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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Kashmir through the Lens of International Law: Self-Determination or Sovereignty****Madiha Rathore**

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*This article conducts a critical legal analysis of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute through the competing frameworks of self-determination and state sovereignty in international law. It argues that the conflict embodies a profound, unresolved contradiction within the international legal order, where the peremptory norm (jus cogens) of self-determination, as initially invoked in United Nations Security Council resolutions promising a plebiscite, collides directly with India's sustained claim of territorial sovereignty based on constitutional integration, the bilateral Simla Agreement, and the principle of uti possidetis juris. The article traces this legal antinomy from its historical origins in the contested Instrument of Accession (1947) through the shifting paradigms of UN intervention and bilateralism, to the contemporary impasse solidified by India's abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. It further examines how widespread human rights violations intersect with the contentious doctrine of remedial secession and how geopolitical realities effectively neutralize international legal mechanisms. The conclusion posits that Kashmir exposes the structural limits of international law, which provides the normative vocabulary for the dispute but lacks the adjudicative power to resolve it, as strategic interests and the primacy of state sovereignty consistently override the enforcement of erga omnes obligations, leaving the core issue in a state of permanent legal suspension.*

**Keywords:** Kashmir, International Law, Self-Determination, Sovereignty, Article 370, Human Rights

**Introduction**

The bifurcation of British India in August 1947, executed along ostensibly religious-demographic lines, was less a clean surgical partition and more a violent and chaotic vivisection (Khan, 2017). This traumatic birth of two nation-states, a secular India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan instantaneously created a cartographic and political conundrum in the form of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Ruled by a Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh, but with a majority Muslim populace, the state's delayed and contested accession to India, following a tribal invasion from Pakistan, ignited a conflict that has now persisted for over seven decades (Bose, 2021). This moment was not merely a territorial dispute but the genesis of a profound legal and ideological clash. As scholar Sumantra Bose (2021) argues, Kashmir became the "unfinished business of partition," a symbolic and substantive battleground where the foundational principles of the two new states India's secular pluralism versus Pakistan's Muslim nationalism were first tested and found catastrophically wanting. The subsequent first Indo-Pakistani war solidified a territorial stalemate, dividing the region along a de facto ceasefire line, later the Line of Control (LoC), but failed to resolve the fundamental question of political

legitimacy and popular will, embedding the dispute into the very DNA of South Asian geopolitics and international law (Ganguly, 2019).

The Kashmir conflict endures as one of the world's most intractable and volatile disputes, a perpetual flashpoint with demonstrated potential for catastrophic interstate conflict, as evidenced by the Kargil War of 1999 and repeated military standoffs (Kapur, 2022). Its endurance stems from the potent confluence of competing and seemingly irreconcilable claims: India's assertion of legal and irrevocable sovereignty based on the Instrument of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh in October 1947; Pakistan's counter-claim rooted in the state's Muslim-majority demographics and its charge that the accession was obtained by "fraud and violence"; and, crucially, the complex and often suppressed political aspirations of the Kashmiri people themselves, which have evolved significantly from initial ambiguity to a robust movement for self-determination, frequently met with severe state repression (Chaudhury, 2020). This tripartite contention exists within a landscape of heavy militarization, with India maintaining one of the world's highest concentrations of security forces in the Valley, documented consistently by international human rights bodies (OHCHR, 2018). The situation has been further radically altered by India's unilateral constitutional actions of August 5, 2019, which abrogated the region's limited autonomy under Article 370 and bifurcated it into two federally administered territories. This move, as noted in the 2022 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has "deepened the existing political, economic, social and cultural inequalities" and intensified the human rights crisis, thereby reframing the legal and political dimensions of the conflict for a new era (OHCHR, 2022, p. 5).

At the heart of this enduring impasse lies a critical and unresolved question for international jurisprudence: How does the corpus of international law frame the Kashmir dispute, and within its frameworks, does it privilege the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people or the principle of territorial sovereignty as claimed by India? This is not a mere academic exercise but a query that cuts to the core of international legal order's ability to adjudicate between two of its own foundational, and often conflicting, norms (Cassese, 1995). On one hand, the right of peoples to self-determination is enshrined in the United Nations Charter (1945) and codified as a peremptory norm (*jus cogens*) in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). This principle was the central pillar of the UN's initial intervention, with Security Council Resolutions 38 (1948), 47 (1948), and 51 (1948) explicitly calling for a "free and impartial plebiscite" to allow the Kashmiri people to decide their future. Conversely, the principle of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the concomitant doctrine of non-intervention in domestic affairs, equally enshrined in Article 2(1) and 2(7) of the UN Charter, forms the bedrock of India's legal defense, particularly after the 1972 Simla Agreement which committed both nations to resolving the issue bilaterally, thereby ostensibly removing it from the UN's purview (Singh, 2021). The legal contest, therefore, is a dialectic between a historically invoked, unimplemented promise of a plebiscite and a contemporaneously asserted claim of final and complete sovereign authority (Noorani, 2011).

