

Understanding the Kashmir Conflict: A Complex Multiplicity Perspective

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Abstract

This paper examines conflict in Kashmir from the lens of ‘desiring-production’ and looks at how class processes were over-determined by regional (and religious) factors during the socio-political developments in Kashmir from the 1940s up to the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990. The concept of ‘over-determination’ is used to avoid a deterministic theory of conflict in Kashmir. Over-determination is used to understand how at any one moment of historical trajectory, there is not always a sole influencing factor but rather multiple factors that may overlap in determining the outcome of events. To enunciate this concept, the philosophy of Felix Guattari and Giles Deleuze is utilized wherein the metaphor of the rhizome as a methodological tool to understand history, society, politics and culture is posited. Thus, Kashmiri history is seen from the perspective of ‘desiring-production’ where the desire for liberation and freedom for Kashmiri is rooted in political economy and extends everywhere in its history. Kashmiri political consciousness is examined along many vectors and axes including the colonial legacy in a postcolonial nation state. How the lens of political economy itself (Marxian or other heterodox schools) is not sufficient enough to unpack the political consciousness of Kashmiris during this period is illustrated. Such a framework permits us to analyse various segmentations in the Kashmiri society beyond the binary lenses of secular/communal; to look at class relations coupled with desiring relations and eventually helps us to explain the alienation of Bhattas (Kashmiri Pandits) from the politics of Azadi.

Introduction

There has been plenty of work and literature on the contemporary history of Kashmir, the socio-political roots of the conflict and on different lenses of analysis of its genesis- security aspect, religious, cultural and so on. However, one particularly under-studied aspect has been the period between the partition and up till the imposition of Governor’s rule in 1990. While many studies have studied this period (1947-1990) and remarked on the various socio-political developments which inadvertently paved way for armed insurgency, not many have commented on the class relations during this period (Choudhary, 2018). Moreover, not many studies have been devoted to the inter-religious relationships in the valley during the period, although much attention has been given to the inter-religious relationships before it, namely in ‘ancient’ and ‘medieval’ times. It may be noted that the initial discourse of political leadership in Kashmir in the 1940s had defined denial of rights to Kashmiris due to the religious nature of the state—a Hindu Dogra regime with mostly Muslim subjects.

In the Kashmir conflict, the primary actors involved can be identified as the Indian state, Pakistani state and the masses of Kashmir. A popular approach to looking at this conflict is the ‘military’ or ‘security’ or ‘institutional failure’ perspective (Malhotra, 1992; Ganguly, 1999; Swami, 2012). This often includes works of former bureaucrats, high ranking military personnel or other (ex) public servants who have either

served in Kashmir or have been involved in high level policy making. The perspective adopted by these writings concentrate on the problem of Kashmir as a vital frontier for the Indian state. Undoubtedly this was also true for the British colonial empire. The argument here mainly focuses on the mishandling of the Kashmir militancy, how its rise went unchecked and the possible alternatives for the state to ameliorate the security issues which continue to be posed (Bamzai, 2007). These works mostly deal with the conflict through the prism of nationalism and the consequent developments as a mishandling or mismanagement of the task of nation building projects of both the nation states and the obstacles which were posed to it. They also lay the blame of rise of armed militancy on the account that the Indian state has viewed 'democracy and national interest' as incompatible in Kashmir or that 'the normal democratic processes' in federal relations have been throttled by India (Banarjee, 1996). What lies common in all these interpretations is that they view the conflict from the perspective of the Indian state and do not question the precast statist parameters of inquiry which ignore the hegemony of India over Kashmiri politics or effectively deny the political agency of Kashmiris.

Another strand of work tends to work along the lines of the prism of identity (Choudhary, 2018; Rai, 2004; Zutshi, 2004) and view the multi-dimensional aspects of the contested claims in the conflict which is inter-locked in a complex web of not only religious and ethnic identity politics but also intra-regional identity. While the issue of ethno-nationalistic identity is definitely an important issue of conflict and has been addressed in numerous works in the past decade or so, a Marxian analysis of contemporary Kashmir is missing. Specifically, the role of desire in Kashmiri political consciousness has not been addressed. Moreover, even class processes in Kashmiri society post partition have been under-studied.

