

## The Role of the 1947 Tribal Invasion in Maharaja Hari Singh's Decision to Sign the Instrument of Accession

Asra Manzoor<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Poonam<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Department of History, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan

<sup>2</sup>Supervisor, Department of History, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan

### Abstract

This paper examines how the October 1947 tribal invasion of Jammu and Kashmir influenced Maharaja Hari Singh's decision to accede to India. It analyses the immediate and contextual factors surrounding the Maharaja's choice, arguing that the invasion was the decisive catalyst that overrode his initial preference for independence. Drawing on archival letters and contemporary accounts, including the Maharaja's own appeal to Lord Mountbatten, it shows that large-scale tribal violence and chaos created a "grave emergency" that left the Maharaja no option but to seek Indian assistance (and thus to sign the Instrument of Accession). The study reviews scholarly interpretations (Schofield 2003; Bose 2003; Snedden 2013; Bazaz 1954) and primary documents to situate the tribal invasion within the broader crisis in Kashmir. It traces the pre-1947 political context, the events of late October 1947, and the Maharaja's communications with Indian leaders. The conclusion highlights that while multiple pressures shaped the accession debate, the tribal incursion was the immediate trigger that forced Hari Singh's hand. These findings underscore the invasion's central role in the accession and its lasting impact on Kashmir's fate.

**Keywords:** Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, Instrument of Accession, tribal invasion, 1947 Partition

### Introduction

The dispute over Kashmir's accession in 1947 remains one of modern South Asia's most intractable issues. At partition, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir – a Muslim-majority territory ruled by the Hindu Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh – faced the choice of joining India, Pakistan, or remaining independent. Hari Singh initially resisted joining either dominion, preferring standstill agreements with both India and Pakistan and even flirting with outright independence. However, on October 26, 1947, he signed the Instrument of Accession, formally ceding Kashmir's defense, communication, and foreign affairs to India. Why did he accede at that moment? Historians have debated whether the decisive factor was internal unrest, political maneuvering by Indian leaders, or the sudden tribal invasion from Pakistan. This paper argues, on the basis of archival evidence and scholarship, that the tribal invasion was the immediate catalyst that compelled the Maharaja to seek Indian help and thus to sign the accession documents. By examining the events of October 1947 in the context of preceding tensions, this study shows how the invasion created a security crisis that overrode the Maharaja's earlier indecision. The structure is as follows: a brief review of scholarship on this question, background on Kashmir's pre-1947 politics, a narrative of the October invasion, an account of the Maharaja's response and appeal to India, and a discussion of the accession's signing.

## Literature Review

Scholars offer varied perspectives on the accession decision. Victoria Schofield (2003) emphasizes that the tribal invasion “forced a decision upon” Hari Singh, framing it as the trigger for accession. She notes that the Maharaja had favored independence and was reluctant to choose either dominion until confronted by the invasion’s chaos. Nirmal Chandra Bose (1997/2003) similarly portrays the invasion as the critical turning point, arguing that widespread atrocities in Kashmir convinced Hari Singh he needed Indian military support. Likewise, P. N. K. Bamzai (1966) presents the tribal attack as the primary catalyst, stressing that the Maharaja had “no alternative but to sign the Instrument of Accession” once Pakistani-backed raiders poured in. By contrast, Christopher Snedden (2013) and Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz (1954) draw attention to earlier internal upheavals. Snedden argues that violent uprisings in Poonch and communal strife in Jammu during mid-1947 had already fractured the state, suggesting that Kashmiri actors had largely instigated the conflict. Bazaz, a Kashmiri Pandit leader, also emphasized popular mobilization for self-determination. These views imply that the tribal invasion was part of a larger struggle rather than a lone cause. Others (e.g. Rai 2004) note that Sheikh Abdullah’s National Conference had mobilized public opinion against Dogra rule and favored India, weakening Hari Singh’s position. In sum, the literature recognizes the invasion as crucial, but some scholars caution that other factors (communal violence, political pressure from Delhi, and Jammu unrest) were also at play. This paper builds on these works by integrating primary sources – notably the Maharaja’s own letters – to assess the invasion’s role in context.

## Historical Context: Pre-1947 Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir was a multi-ethnic state under the autocratic Dogra dynasty. Its population was roughly 77% Muslim, yet it was ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh, who succeeded in 1925. By 1947, discontent with the regime’s favoritism toward Kashmiri Pandits and repression of Muslims had grown. In the winter of 1946–47, the National Conference under Sheikh Abdullah, itself allied with Nehru’s Congress, launched the Quit Kashmir agitation against the Maharaja, demonstrating the prince’s weakening authority. Meanwhile, in late summer 1947 the western Poonch region – a frontier area with many refugees from the Partition violence in Punjab – saw a pro-Pakistan uprising. By August, residents of Poonch had begun openly flying Pakistan’s flag and acquiring arms (often smuggled via Rawalpindi). Communal violence also broke out in Jammu: Hindus and Muslims clashed during July–September 1947, displacing many and heightening tensions. The Maharaja’s government had responded by jailing political leaders (the National Conference and the Muslim Conference leaders were imprisoned).