Consequently, this article posits that the case of Jammu and Kashmir presents international law with a profound and unresolved contradiction, wherein the *jus cogens* norm of self-determination collides directly with the established principle of state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Shaw, 2023). This legal antinomy is not static but is dynamically exacerbated by shifting geopolitical realities including the rise of India as a global power resistant to external mediation, China's vested interests in parts of the original princely state, and the strategic

calculus of Western powers and by fiercely contested historical and constitutional interpretations (Pant, 2023). The tension manifests in the divergent application of legal precedents: India cites the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) emphasis on territorial integrity in the *Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Niger)* case (2013) and the principle of *uti possidetis juris*, while proponents of Kashmiri self-determination point to the ICJ's *Chagos Archipelago* advisory opinion (2019), which reinforced that the right to self-determination is an *erga omnes* obligation and a continuing one, not extinguished by the passage of time (ICJ, 2019). This analysis will navigate this legal labyrinth, arguing that the Kashmir dispute reveals the limits of international law as an adjudicative mechanism when confronted with hardened sovereignty and strategic realpolitik, ultimately leaving the core question of popular sovereignty in a state of permanent suspension (Simpson, 2024). The abrogation of Article 370 does not resolve this legal contradiction; rather, it intensifies it by testing the international community's commitment to human rights and democratic principles against its deference to state power and strategic interests, as critically analyzed by legal scholar A.G. Noorani (2023) in his examination of the constitutional coup and its implications for both federalism in India and the rules-based international order.

### Literature Review

The historical and political scholarship on Kashmir provides the indispensable, if contentious, bedrock upon which all legal arguments are constructed. Foundational works like Alastair Lamb's *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy* (1991) and *Birth of a Tragedy* (1994) rigorously dissect the events of 1947-48, challenging the Indian narrative of a final and legal accession. Lamb meticulously examines the circumstances surrounding the signing of the Instrument of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh, arguing it was executed under duress after the Maharaja had fled his capital, and that its conditional nature was immediately overshadowed by India's military intervention and Lord Mountbatten's controversial acceptance. This historiography, which emphasizes the "tribal invasion" as a catalyst for Indian action rather than its cause, is crucial for legal scholars contesting the accession's validity under doctrines of coercion and state continuity (White, 2022). In contrast, a more contemporary strand of political scholarship, exemplified by Sumantra Bose's *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (2003) and his more recent *Kashmir at the Crossroads* (2021), shifts focus from the forensic details of 1947 to the conflict's internal political sociology. Bose analyzes the evolution of Kashmiri identity and political aspiration, documenting the shift from a plebiscite demand to a mass movement for self-determination and, in phases, armed insurgency and profound alienation. This body of work underscores that the dispute is not a frozen historical artifact but a dynamic political struggle, a reality that directly challenges legal arguments predicated on a static, 1947-based sovereignty claim. The political scholarship thus establishes a critical narrative divide: between histories that problematize India's foundational claim and those that analyze the conflict as a living, evolving contest of legitimacy and governance.

Legal scholarship on the dispute is irrevocably bifurcated along the fault line of the central normative conflict, producing two largely parallel canons. One stream provides a meticulous legal defense of Indian sovereignty. Scholars like A.G. Noorani, in his seminal *Article 370: A Constitutional History of Jammu and Kashmir* (2011), and more recent constitutional analyses by Singh (2022), dissect the domestic legal integration of the state, arguing that the Instrument of Accession was valid under international law governing princely states and that subsequent constitutional processes finalized its status. This school heavily relies on the 1972 Simla Agreement, interpreting it as a bilateral treaty that superseded the UN's plebiscite framework by committing both parties to resolving all issues peacefully and bilaterally, thereby elevating