As a result, this paper proposes a Marxian intervention in deconstructing the Kashmir conflict. In this regard, looking through desiring-production, production relations in general, a la Deleuzian and Guattarian prism of viewing Kashmir becomes crucial.

Seeing the World as *Nadur*

What does *nadur* (*nadir* in plural) or its Hindi/Urdu afflicted version- *nadru* (lotus stem) have anything to do with analysing the Kashmir conflict? This surprisingly delicious and plentifully available vegetable used unsparingly in Kashmiri cuisine has everything to do with it. The lotus stem is biologically a *rhizome*. The rhizome, a term borrowed from biology, implies connection and heterogeneity. The idea is that there is no totality per se, or a single origin. The problem with this idea of having an 'origin' is that it presumes each object as a whole in itself while for the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, there can only be 'partial objects' each a machine coupled to other machines through breaks and flows. So, the origin is multiplicity and there is no 'one' true origin. In their own words, a rhizome has "ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013).

Thus, we must look at history, philosophy, science and culture in a way opposed to the traditional tree-root system because the "rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Ibid.). Consequently, this paper does not propose any sort of totality of Kashmir. A key component in explaining Kashmiri political consciousness and mobilization conditioned by class processes and religion, would be not only to utilize over-determination but also look its complex reality through the lens of 'desiring-production' or how desire affects the realm of social reality. Deleuze and Guattari (2009) had, thus, argued that "...we live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers ... We no longer believe in the primordial totality that once existed, or in a

final totality that awaits us at some future date”. Their project of *Anti-Oedipus* (simply referred as *AO* from now on) was written in the background of the militant student-worker strikes across France in May 1968. Unlike any other 20th century mobilization against the capitalist order, this one was not patronized by a prominent party (the French Communist Party in this case) or a vanguard and neither organized on a call given by unions. While *AO* can be seen as a response to May 1968, one could also look at it as an attempt to reformulate the ideas of political movements, the machineries of the state, and the circuits of capital which are all connected to the “problem of desire, *and desire is part of the infrastructure*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2009). Although their work is inspired by Marx, these two French philosophers are surprisingly quiet on class processes since their prime concern is not who will be the motor for the revolution but rather what are the mechanisms of desire which will produce a desire for that revolution. Hence, they suggest a micropolitics of desire which could produce conditions for revolution and liberate humankind. While May 1968 protests were a major source of inspiration for their work, the rise of fascism in Europe through the mid-20th century was another precursor for their interest in the subject.

Implications for Our Analysis

What does the above mean for understanding the Kashmiri conflict and its history? In first and foremost terms, we must reject the ‘Oedipalization’ of this conflict itself. The whole project of *AO* was aimed at critiquing the oedipal complex as proposed by Freud which for Deleuze and Guattari, reduced the unconscious to familial relations. So far, the Kashmir conflict has been largely oedipalized. But oedipalization does not necessarily refer to the oedipal triangle itself (mommy-daddy-me) but any attempt to make everything reductive. Although, Kashmir does tend to be reduced to this oedipal triangle itself at times, with Kashmir often caught between the Indian nation state--the patriarch, the oppressor, the authoritative and paternal figure--and Pakistani nation state-- the nurturing ‘maternal’ figure, the supporter, the symbolic ‘saviour’. We must break away from this constant oedipalization in our understanding of the Kashmir conflict. Not only has this reflected in how literature has tended to view the conflict but also in policy and diplomatic level where Kashmiri masses and their perspective is not even seriously considered. Instead, we must appreciate Kashmiri history in all its breaks and flows, flows which transverse partial-objects (objects irreducible to global/whole objects). To assign an identity to the Kashmiri and henceforth examine its history would be ascribing to it a deterministic function. Instead of thinking in terms of Kashmiri vs. Dogras or Kashmiri Muslims’ political consciousness vs. Kashmiri Pandits’ service of status quo, we must perhaps move towards a more nuanced understanding. Segmentation in Kashmiri political consciousness over centuries could be perhaps be understood as the difference between a ‘subject-group’ and ‘subjugated group’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2009). The ‘subject-group’ is the group which ‘can manipulate semiotic flows, shatter meanings, open the language to other desires and forge other realities’ and hence, they can collectively enunciate without being subject to individuation (Guattari, 2009). As such these are the rebels of history, those who refused to be ‘oedipalized’, to be assigned some sort of dominant meaning or totality-- the stone pelters at Mughals, the local mutineers against the transfer of power to Gulab Singh (first Dogra ruler), the militia women against the tribal raids of 1947, and the student activists in the universities of Kashmir during 1970s and 1980s. ‘Subjugated groups’ are captured in the structures of Oedipus with members ‘induced to live or fantasize individually their membership in the group’. These are ‘desiring-machines’ whose subjectivity has been individuated, those who desire to stamp dominant meanings--Kashmir as land of Hinduism, *azadi barai Islam* (freedom based on Islamic principles) etc. But, this segmentation is not fixed or permanent. The two

