



Trade Networks Severed: The Economic Disintegration of the Pirpanjal Region After 1947

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Abstract: This paper examines the economic consequences of the 1947–49 conflict for the Pirpanjal region of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, comprising the present-day districts of Poonch and Rajouri. Prior to Partition, this region functioned as an economically integrated zone whose trade, pastoral, and labour circuits extended westward toward Muzaffarabad and the Punjab plains as naturally as they extended eastward toward Jammu and Srinagar. The ceasefire line established in 1949, and its later designation as the Line of Control, bisected this zone without regard to its economic geography, severing seasonal grazing circuits, weekly and periodic markets, artisanal supply chains, and long-distance trade in timber, wool, and minor forest produce. Drawing on the historiography of Partition-era economic disruption and on the author's doctoral research into the socioeconomic history of Poonch and Rajouri between 1947 and 1989, this paper argues that the region's post-1947 economic trajectory should be understood not as a single rupture followed by recovery, but as a sustained process of disintegration and asymmetric reintegration into two separate, militarized state economies. It traces this process across three phases — the immediate rupture of 1947–49, the consolidation of a bordered economy through the 1950s and 1960s, and the entrenchment of economic marginality amid recurrent conflict through 1989 — and situates the region's limited, temporary trade reopening after 2008 as evidence of the durability, rather than the resolution, of this disintegration.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir; Pirpanjal; Poonch; Rajouri; Partition economy; Line of Control; pastoral economy; borderland trade

1. Introduction

The economic history of the 1947 Partition has been written substantially as a history of Punjab and Bengal: the collapse of canal-colony agriculture, the flight of mercantile and artisanal communities, and the improvised administrative response to two new states' worth of refugee resettlement.¹ The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir does not fit neatly into this literature, since no boundary commission partitioned it and its economic rupture occurred gradually, through more than a year of armed conflict, rather than through the abrupt legal transfer of assets that characterized Punjab and Bengal.²

This paper is concerned with the economic dimension of that rupture as it affected the Pirpanjal region — the districts of Poonch and Rajouri — a zone whose pre-1947 economy was organized around circuits that the 1949 ceasefire line cut through rather than around. It asks two related questions. First, what did the Pirpanjal region's economy actually consist of before 1947, such that the consequences of its division can be specified rather than assumed? Second, how did that economy adapt, over the following four decades, to a border that neither state has ever formally recognized as final, yet which has functioned, in practical economic terms, as an unusually durable one? The paper argues that the standard historiographical language of Partition — 'disruption' followed by 'rehabilitation' — does not adequately describe the Pirpanjal case. Rehabilitation in the Punjab sense presumed a new, settled economic order into which displaced populations and severed livelihoods could eventually be

¹Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 88–112.

²Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History* (Noida: HarperCollins India, 2013), 45–62.



integrated. In Poonch and Rajouri, by contrast, the border itself remained militarily active and administratively provisional for the entire period under study, so that the region's economy was never permitted to settle into a new equilibrium. It instead developed what this paper terms a permanently frontier economy: one structurally organized around proximity to an active, closed border rather than around the trade and pastoral circuits that had defined it before 1947.

2. Historiographical Context

Ilyas Chattha's study of Gujranwala and Sialkot after Partition demonstrated that the economic consequences of the Radcliffe Line varied sharply by locality, depending on each district's specific position relative to the new border and its prior economic specialization — a methodological lesson directly applicable to the internal variation within Jammu and Kashmir's own divided districts.³

Vazira Zamindar's account of the 'long Partition' in Punjab and Sindh is particularly useful for Jammu and Kashmir because it treats Partition not as an event of 1947 but as a protracted process of bureaucratic and economic bordering that continued for years afterward through passport regimes, evacuee property legislation, and the slow closure of routes that had initially remained porous.⁴ Ian Copland's work on the political economy of the princely states provides essential background on the fiscal and infrastructural condition of Jammu and Kashmir at the moment of accession, showing that the state's western districts were already administratively and economically peripheral to Srinagar before 1947, a peripherality the ceasefire line then hardened into permanence.⁵