the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept) over prior UN resolutions (Menon, 2023). The opposing legal canon critically engages with international law's core principles. Scholars such as Shehzad (2023) deconstruct the accession's legality under the emerging 1947 norms of state succession and popular sovereignty. Central to this analysis is the enduring weight of UN Security Council Resolutions, particularly Resolution 47 (1948). While non-binding under Chapter VI, legal theorists like Khan (2022) argue these resolutions created a specific, contingent international legal framework for Kashmir, conditioning its final status on a UN-administered plebiscite an unfulfilled condition that leaves the sovereignty question legally open. This argument is strengthened by the modern jurisprudence on self-determination. Building on Antonio Cassese's foundational work *Self-Determination of Peoples* (1995), contemporary scholars like Dawes (2024) analyze the ICJ's *Chagos Archipelago* (2019) advisory opinion, which affirmed self-determination as a *jus cogens* norm and a continuing right applicable to non-colonial contexts where a people are subjugated. This evolving norm directly challenges the Indian legal position that self-determination was extinguished by accession or the passage of time. Furthermore, a growing body of literature, synthesized in reports by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2018, 2022) and analyzed by legal ethicists like Bhat (2023), explicitly links widespread and systematic human rights violations to the legal discourse. This scholarship probes the doctrine of "remedial secession," questioning whether persistent human rights abuses and the denial of internal self-determination can reinvigorate a right to external self-determination, thus connecting on-the-ground realities to the highest levels of international legal theory.

Despite this rich and polarized scholarship, a significant analytical gap persists. The historical, political, and legal discourses often operate in silos, with legal analyses frequently cherry-picking historical facts to support predetermined normative conclusions. There is a pronounced lack of a structured, contemporary legal analysis that does not merely reiterate the entrenched positions but actively juxtaposes and weights them within the current, transformed framework of international law. The post-2019 constitutional landscape in Jammu and Kashmir the abrogation of Article 370, demographic changes facilitated by new domicile laws, and intensified integration has fundamentally altered the factual substrate of the dispute, yet much legal scholarship remains tethered to pre-2019 assumptions. The gap, therefore, is for a rigorous analysis that critically evaluates the strength of India's sovereignty claim based on the Simla Agreement, constitutional integration, and the principle of *uti possidetis juris* against the resurgent and reinforced norm of self-determination as articulated in the *Chagos* opinion, alongside the *erga omnes* obligations it creates. This requires not just a recitation of old arguments but a fresh synthesis that considers how geopolitical shifts, the securitization of the region, and the international community's practice of selective enforcement of human rights norms impact the practical adjudication of this legal contradiction. This article seeks to fill that void by moving beyond a descriptive literature review to a prescriptive legal confrontation, examining whether, in the context of 21st-century international law and the specific facts of Kashmir's current administration, the scale finally tips decisively toward one foundational norm over the other, or if the contradiction remains an insurmountable testament to international law's limits.

### Objectives

1. To examine the foundational legal instruments (Instrument of Accession, UNSC Resolutions) and their contemporary validity.
2. To analyze the right to self-determination under international law and its applicability to the people of Jammu & Kashmir.

3. To assess India's sovereignty, claim through the lenses of constitutional integration, the Simla Agreement, and the principle of *uti possidetis juris*.
4. To explore how the conflict is shaped by the tension between *erga omnes* obligations (self-determination) and the non-interference in internal affairs.
5. To evaluate recent developments (abrogation of Article 370, increased militarization) and their implications for the international legal discourse.

### Methodology

This investigation employs a three-pronged methodological approach anchored in international legal doctrine. The primary method is doctrinal legal research, involving a critical analysis of foundational texts including the UN Charter, the specific Security Council resolutions on Kashmir, the 1972 Simla Agreement, relevant International Court of Justice dicta, and reports from UN human rights mechanisms. This is supplemented by a comparative legal analysis, juxtaposing the Kashmir case against precedents like the East Timor case, the Kosovo Advisory Opinion, and the Chagos Archipelago opinion to critically examine the application and limits of the right to self-determination in contested sovereignty contexts. The research adopts an intrinsic case study design, maintaining a tight focus on the unique historical and legal trajectory of the Jammu & Kashmir dispute to understand its particular complexities. The analysis consciously acknowledges significant limitations: the tension between established law (*lex lata*) and state practice, the inherently political and often paralyzed nature of UN Security Council enforcement, and the fundamental constraint of international law as a tool for resolving conflicts where hard geopolitical interests and deep historical grievances are paramount.

### Self-Determination in UN Practice (1947-1971)

The legal controversy over Kashmir originates in the disputed validity of the Instrument of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh on October 26, 1947. India's sovereignty claims rests on the assertion that this was a final and lawful act of state succession by a recognized sovereign. However, contemporary legal historiography profoundly challenges this narrative. Scholars (White, 2023) argue that the accession's legality must be assessed against the emergent post-colonial norm of popular sovereignty, not merely the formalities of princely prerogative. The Maharaja's signing occurred under acute duress and, crucially, the acceptance by India's Governor-General, Lord Mountbatten, was explicitly conditional, stating the accession question "should be settled by a reference to the people." This conditionality (Singh, 2024) transformed the accession from a conclusive treaty into a provisional arrangement, creating a fiduciary obligation on India to facilitate a popular ratification. Therefore, the instrument is best understood not as a final settlement but as a contested and conditional document whose ultimate validity was made contingent upon an unimplemented democratic exercise.

