International, and Physician for human rights and many more.

It is revealed that the state has dealt inadequately viz the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir were eroded deliberately to suppress the people. Owing to polarity in the political process, anti-India and anti-army narratives developed that ultimately favored Pakistan; hence, a state of frustration prevailed among the people that impacted the popular narratives as well. However, the important proclamations were overlooked like the conflict of Kashmir as Snedden mentions on Page 250 that “During 1999-2000, several Kashmiris want peace and normalcy and return to regions”. He accepted the narrative of state to return towards peace and normalcy. As such a statement and definition of peace and normalcy creates problems for the pro-movement Kashmiris show reservations due to the important political implications: as the time of peace and normalcy was predominantly turned into an armed movement in the 1990s.

Like other authors, Snedden also suggested the solutions to the Kashmir conflict. He reveals that both neighboring countries India and Pakistan are at fault as both the states inexorably obsessing to Kashmir. Here Snedden cited fourteen consecutive events between 1950-2005 and argued that these events, “could have altered the...status quo.” As the international community [countries] has the captivating reason to intervene and mediate between the neighboring countries but they were found either uninterested in the matter or parties adopted the truce and for the time being initiated the dialogue on the pressure of international forces and soon left out and

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confronted. Therefore, the authors consider the best way to resolve the Kashmir issue is to ‘let the people of Jammu and Kashmir decide their fate’. He clearly explains that makes the people of the Jammu and Kashmir as a party to the Kashmir issue while discussing the issues mutually with other two stakeholders and reach the solution. As this approach is reasonable to own those in the process of resolution who states, and homeland are the centers of the dispute. While proposing the solution of “let the people decide approach”, Snedden differs from and, the argument of withdrawal of Kashmiris’ from the basic right. Snedden unlike other authors shows his pragmatic stance on the dispute by arguing that India and Pakistan were not able to resolve the Kashmir conflict rather people of Jammu and Kashmir may resolve.

In this book, one of the important sections is its last chapter where the politico-strategic vision of Snedden is revealed vehemently. His ‘strategic ponderings’ imply that ‘nothing stays the same forever’ while considers the natural law as the status quo on the South Asia region will change overwhelming even the status of Kashmir conflict will change. Another argument he made, “One thing seems certain: population growth and increasing water issues will plague the subcontinent in the years to come...” In the end, the analysis of Snedden on the political narrative “for a more generalist audience,” is incisive, well searched, logically written. Thus, this book provides rich historic details from the recent studies and historical writings while neatly unknots the political and diplomatic complexities embroiled in the Kashmir conflict.