Sumantra Bose's political history of the Kashmir conflict situates the region's economic marginalization within the broader failure of both Indian and Pakistani state-building projects to deliver development to their respective portions of the former princely state, a framework this paper extends specifically to Poonch and Rajouri's trade economy.⁶ Rekha Chowdhary's study of the Jammu region's politics of identity documents a persistent regional grievance that the Jammu division, including Poonch and Rajouri, was economically neglected relative to the Kashmir Valley in state development planning — a grievance this paper reads partly as a consequence of the western districts' post-1947 loss of their traditional trade catchment.⁷

On the specifically pastoral dimension of the pre-1947 regional economy, Aparna Rao's ethnographic and historical work on transhumant pastoralism in the western Himalaya documents grazing circuits that routinely crossed what became, after 1947, an international ceasefire line, and the resulting collapse of herd mobility for households on both sides.⁸ Finally, Happymon Jacob's study of the Line of Control provides the fullest existing account of the limited cross-LoC trade mechanism established after 2008, which this paper treats in Section 6 as evidence bearing on the durability of the region's economic division rather than as a resolution of it.⁹

³Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot, 1947–61* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143–168.

⁴Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1–24.

⁵Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 219–244.

⁶Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 149–172.

⁷Rekha Chowdhary, *Jammu and Kashmir: Politics of Identity and Separatism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015), 61–84.

⁸Aparna Rao, "Kinship Matters: Ethnic Discourses in Ladakh and Kargil," in *Ladakh: Culture, History, and Development between Himalaya and Karakoram*, ed. Martijn van Beek and Fernanda Pirie (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 51–75.

⁹Happymon Jacob, *The Line of Control: Travelling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2019), 201–226.



3. Sources and Methodology

This paper draws on three categories of source material: published historiography of Partition-era economic disruption, both for Punjab (as a comparative case) and for Jammu and Kashmir specifically; colonial and early post-colonial administrative gazetteers and settlement reports describing the pre-1947 economy of Poonch and Rajouri, read critically for their own administrative biases; and the author's doctoral fieldwork on trade disruption and community reorganization in the Pirpanjal region, which is ongoing.

*Author's note on primary economic data: Precise, disaggregated trade-volume and market-turnover figures specific to Poonch and Rajouri for the pre-1947 period is fragmentary in the available published record, and this paper does not present invented statistics in their place. Where the paper characterizes the scale or structure of pre-1947 trade, it does so in the qualitative and comparative terms supported by the secondary literature cited, flagging explicitly where quantification would require archival gazetteer and settlement-report data that the author's doctoral fieldwork is in the process of compiling.*¹⁰

4. The Pre-1947 Economy of the Pirpanjal Region

Before 1947, Poonch and Rajouri sat astride, rather than at the edge of, several overlapping economic circuits. The Poonch jagir's own administrative and trade orientation ran naturally toward Rawalpindi and the Jhelum valley to its west as much as toward Srinagar and Jammu to its east, reflecting the region's physical geography of river valleys draining westward through what became, after 1947, Pakistan-administered territory.¹¹

Four elements of this pre-1947 economy are of particular significance for understanding the scale of its subsequent disruption.

First, transhumant pastoralism organized much of the region's rural economy: Gujjar and Bakarwal herding households, along with settled agriculturalist families who maintained seasonal herds, moved livestock along established circuits between winter lowland grazing and summer highland pasture, circuits that in many cases extended across what became the ceasefire line.¹²

Second, periodic and weekly markets (locally organized bazaars held on fixed days) served as the primary points of exchange for grain, livestock, wool, ghee, and craft goods, drawing sellers and buyers from a catchment that did not respect the internal jagir boundary, let alone the ceasefire line that would later bisect it. Third, artisanal production — woodcarving, wool-weaving, and metalwork — depended on supply chains for raw materials, particularly timber and raw wool, that moved along the same west-oriented routes as pastoral and market trade. Fourth, seasonal and permanent labour migration linked Poonch and Rajouri households to employment opportunities in Rawalpindi, in the Punjab plains, and in colonial and princely-state military recruitment, the last of which had long made the region a significant source of soldiery for both the Dogra state forces and the British Indian Army.

