

Developing a British Kashmiri Studies

Friday 7 June 2024 09:00 (1h 30m)

Migration from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK or Azad Kashmir for short) to Britain commenced during the colonial period, however it was not until the 1950s that larger waves of migration from the disputed territory began to take place. Today it is estimated the diaspora form half of all British Muslims, and one of the largest non-European origin communities in the UK. Yet very little is known about the socio-economic, political, and ethno-linguistic nuances outside of the community itself; and although a growing number of scholars, activists, and writers continue to emerge from the British Kashmiri community, their work remains at the periphery when discussing minorities in the UK.

Therefore, what is unique about this community is that, although it forms a large share of the ethnic minority population in Britain, it remains 'hidden'. This is largely a result of coming from an internationally disputed territory (Jammu and Kashmir) and being amalgamated with Pakistanis, by British officialdom, upon settlement in the UK. However, as grassroots identity movements continue to demonstrate, a significant number of those from the community (in the homeland and diaspora) believe this masks both internal nuances, but also has a detrimental impact on the lived experiences of the community for representation and policy provision. Although many pioneers from South Asia who participated in political activism and trade unions, were from Azad Kashmir, there is evidence of discrimination by other South Asian heritage groups within a British context. This often involves negative stereotyping and degradation of language and culture, as well as access to political platforms as 'Kashmiris'. Yet issues of identity and recognition as a result of originating from an internationally disputed territory continue to play out, both decades on and thousands of miles away.

BISA provides an excellent platform for a roundtable discussion on 'Developing a British Kashmiri Studies', given Birmingham is home to the largest diaspora from Azad Kashmir and the city was part of key developments in terms of maintaining transnational links, including the creation of the historically significant Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The contribution of British Kashmiris to both the city and the UK as a whole is seldom acknowledged and all but absent in terms of academic study on minorities, despite this presence.

In recognition of a lacuna of voices from this diaspora within public platforms of this nature, the roundtable is formed entirely of British Kashmiri heritage scholars and writers, comprising of: Associate Professor Serena Hussain (Coventry University), author of 'Society and Politics of Jammu and Kashmir'; Professor Zafar Khan one of the first British Kashmiri academics and an active senior member of the JKLF; Professor Tahir Abbas a Professor of International Relations (Leiden University); Shams Rehman, a journalist and founder of the online news platform Jammu Kashmir TV; Dr Karamat Iqbal, an expert in minorities in education; and early career researcher, Awais Hussain (University of York) a social historian and linguist specialising in migration from Azad Kashmir to the UK. The roundtable Chair, Dr Yasmin Farooq, is an expert on the experiences of ethnic minorities within the NHS and a former Magistrate.

Track Classification: Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonial Working Group