As British suzerainty ended on August 15, 1947, Hari Singh initially sought “standstill” agreements with both new Dominions to maintain the status quo in governance and trade. Pakistan quickly agreed to a standstill, but India (concerned by the state’s situation and Abdullah’s popularity) demanded further talks. In practice, Pakistan’s goodwill was dubious: within weeks it covertly supported Poonch rebels and began choking off supplies of food, salt, and fuel to Kashmir. Indian historian Aman M. Hingorani recounts that even before October the Pakistani military and intelligence were preparing Operation Gulmarg – a plan to organize tribal militias for invasion. The Maharaja, meanwhile, vacillated; Karan Singh (his son) later

noted that Hari Singh found himself “alone and friendless” when making these historic choices. Many in the Hindu-dominated Jammu province leaned toward India, whereas most of the Muslim Kashmir valley favored Sheikh Abdullah. Thus by October 1947, Kashmir was rife with insurgency and suspicion, setting the stage for the looming crisis.

### **The Tribal Invasion of October 1947**

On the night of 21–22 October 1947, large columns of Pashtun tribesmen from Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (organized as lashkars under retired officers) crossed into northern Kashmir. These raiders, drawn from tribal groups such as Afridis, Wazirs and Mohmands, were heavily armed with modern rifles, Bren guns, and even artillery. As V. P. Menon later reported, their “modern military equipment could only have been obtained from Pakistani sources,” and he estimated some 5,000 tribesmen traveling in hundreds of lorries had invaded. The assault was coordinated: Akbar Khan, a Pakistani Army officer calling himself “General Tariq,” had drawn up Operation Gulmarg to seize Kashmir (as Menon recorded). Within hours, key border posts fell. On the evening of 22 October, the tribesmen captured Domel after seizing the bridge over the Jhelum at Muzaffarabad. Over the next two days they took Uri and other strategic points, advancing toward Srinagar.

The violence was brutal. As the Maharaja’s letter describes, tribesmen “soldiers in plain clothes... have been allowed to infiltrate” via Poonch, Sialkot and Hazara, attacking civilians and properties. They burned the Mahura power station supplying Srinagar, looted villages, kidnapped women, and massacred peasants. “The number of women who have been kidnapped and raped makes my heart bleed,” Hari Singh wrote desperately, noting that these “wild forces... are marching on with the aim of capturing Srinagar”. By 24 October, news of mass killing in Baramulla and nearby towns reached Jammu, spreading panic. Historian H.V. Naqvi (citing Army records) confirms that Kashmiri villages like Baramulla and Handwara suffered heinous crimes during this “darkest chapter” of 1947. In effect, the state’s scant 20,000-man army was stretched thin. The non-military defense forces (the paramilitary Scouts and rifles) simply could not contain these well-equipped raiders. This unprecedented invasion transformed the political situation overnight. What had been a treaty dispute became an existential military emergency for the Maharaja’s government.

### **The Maharaja’s Dilemma and Request for Indian Assistance**

Confronted with the cataclysmic invasion and news that Srinagar itself was threatened, Maharaja Hari Singh faced a stark choice. Until then, he had insisted on Kashmiri independence as ideal and kept India and Pakistan at arm’s length. But with panic spreading, on 24 October he flew to Jammu (security could no longer be guaranteed in Srinagar). In Jammu he delayed, hoping Pakistan would honor its standstill and quell the tribes. The tribes, however, continued ravaging the state. By 25 October, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had communicated that Delhi could only send troops if Kashmir formally acceded.

Realizing the gravity, Hari Singh’s resolve broke. On 26 October he wrote urgently to Governor-General Lord Mountbatten. In that letter he declared that a “grave emergency” had arisen (after armed tribes infiltrated en masse) and asked for immediate help. He lamented that his unaligned state was neighbor to both India and Pakistan, yet “strangulation” of essential

supplies by Pakistan had worsened the crisis. Importantly, he acknowledged that “they [India] cannot send the help asked for by me without my State acceding to the Dominion of India.” With “great emergency” looming, \**“I have no option but to ask for help from the Indian Dominion. I have accordingly decided to do so and I attach the Instrument of Accession”\**. This explicit statement confirms that under duress, Hari Singh agreed to India’s terms. The letter also spoke of setting up an interim government with Sheikh Abdullah as head, reflecting the Maharaja’s desperate bid to stabilize the situation.