This last point matters for the paper's later argument: Copland's account of princely-state fiscal structures notes that military recruitment from districts such as Poonch functioned as a significant, if informal, form of economic integration between the state's western districts and the wider colonial economy, one that collapsed abruptly with the 1947 uprising and the subsequent conflict.¹³

¹⁰This methodological caution follows the general standard set out in Chattha, *Partition and Locality*, 12–18, for reconstructing local economic history from fragmentary colonial-era sources.

¹¹Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, 63–88.

¹²Rao, “Kinship Matters,” 55–62.

¹³Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire*, 225–231.



5. Disintegration and Bordered Reintegration, 1947–1989

5.1 Phase One: Immediate Rupture, 1947–1949

The Poonch uprising of summer 1947, the subsequent tribal invasion, and the Indian and Pakistani military deployments that followed converted the region's internal trade and grazing routes into a contested and then a militarized frontier within roughly eighteen months.¹⁴ The immediate economic effect was the sudden termination of market access for households now separated from their customary bazaars, the stranding of livestock on the 'wrong' side of shifting front lines, and the interruption of the 1947 and 1948 harvest and herding cycles by active combat.¹⁵

Unlike the Radcliffe Line, which was announced in advance of Independence and implemented, however violently, as an immediate and total border, the Poonch–Rajouri frontier emerged incrementally as a product of shifting battle lines over more than a year, meaning that households in the region could not, even had they wished to, make the kind of anticipatory economic adjustment — liquidating assets, relocating stock, transferring debts — that some Punjabi trading communities managed in the weeks before August 1947. The 1949 ceasefire line thus froze in place whatever economic arrangement had happened to obtain on the day fighting stopped, rather than reflecting any negotiated or planned economic settlement.

5.2 Phase Two: Consolidation of a Bordered Economy, 1950s–1960s

Through the 1950s, both Indian- and Pakistani-administered portions of the divided region undertook road-building and market-relocation programmes that, whatever their stated developmental intent, had the effect of reorienting the region's remaining trade circuits away from the ceasefire line and toward each state's respective administrative centre — Jammu and, eventually, the Kashmir Valley on the Indian side; Rawalpindi and Muzaffarabad on the Pakistani side.¹⁶

This reorientation was not a restoration of the pre-1947 economy but its replacement with a new, asymmetric structure: markets and roads on each side of the line were built to serve trade flowing away from the border, since the border itself was, by the 1950s, understood by both administrations as a fixed military reality rather than a temporary inconvenience awaiting resolution. Pastoral households whose grazing circuits had crossed the line faced a starker adjustment than market-dependent traders, since alternative grazing land was not simply a matter of redirected trade but of physically inaccessible or already-occupied pasture; oral and ethnographic evidence from later decades suggests many pastoral families were forced to either radically curtail herd size or abandon transhumance for settled agriculture.

Chowdhary's account of Jammu-region development grievances during this period notes a widely held perception, expressed repeatedly in regional political mobilization from the 1950s onward, that state investment in road and market infrastructure disproportionately favoured the Kashmir Valley over the border districts of Poonch and Rajouri, compounding the districts' loss of their traditional westward trade orientation with comparative neglect in their new, eastward-oriented one.¹⁷

5.3 Phase Three: Entrenchment of Economic Marginality, 1965–1989

The 1965 and 1971 India–Pakistan wars, both of which involved active fighting along the Poonch–Rajouri sector of the ceasefire line, further entrenched the region's frontier economy by reinforcing the military logic — restricted

¹⁴Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, 89–112.

