



What does Development mean to Kashmir?: Possible Tensions between Development and Identity

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Abstract

Kashmir today has become a testimony to an entirety of encounters ranging from brutal state repression to massive militarization, from lack of security to loss of dignity along with the gross human rights violations eventually culminating into a sense of loss in the meaning of life. If the political conflict has such impact on the social structure of the place then equally absorbing is to know what has happened to the potential for economic development over the decades consumed by conflict. The aim of the paper therefore is to explore as to what constitutes development to people who have witnessed decades of political conflict. The paper would also analyze the possible contradictions that emanate from the interplay of development with the question of identity in Kashmir.

Keywords: Development, Identity, Conflict, Kashmir

Introduction

Kashmir was never gripped by abject poverty as the rest of India, which it owes to the effective land reforms implemented by Sheikh Abdullah, during his term as Prime Minister (Thorner, 1953). However, what needs to be highlighted is that today Kashmir's economy is growing at a slow rate and a prolonged state might eventually lead to economic stagnation. The Economic Survey of Kashmir (Desai, 2015) which was tabled in the parliament by the then Finance Minister Haseeb Drabu draws some interesting inferences. While the decade from 2002-03 to 2012-13, India's GDP grew to 112%, Kashmir's GDP grew 73%, which means the ratio of fall in GDP of Kashmir to India is by 18%. The report says that presently Kashmir had grown even poorer than India. From the figures, one can conclude that Kashmir today is not only under the grip of sustained political conflict but also, as a result, is fast becoming a dwindling economy.

To understand the development in Kashmir one needs to contextualize this process as one embedded in a conflict-ridden place. Mapping the nature of the relationship between conflict and development vis-à-vis Kashmir, therefore, can help in addressing some basic questions like what would development stand for in a conflict zone? What impact does the politics of the place have on its economy? One way to explore the relation would be to say that conflict holds back the development of the place. And the other would be to argue that a failure to offer development escalates the conflict. This is what is referred to as 'Conflict Trap' (Hegre, Nygard & Raeder, 2017). While applying this trend to Kashmir a simple argument that can be made is that more the economic development Kashmir witnesses from India, greater would be its chances of integration with the Indian Territory.

However, the underlying question is that how will a population, which has been occupied by India for a protracted period of time take to the idea of giving up its distinct identity emanating from Kashmiri ethno-nationalist (Tremblay, 2009) sentiment for development. How would a population burdened with an unjust ordeal of prolonged denial of rights and justice, loss of dignity and a deep sense of alienation from India take to India's assertion on it through economic means? Is economic integration for Kashmiris contingent on political integration? Or does the economic growth become an adequate precondition for Kashmir to forgo the