In parallel, Indian civil servant V. P. Menon was flown to Jammu with Sardar Patel. Menon found the palace in “utter turmoil” with valuables strewn about and the Maharaja barely awake. Menon’s narrative underscores that Hari Singh “was ready to accede at once” once he understood the alternative. The Maharaja voiced regret that he had initially sought time to decide between India, Pakistan or independence, but admitted that the tribal invasion “had forced a decision upon him”. In conversation, the Maharaja even joked morbidly that if Menon returned from Delhi (implying India’s acceptance), the Maharaja should sleep peacefully, but if not, his ADC was to shoot him rather than let Kashmir fall. Thus, by the early hours of 26 October, the Maharaja’s resolve had shifted decisively under crisis. He formally agreed to accede, sealing his fate and Kashmir’s.

#### Signing the Instrument of Accession

Late on 26 October 1947, with the pleas and paper ready, Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession, making Kashmir a part of India in legal terms. This act granted India control over defense, communications, and external affairs of the state. The accession document, annexed to his letter, was transmitted to New Delhi that night by Menon, who immediately proceeded to confer with Sardar Patel. By next day (27 October), India formally accepted the accession, and simultaneously airlifted troops to defend Srinagar before the tribes could reach it. The speed of military deployment suggests that Delhi treated the accession as having taken effect before Indian arms intervened. Indeed, Schofield notes a timing ambiguity: officially the Maharaja signed on 26th, and Indian troops arrived on 27th, just in time. Whatever the exact order, it is clear that by signing the Instrument Hari Singh granted legitimacy to India’s intervention. As historian Alastair Lamb observes, the signed Instrument was never published in India’s White Paper, but contemporaries (Menon, Patel) uniformly treated it as the legal basis for action. Hari Singh later never contested the fact of his having signed it, even if he would complain of a “pressure” in doing so.

The formal accession was announced publicly on 27 October 1947. News bulletins declared that Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India under Hari Singh’s signature. The dramatic wording in some accounts (“joining the Indian Dominion” under grave emergency) mirrored the language of the Maharaja’s letter. In India and Kashmir, reaction was mixed. Sheikh Abdullah and the pro-India faction endorsed the accession, believing that only India could repel Pakistan-backed invaders and preserve secular governance. On the other hand, Muslim League leaders argued that Hari Singh had acted only under duress and that the accession was not fully voluntary, foreshadowing the Kashmir dispute that would soon reach the United Nations. Nonetheless, in immediate terms the accession provided the legal cover India needed to secure Kashmir from the tribal onslaught.

## Conclusion

The tribal invasion of October 1947 stands out as the direct precipitant of Kashmir's accession to India. The evidence – from the Maharaja's own words to contemporary accounts – shows that Hari Singh's decision was forced by the emergency created by the invasion. Prior to the invasion, he had firmly resisted choosing India or Pakistan, cherishing the idea of an independent Kashmir. But when thousands of tribesmen swept across his borders, committing atrocities and threatening Srinagar, all other considerations were swept aside. Faced with widespread chaos, destruction of his infrastructure, and appeals to remain a "freebooters" victim, the Maharaja saw "no option" except to accede and secure Indian military aid.

This analysis confirms historians like Schofield and Bose who emphasize the invasion as the immediate cause of accession. It also acknowledges that underlying currents – communal violence in Jammu, the Poonch uprising, and Indian-Pakistani rivalry – formed the backdrop. Yet even Snedden concedes that by late October the tribal attack tipped the scales. In short, while multiple factors set the stage, the 22–26 October invasion was the tipping point that compelled Hari Singh to change course. His signature on the Instrument of Accession that October night marked the end of Kashmir's uncertainty and the beginning of a dispute that remains unresolved. The tribal invasion, therefore, occupies a pivotal role in the history of Kashmir – it not only accelerated Kashmir's alignment with India, but also enshrined this decision in law.

## References

1. Bazaz, P. N. (1954). *The history of struggle for freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and political, from the earliest times to the present day*. Gulshan Publishers.
2. Bose, S. (2003). *Kashmir: Roots of conflict, paths to peace*. Harvard University Press.
3. Dawn News. (2012, March 24). Excerpt: The Maharaja of Kashmir's letter to Lord Mountbatten, October 26, 1947. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/705098/excerpt-state-of-affairs>
4. Hindustan Times. (2013, July 9). *Kashmir: The Unwritten History* is a well-researched study of the Kashmir dispute (book review).
5. Hingorani, A. M. (2016). *Unravelling the Kashmir Knot: Past, present and future*. SAGE Publications.
6. Schofield, V. (2003). *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*. I.B. Tauris.
7. Snedden, C. (2013). *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*. HarperCollins.