¹⁵Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, 40–58, on the general pattern of harvest-cycle disruption along newly militarized Partition-era frontiers.

¹⁶Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, 152–160.

¹⁷Chowdhary, *Jammu and Kashmir: Politics of Identity and Separatism*, 68–75.



civilian movement near the line, heavy security infrastructure, periodic shelling affecting border villages — that had governed the area since 1949.¹⁸

By the 1980s, the Pirpanjal region's economy exhibited a distinctive structure: a resident population still substantially dependent on agriculture and residual pastoralism, but with commercial and market life reoriented toward district and state administrative centres rather than the historically closer bazaars now across the line; a significant continuing outflow of labour migration, though now directed toward Indian cities and the Gulf rather than toward Rawalpindi and Punjab; and an economy structurally shaped by the presence of security forces, whose demand for local goods, services, and labour had itself become a meaningful component of the district economy in a way with no clear pre-1947 precedent.

Robinson's study of families on the Pakistan-administered side of the ceasefire line documents a broadly parallel pattern of militarized economic dependency, in which proximity to the line shaped local livelihoods through military employment, and later through the political economy of cross-border militancy, in place of the trade and pastoral circuits the same families' grandparents had relied upon before 1947.¹⁹

6. A Postscript on Reopening: The 2008 Cross-LoC Trade Mechanism

Although this paper's chronological scope ends at 1989, the limited cross-LoC trade mechanism established in October 2008 — permitting a restricted list of goods to move by barter across designated crossing points, including the Poonch–Rawalakot route directly relevant to this paper's subject region — offers a useful retrospective test of the argument developed above.²⁰

As Jacob's study documents, the mechanism operated under severe restrictions — a limited and non-monetized barter list, restricted trading days, and periodic suspension during episodes of cross-LoC tension — that prevented it from approaching the scale, diversity, or ordinary commercial character of the pre-1947 trade the region had once conducted along substantially the same routes.²¹ Its repeated suspension after 2016 amid renewed security tensions demonstrates, in this paper's reading, not the failure of a promising economic reintegration but the persistence of the underlying condition this paper describes: an economy in which the border's military logic continues to take precedence over its commercial one, exactly as it has since 1949.²²

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the economic history of the Pirpanjal region after 1947 is better described as a process of disintegration and asymmetric, militarized reintegration than as a single rupture followed by conventional rehabilitation. The region's pre-1947 economy — organized around transhumant pastoralism, periodic markets, artisanal supply chains, and labour migration oriented as much westward as eastward — was not simply damaged by the 1947–49 conflict but structurally reoriented by it, in ways that later state investment entrenched rather than reversed. The limited and repeatedly suspended cross-LoC trade mechanism of the post-2008 period, considered as a postscript to the 1947–1989 period this paper covers, illustrates the durability of that reorientation rather than its resolution.

The paper has necessarily relied on the published historiography of Partition-era economic disruption, read alongside the fragmentary administrative record available for Poonch and Rajouri specifically, pending completion of the author's doctoral fieldwork and archival gazetteer research. That fieldwork, part of a wider study

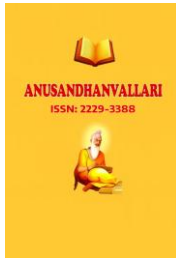
¹⁸Snedden, *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris* (London: Hurst, 2015), 130–145.

¹⁹Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior: Refugee Families and the Making of Kashmiri Jihadists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 61–79.

²⁰Jacob, *The Line of Control*, 205–212.

²¹Jacob, *The Line of Control*, 215–224.

²²Jacob, *The Line of Control*, 224–226.



of trade disruption, community reorganization, and memory transmission in the Pirpanjal region from 1947 to 1989, is intended to supply the disaggregated market and settlement data that would allow the qualitative argument advanced here to be tested against quantitative evidence.

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