



Kashmir's Cri



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INSURRECTION

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The Attack on America woke up the world to what has been daily reality in Kashmir for the last ten years as heavily armed Islamic militants fight to wrest control of the region from India

Upon learning of the September 11 attack upon America, India's Prime Minister, Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said, "Our prayers rise for those who have been killed. Our hearts go out to those who have lost their loved ones. Every Indian feels for them. More than that, at least 53,000 families in India know exactly the pain they are going through at the moment; for terrorists have mowed down and blown up that number here in India over the last two decades." The subsequent "War on Terror" has shed a welcome light on Kashmir as the world comes to learn what India faces. The following story was planned for this issue of Hinduism Today months before the attacks. After September 11, what is happening in the formally tranquil valley of Kashmir is ever more relevant to Hindus and non-Hindus alike.



ARWANAND KAUL PREMI, 64, WAS a well-known Kashmiri poet and scholar living in Soaf Shali in Anantnag district. Despite militancy claiming numerous Hindu lives in and around his village, Premi refused to leave his homeland. Then on April 30, 1990, terrorists burst into his home and, with guns waving ordered his family to collect all their gold and valuables and put them into an empty suitcase. Both Premi and his 27-year-old son, Virender Kaul, were taken by the terrorists. They were found tortured and murdered two days later. This is not an isolated case. It is one that resonates from every Hindu house in Kashmir.

Kashmir is one of the as-yet-unsolvable problems caused by the disastrous partition of India in 1947. The ruler of Kashmir was given the choice to join India or Pakistan, but failed to make his decision by the deadline. Shortly after independence, the ruler joined India, but Pakistan invaded Kashmir, seizing about half the Indian state. The Indian army was succeeding at pushing them out when a UN-backed ceasefire took hold in 1949, with the state divided along the "Line of Control" between the two armies.

Valley guards: Indian soldiers stand guard against possible Muslim militant attacks on the Panjtarni route to the cave shrine of Armanath, July 6, 2001

Constant hostility and occasional outbreaks of war have continued ever since. Today three million people live in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and nine million in the India-administered area.

Pakistan-backed militants became active in the late 1980s, leading to the murder of Premi and others. Now, nearly everyone in the Valley has seen, heard or experienced the wrath of militants in their unending bid to create a "pure" Islamic state in this mountainous Shangrila, to end Indian rule and become part of Pakistan. To a certain degree, they have been successful. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus, and a considerable number of Muslims, have fled the Valley. Some who have moved from their homeland have settled in the United States and formed organizations to address the problems in hopes of finding a remedy. Their cause was greatly helped when the US State Department's October 5, 2001, list of 28 "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" included the Harakat ul-Mujahidin, which it described as "an Islamic militant group based in Pakistan that operates primarily in Kashmir."

When asked about their experience, everyone has a story to tell. "My cousin was killed in crossfire," laments Rajiv Pandit. "My uncle, Captain S. K. Tikoo, survived an assassination attempt. He is General Secretary of the Jammu and Kashmir Awami Conference and has been in Srinagar for the past five years. Many of his Hindu friends have been assassinated. All of our relatives fled from Srinagar in the middle of the night in January, 1990, after that assassination attempt on my uncle."

Militancy has held Kashmir hostage for the past twelve years and has claimed the lives of over 12,000 innocent civilians. As a result of the world's new War on Terrorism following September 11, what has been obvious to India for years is becoming increasingly clear to everyone else, that elements within Pakistan have been actively sponsoring and training militants in waging a proxy war against India-administered Kashmir. The victims have been innocent Kashmiris, particularly Hindus, whose lives and industries have been disrupted.

Kashmir's ancient Hindu heritage has left an indelible mark on the region. From the ancient temples built by Adi Shankarachar-