groups are constantly mutating and transforming with subject groups constantly threatened with subjugated and the subjugated groups occasionally being called upon to take a ‘revolutionary role’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2009). Perhaps this is why Prem Nath Bazaz, the noted Kashmiri Pandit socialist, was always at odds over his political positions vis-a-vis the hegemonic Kashmiri Pandit leadership, arguing how if the Jammu and Kashmir State ‘is held by India against the will of the state Muslims...[they] will become more and more hostile...in perpetual rebellion against the Central Government’ (Bazaz, 2003). That is the burden of *schizo* position--to be ridiculed, to be maligned and to be dismissed as fantastical nonsense. An identitarian view of Kashmiri politics will hence not permit us to understand why people like Bazaz went against the dominant Kashmiri Pandit politics or why Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed willingly betrayed his old comrade Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 in return for power.

The limitation of analysing Kashmir is also encountered with Marxian political economy methodology and political economy in general—both of which demarcate between goods economy and desiring economy. Even other political economy approaches which notionally have supported the right to self-determination of Kashmiris have tended to categorize the capitalist development in post-partition Kashmir as ‘parasitic capitalism’ where techno-bureaucratic class emerged to seize state power (under the aegis of the Indian state) and collaborated with other emerging classes such as the ‘rural oligarchy’ which ensured that the radical intent of the land reforms were dented and fermented widespread corruption (Prakash, 2000). But they fail to explain why these very ‘dominant proprietary classes’ were among the first to support the militancy and the popular movement for *azadi*. A certain strand of Marxian analysis, especially of Frantz Fanon’s persuasion, would argue that this could be explained if we understand the Kashmiri political mobilization post 1980s as a historical contingent moment where the colonized masses of Kashmir transformed their initial anti-colonial movement to overt armed resistance. As a result, this could explain why these newly emerged hegemonic classes supported the self-determination movement. But how do we understand the failure of this anti-colonial movement? Was it just a case of brutal state repression or something more which was being missed in the analysis?

I would argue that a ‘micropolitics of desire’ is missing in such examination. This is why Deleuze and Guattari view capitalist system as a general economy i.e., a meta-system which is de-totalized- production of both commodities and desire. We cannot reduce Kashmiri history to boxes and categories because they always tend to compartmentalize and oedipalize it to ‘despotic signifiers’-- the ‘aborigine’ Kashmiri Pandit and their exoduses, Kashmiri Muslims and the Ummat-ul-Islam and so on. Universal history then must be viewed as a history of contingencies, and unpredictabilities (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009). For these scholars, capitalism is a civilizing social machine which constantly ‘deterritorializes’, ‘decodes’ flows of desire, rendering the transcendental (the king, penalty, punishment, the monarch) or redundant and archaic but simultaneously there occurs ‘reterritorialization’, ‘recoding’ of flows in terms of production, consumption and exchange elevating them to the place of immanence with capital itself becoming immanence. Deterritorialization in a simple sense can be understood as deconstruction of a set of relations, while reterritorialization refers to restructuring another set of production of flows. From their understanding, this was the reason Marx had critiqued classical political economy--they deterritorialize the source of wealth-creating activity ‘labour in general...the abstract universality of wealth-creating activity’ and immediately reterritorialize it by finding its essence in private property (privatization) or commodities (fetishism). Thus, the continuous development of the productivity of labour within the immediate limited object of expanded reproduction of capital at a larger and larger scale presents a classic example of how capitalism continuously deterritorializes, delimits, surpasses its own limits but at

the same time encounters barriers which are immanent to itself and ‘...because they are immanent, let themselves be overcome only provided they are reproduced on a wider scale (always more reterritorialization – local, world-wide, planetary)’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009).

