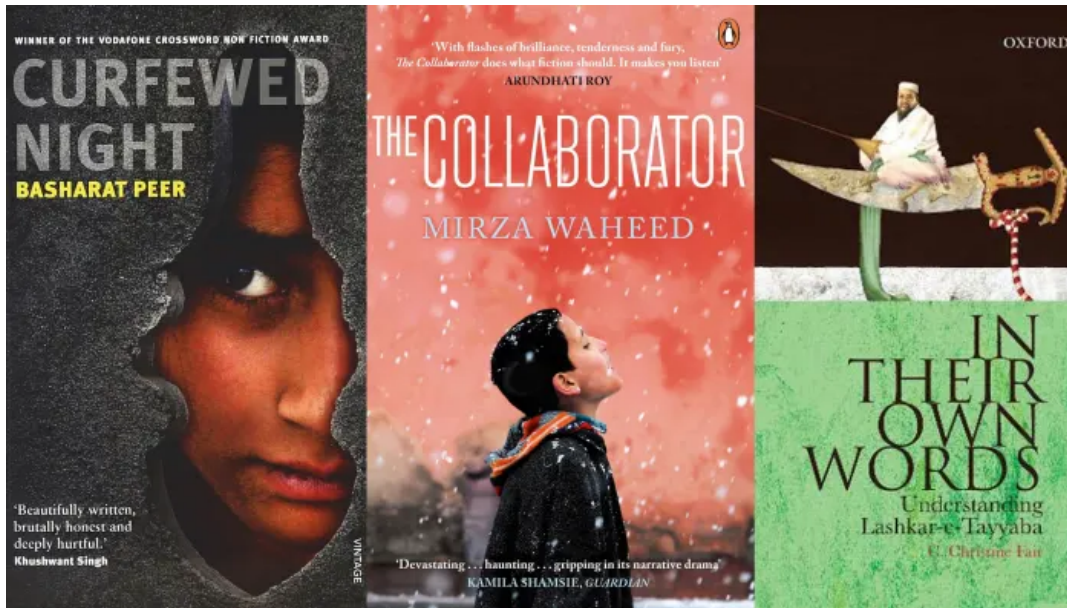


## Jammu and Kashmir

### Five books that explain Kashmir's decades-long crisis

How did it come to this? The Muslim-majority state remains in lockdown after India revoked special rights



Amy Kazmin AUGUST 21, 2019

India's achingly beautiful Kashmir Valley was once described by former US president Bill Clinton as "the most dangerous place in the world", and in my several past visits to the region, I've always been struck by the jarring contrast between its stunning natural beauty and the overwhelming Indian military presence.

Now, the Himalayan region has once again hit the headlines, as New Delhi [revoked a constitutional provision](#) that had given India's only Muslim-majority state [autonomy since 1947](#) to make its own laws and protections — such as barring non-residents from buying land. Kashmir has also been demoted from a fully fledged state to a union territory, giving New Delhi far more control over the region and stoking fears among Kashmiris that this is the first step by Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, towards changing the region's demographic make-up, paving the way towards Hindu dominance.

Anticipating a potentially violent public reaction to the dramatic legal changes, New Delhi put Kashmir [under tight lockdown](#) earlier this month, snapping telecom links, imposing restrictions on public movement and arresting hundreds of local leaders — including two former chief ministers of the state. Foreign reporters, including me, have been barred from visiting.

Indian officials described the measures as necessary precautions to prevent bloodshed, given the [territory's tumultuous history](#). Kashmir has been the focus of three wars between India and its nuclear-armed neighbour Pakistan, which covets the region for itself and which also supported a

Kashmir separatist insurgency. While some restrictions on the public were lifted over the weekend, mobile and internet services are still blocked, and the situation remains tense.

## Here are five books to read to understand Kashmir's protracted crisis

1. *[Paradise at War: A Political History of Kashmir](#)* by academic Radha Kumar traces the territory's political evolution from the late colonial era to the present. Kumar was one of three people appointed by the Indian government back in 2010 to chart a potential road map to fulfil Kashmiri aspirations within an Indian constitutional framework. In this detailed examination of a complex dispute, she spares neither Indian politicians nor Pakistanis for their role in perpetuating Kashmir's tragedy.

2. *[Defeat is an Orphan: How Pakistan Lost the Great South Asian War](#)* by former Reuters correspondent Myra McDonald is a gripping account of the past two decades of strategic competition between India and Pakistan, following their tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998. It explains the shifting international attitudes towards the countries, with India now seen as emergent superpower, while Pakistan is viewed more warily.

3. Basharat Peer was an adolescent schoolboy when Kashmir's separatist insurgency erupted in Kashmir in 1989. In his searing, melancholic memoir *[Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir](#)*, he recounts the experiences of daily life in the conflict zone. His reportage also shines a light on the Indian army's horrific human rights abuses at the height of the deadly conflict.

4. The Kashmir conflict also underpins some powerful literary fiction. Former BBC journalist [Mirza Waheed](#)'s debut novel *[The Collaborator](#)* is about a Kashmiri youth who is employed by the Indian army to collect ID cards of dead militants — and who dreads that he will stumble across the bodies of his childhood friends.

5. *[In their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayaba](#)* is a tour de force by Georgetown University professor C Christine Fair. Fluent in Urdu and Punjabi, Fair analyses the LeT's own published propaganda to explain the organisational capabilities and recruitment strategies of the Pakistani militant group that carried out the Mumbai terror attacks as well as multiple attacks in Kashmir, all in the name of challenging India's sovereignty over Kashmir.

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*What books have we missed? Share your recommendations below and join our online book group on Facebook at [ft.com/ftbookscafe](https://ft.com/ftbookscafe)*