In response to the ensuing war, the United Nations Security Council became the primary international arbiter, establishing a framework that explicitly privileged self-determination. Resolutions 38, 47, and 51 (all 1948), along with the work of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP), constructed a conditional process. The core, articulated in Resolution 47, was a "free and impartial plebiscite." While India argues these Chapter VI resolutions were non-binding, their legal significance is nuanced. As noted, (García, 2023), a series of resolutions accepted by both parties can create a specific legal regime and legitimate expectations. The UN's intervention prescribed a *conditional* path to sovereignty, making Jammu and Kashmir's final status legally contingent upon the will of its people. This created an international legal obligation that suspended a definitive sovereignty award. The plebiscite was

never held, but its conditional promise was never formally rescinded, leaving what has been termed a “sovereign vacuum” (Chen, 2024) a territory whose international legal status remains purposefully unresolved by the body that assumed jurisdiction.

The heart of this UN-mandated solution was the evolving legal principle of self-determination. In 1947-48, this right was understood within the “salt-water” colonial context. However, over subsequent decades, as articulated in the International Covenants on Human Rights (1966) and affirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), self-determination matured into a peremptory norm (*jus cogens*). The ICJ’s landmark 2019 *Chagos Archipelago* advisory opinion decisively rejected the notion that self-determination is a one-time event. The Court affirmed it as a continuing right, an *erga omnes* obligation. This modern jurisprudence (Alston, 2023) fundamentally recalibrates the legal standing of the Kashmir dispute. It substantiates the argument that the UN’s plebiscitary condition was an early recognition of a fundamental and enduring legal right. Consequently, the passage of time and India’s *de facto* control do not extinguish this right; rather, the continuing denial of its fulfillment perpetuates a standing violation of a *jus cogens* norm, ensuring the dispute remains an active, rather than historical, legal grievance in international law.

### **The Sovereignty Framework**

The post-1971 political landscape, following India’s military victory and the creation of Bangladesh, catalyzed a decisive shift in the legal framing of the dispute, moving it from the multilateral arena of the United Nations to a bilateral sovereignty paradigm. The 1972 Simla Agreement, signed by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, is the cornerstone of this shift. The Agreement’s pivotal clause commits both parties to “settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them” (Simla Agreement, 1972, Clause ii). India’s legal position, as articulated by scholars like Menon (2023), interprets this as a *novation* a new treaty that supersedes the prior UN Security Council resolutions. The argument rests on the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept) enshrined in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties and the doctrine of *lex posterior derogat priori* (a later law overrides an earlier one), asserting that the bilateral Simla pact rendered the multilateral plebiscite framework obsolete. This interpretation seeks to relocate the dispute firmly within the domain of inter-state relations governed by the principle of consent, thereby strategically nullifying the UN’s conditional, people-centric approach and reframing Kashmir as a purely territorial issue to be managed between two sovereign states, insulated from international intervention or the direct invocation of a third-party (Kashmiri) right to choose.

Concurrently, India has pursued a relentless strategy of domestic constitutional integration to fortify its sovereignty claim through the doctrine of effective control and the principle of *uti possidetis juris*. The incremental erosion and eventual abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in 2019, which had granted Jammu and Kashmir special autonomous status, represents the culmination of a decades-long process of legal assimilation analyzed by legal scholars (Singh, 2022; Noorani, 2023). This domestic legal process is leveraged to bolster an international legal argument: that India exercises continuous, peaceful, and exclusive sovereign authority over its territory, a key element in establishing title under international law. This claim is further strengthened by invoking *uti possidetis juris*, a principle that stabilized post-colonial borders by preserving the administrative boundaries of former colonial units at independence. Applied to Kashmir, the argument posits that the boundaries of the former princely state, as it existed on August 15, 1947, were inherited by India upon the Maharaja’s accession, and this territorial integrity is now inviolable (Shaw, 2023). The combination of deep

constitutional integration and sustained, unchallenged administration (save for the territory under Pakistani control) is presented as creating an indisputable fact of sovereignty that, over time, has crystallized into a legal title, rendering historical debates about conditional accession moot.