Thus, we must formulate a way of thinking military occupation, nationalism and colonialism in Kashmir with this framework in our mind. Both Indian and Pakistani nationalisms see the conflict within their own respective universalizing signifiers of nationalisms with India casting Kashmir as the ‘paradise’, the jewel in its crown of secular project while simultaneously subverting the political aspirations of its masses, dehumanizing the people by systematically painting resistance to military occupation as ‘anti-national’, once again reducing it to the universalism of nationalism. Ali (2016) while calling Pakistan’s official policy on Kashmir as a nationalistic project with a ‘liberatory dimension’--as a supporter of self-determination-- and in the same breath acknowledges its dimension of ‘saviour nationalism’-- dedicated towards saving a community which is not yet a part of the nation itself and ‘ultimately seeks to win over more territory and people into the boundary of the nation’. This leads us to inquire into the role of Pakistan in this triangulation which is created in the process. Pakistan itself is never just mother or father but always becomes the care giver, a saviour, a despot, a tyrant. The ‘conservative’ paternal figure at home while ‘suppressing dissent in Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan’ and then all loving parent when reporting atrocities in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The dynamics of being a disputed territory, jealously guarded over and fought over just like old colonial possessions of the past, the prized child. It should not surprise us how the contours of Kashmir conflict are oedipalized when we only talk about it in terms of nationalism. Nationalism was a byproduct of imperialist policies of European powers towards the late 19th century. National movements arose based on a certain sense of ethnic homogeneity, posing a threat to the then monarchies of Europe. European imperialists then chose this as a model to be exported to the global south via colonialism. The nation-state is a unity of monopolies in trade, industry, finance and power (Öcalan, 2017). This historically specific development of nation-state presents a type of state with historically unprecedented capacity for power.

Chatterjee (2003) has argued that the problem with anticolonial nationalism, which is generalizable across the global south, lies in the failure to reject Enlightenment ideals proposed by the west and hence the reason why Nehru’s resort to modernization is an acceptance of the ‘dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture’. Chibber (2013) takes him and other subaltern scholars to task for such articulation of anticolonial nationalism that simultaneously makes a claim which Marxist historians have already been making about nationalist movement in India--‘radical in its tone, but conservative in its ambitions’--but with an added component of being colonized by Western discourse, and then in the same breath ‘...obscures, or denies altogether, capitalism’s influence on the colonial world, and...it resurrects many of the most objectionable Orientalist myths about the East’. His point is to stress on the importance of the influence of capital on global affairs and how it limited the paths to break out of colonial subordination, thus making Nehru’s decision to modernize not just a discursive imperative but rather subject to a very real material constraint of the global capitalist order’s flows of money, capital and labour. However, missing from Chibber’s (2013) account is the explanation for the colonialism and imperialism of the post-colonial nation-states which he relegates to a foot-note while describing the military occupation in Kashmir and other use of its armed state apparatus in regions like Tripura and Mizoram as a ‘project of political centralization’ which signifies ‘a continuity with the bloody history of state formation in the West, not a deviation from it’. Gosh (2015) applies more scrutiny in his critique of Chatterjee’s argument since as per him the very foundation of comprehending anti-colonial movements for the Subaltern school is

‘completely evacuated of all politics of class struggle to become no more than an idiom of competitive ethno-nationalisms and ‘militant’ reformism’. Here, he is pointing out to the universalization process of nationalism since by marking Kashmiri politics as an ethno-nationalist moment or a failure of federalism in India only marks it to be subservient to the master signifier of Indian nationalism and hence, reinforces the ‘imperial project of politically managing the South Asian moment of the globalising late-capitalist conjuncture’. Assimilation and genocide are biproducts of monopolization of social processes i.e. processes aimed at the establishment of the nation-state. This involves instituting a form of homogeneity, a mechanism of ‘social engineering’-- one national culture, one national identity, one religious identity and as a result a homogeneous citizenship (Öcalan, 2017). Osuri (2017) similarly makes a Marxian intervention in this field of debates on nationalism by invoking sovereignty and moving beyond the previously held parameters on anti-colonial/third-world nationalism-- the pitfalls of cultural nationalism and liberation as transfer of power from white elites to ‘native’ elites, the oriental tones of such national movements (Subaltern studies), the co-option of revolutionary potential in anticolonial movements. Osuri (2017) strives to explore a poststructuralist understanding of colonialism, imperialism and sovereignty by examining postcolonial texts to throw light on the fact that though these texts provide detailed examination of classical colonial sovereignty (the Global North/South divide) they do little to shed light on postcolonial nation state’s relationship with imperialism and sovereignty. Nor do these works examine settler-colonial projects such as that of United States, Australia and Canada. What this brings us back to is the promise of decolonization promised by anti-colonial or third-world nationalism and this leads to a precise lack of attention paid to the capacity of postcolonial nation states to produce their own imperial and colonial relations (Kashmir, Nagaland in India; Balochistan in Pakistan etc.). Osuri (2017) insists that while a Marxian interpretation of this would be to view the establishment of a postcolonial nation state as transfer of power to bourgeois, *savarna* elites who assumed the nation-state boundaries as given; a focus on sovereignty helps us paint a more holistic picture of the geo-political scenario in Kashmir--a narrative which rationalizes ‘undemocratic and/or despotic practices of (post) colonial sovereignty’. Öcalan’s (2017) analysis poses similar critical question to post-colonial nationalism when he argues that the actual motif of the nation-state is to serve as the modern vehicle for capital accumulation and as such, it can never be representative of the people regardless of how ‘nationalist’ it claims to be. With the rise of the nation-states new forms of idealization needed to be achieved where nationalism itself became some sort of quasi-religion and the nation-state the new god--both unquestionable and impervious to inquiry.

Conclusion

Lamb (1992) has argued that the instrument of accession would have been improbable to have been signed before the landing of Indian troops in Srinagar, Kashmir on October 27, 1947. According to the archives, Alexander Symon, the Acting British Deputy High Commissioner, had sent a letter to Archibald Carter, the Head of Commonwealth Relations Office whose contents are in contradiction to the claim of V.P Menon, that he had flown to Jammu on 26th October 1947 to attain Maharaja Hari Singh’s signature on the instrument of accession. Thus, this not only dismantles India’s ‘legal right to be in Kashmir’ but also constitutes the aforementioned act of landing troops as an invasion of Kashmir’s sovereignty according to international law (Schofield, 2000). Noorani’s (2013) meticulous research has shown that Nehru promised a plebiscite on the belief that his close friend, Sheikh Abdullah, would be able to secure Kashmir’s accession to India. Parra (2019) goes further and claims based on archival research that Nehru had expressed the implausibility of a plebiscite, privately, as early as November 1947. Osuri (2017) suggests

us to understand the conflict not only as a ‘disputed’ region which forecloses plurality of understanding around colonial and imperial techniques and strategies employed by post-colonial nation states to not only maintain given boundaries but also expand its territorial boundaries. Mathur (2012) puts this succinctly that if nations are imagined communities, so are their boundaries. This can be easily understood as ‘transfer of sovereignty’ which the Indian state engaged in post-partition era to bring new territories within its boundaries--the annexation of Hyderabad and the invasion of Goa by the Indian army as prime examples (Osuri, 2017). Thus, lack of popular consent and will of Kashmiri people to the transfer of their sovereignty reveals the neo-colonial techniques of power employed by Indian nation-state where discourse of democracy ‘...is made to serve territorial nationalism’, democracy reduced to an empty signifier, ‘national integrity’ -the master signifier, in light of the glaring contrast to the military occupation of the region (Osuri, 2017). In this context, it becomes particularly crucial in understanding Kashmir as a ‘state of exception’. According to Agamben (2005), the *State of Exception* is paradigm of government which is ‘...so difficult to define...[due] its close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance.’ According to A, ‘modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system.’

Thus, different forms of human rights abuses in Indian-occupied Kashmir- extrajudicial murders, unlawful detention, custodial torture and deaths, sexual assault- are sanctified through acts such as AFSPA (The Armed Forces Special Powers Act) and PSA (Public Safety Act). These could be viewed as instances of a ‘legal civil war’ via which the Indian armed forces can ‘arrest, without warrant, any person who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence and may use such force as may be necessary to effect the arrest.’ As a result, the lives of ordinary Kashmiri people is caught in a ‘no-man’s land between public law and political fact, and between juridical order and life’ (Agamben, 2005).

To take this argument a step further, it is crucial to understand this discussion of colonialism, nationalism and imperialism keeping in mind the mechanisms of the capitalist social machine. The postcolonial nation-state deterritorializes classic colonial symbols to pose its own movement as a decolonizing venture, only to reterritorialize it, recode the flows of desire onto the new nation-state. India, the ‘jewel in the crown of the British Empire’ to Kashmir as the ‘*Hindustan ka taj*’ (the crown of India). Colonialism is dismantled, decoded, only to reappear again in the guise of the new nation-state. The civilizing mission of the white colonizers gives way to the goal of ‘national integrity’ and ‘unity’ of the brown rulers. This is the prime function of the modern nation-state, continuous deterritorialization of flows but then simultaneously reterritorializing it, as a prime example provided in *AO* itself- ‘deterritorialization of flows of finance, but reterritorialization of purchasing power and the means of payment (the role of central banks)’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). In this respect, positivism serves as the fuel and fodder of the nationalist ideology or rather in our analysis- the nation-state ‘war machine’ which serves to produce and reproduce the science and philosophy which further produces the breaks and flows which binds the nation-state. Positivism refers to the construction of truth/reality based on what is solely observable and such as such, Öcalan (2017) calls this the new-age idol-worship. Sexism or patriarchy is also integral to the nation-state machine-a machine of anti-production (Robinson, 2010). This involves objectification and commodification of the woman which further maintains the power relations through continued exploitation of women (Öcalan, 2017). Therefore, he boldly claims that capitalism and nation-state are the monopoly of the despotic male, a measure necessary to maintain other processes of exploitation and slavery. Religiosity has a changed role

under the contours of capitalist modernity and as a result, the nation-state. Nation-state is a militarily structured unit built on internal or external warfare where the civil leadership only serves to mask the state's complicity in the militarization of society (Öcalan, 2017). The fascist state is the 'purest form' of the nation state while a liberal democratic state paints the violent processes of the nation-state in a favourable manner by manufacturing consent (Öcalan, 2017).

In relation to the context of this paper, 'To the degree there is oedipalization, it is due to colonization' where the 'colonized resists oedipalization, and oedipalization tends to close around him again' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). In other words, 'Oedipus is always colonization pursued by other means' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). This is the useful theoretical framework around which I have situated the Kashmir conflict.

In addition to this, it is vital to view the very socio-political history of Kashmir through a rhizomatic lens-heterogenous, open, non-continuous at times and an endless flow at once, in its plurality, its multiplicity. To read it perhaps then as sort of an over-determined phenomenon, never determined by some sort of unity, never rooted, but constantly flowing from one branch to the next and then suddenly breaking. Thus, categories of a 'Brahmanical' past, 'Kashmiri Sultanate' or colonizations by 'alien' rule (Mughal onwards) must be looked through such open-ended methodology. In this sense, we can perhaps understand the chasms and segmentations in Kashmiri society through multiple angles- the 'Hindu' Dogra rule, the land reforms, the 1967 Parmeswari Handoo agitations, the 1986 Anantnag riots, the Exodus. All such events hence receive a dynamic outlook rather than reducing it to some sort of dualism or universalization-Muslim v Hindu, India vs Pakistan.

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