This sovereignty claim finds its ultimate defense in the most foundational norms of the UN Charter: territorial integrity and non-intervention. India consistently invokes Article 2(4), which prohibits the threat or use of force against territorial integrity, to condemn Pakistan's support for militant groups as a violation of international law. More critically, it wields Article 2(7), which bars UN intervention "in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state," as a legal shield against any international scrutiny of its administration in Jammu and Kashmir. This framing is potent in the contemporary world order, which remains fundamentally statist. As Simpson (2024) notes, the international system exhibits a powerful bias in favor of recognizing and stabilizing *de facto* sovereign control, especially when exercised by a major state. By presenting the issue as one of defending its territorial integrity from external aggression and separatism, and categorizing all internal governance including security laws and demographic policies as "domestic affairs," India seeks to place the onus of illegality on Pakistan and morally quarantine the internal human rights situation from international legal discourse. This positions the sovereignty argument not merely as a historical or constitutional claim, but as a contemporary imperative under the very charter that also enshrines self-determination, creating a deliberate and powerful legal tension at the heart of the international system.

### **Convergence of Law, Politics, and Human Rights**

The Indian government's unilateral abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's autonomous status under Article 370 of its Constitution on August 5, 2019, represents a definitive assertion of what it terms "complete integration" and constitutes the most significant recalibration of the dispute's factual and legal substrate in decades. Domestically framed as a corrective to constitutional asymmetry and a necessary step for development, the move involved the presidential dissolution of the state, its bifurcation into two Union Territories, and the extension of central laws, fundamentally altering the region's demographic and political character (Kumar, 2023). From an international law perspective, however, this act of raw domestic sovereignty triggered immediate and profound scrutiny. Multiple UN human rights mandate holders issued communications expressing alarm that the changes were "implemented without the consultation of or the consent of the people" and risked undermining the right of self-determination (OHCHR, 2019). This crystallizes the core legal conflict: where India sees an unfettered exercise of sovereign constitutional authority over an integral part of its territory, critical international legal voices perceive a unilateral alteration of the status of a disputed territory that violates the principle of resolving international disputes in good faith and ignores the UN's historical, people-centric framework. The action, therefore, did not resolve the underlying legal ambiguity but rather intensified it, testing the international community's willingness to accept *fait accompli* sovereignty over established, albeit unimplemented, multilateral commitments and peremptory norms (Dixon, 2024).

This aggressive integration has unfolded alongside a well-documented and persistent environment of severe human rights violations, including allegations of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and the stifling of political expression and assembly through draconian laws and mass communications blackouts, as chronicled by international NGOs and UN bodies (Amnesty International, 2022; OHCHR, 2018, 2022). This grim reality forces a critical legal question onto the agenda: does the systematic denial of internal self-determination the

right of a people to freely pursue their political, economic, social, and cultural development coupled with widespread rights abuses, re-legitimize a claim to *external* self-determination, potentially including secession? This is the contentious doctrine of "remedial secession," a concept debated but never unequivocally affirmed as a general rule of international law. Proponents, drawing analogies to Kosovo and citing the International Court of Justice's *obiter dicta* in the *Kosovo Advisory Opinion* (2010) that noted declarations of independence were not prohibited by international law, argue that in extreme cases of subjugation and alienation, secession becomes a remedy of last resort (Peters, 2023). The sustained human rights crisis in Kashmir is thus presented not merely as a humanitarian tragedy but as a potential legal catalyst that could breathe new life into the dormant right to a plebiscite, transforming it from a historical promise into a contemporary, exigent remedy for a people denied meaningful political participation and subjected to repressive control (Watson, 2024).

Ultimately, the trajectory of the Kashmir dispute is dictated less by the refined abstractions of legal doctrine and more by the unforgiving calculus of geopolitics and realpolitik, which have consistently stymied international legal mechanisms. The UN Security Council, the body originally tasked with resolving the conflict, remains paralyzed, its Chapter VII enforcement powers rendered inert by strategic interests and the risk of great power confrontation. The rise of India as a major economic and strategic power has fundamentally altered the diplomatic calculus; key Western states, seeking India as a counterbalance to China, have deliberately minimized public criticism of its Kashmir policy, framing it as a bilateral or internal issue despite the multilateral history and human rights concerns (Pant & Joshi, 2023). This creates a stark divergence between *lex lata* (the law as it is) and state practice. While the legal arguments for self-determination may retain theoretical weight, the practice of powerful states demonstrates a overwhelming preference for stability, territorial integrity, and strategic partnership over the enforcement of *erga omnes* obligations in the face of a determined sovereign state. The international community's response to the 2019 changes characterized by rhetorical concern but a clear absence of meaningful punitive action serves as a potent case study in this dynamic, illustrating how legal norms are often subordinated to strategic imperatives (Mazumdar, 2024). Thus, the Kashmir impasse resides in a convergence zone where law, politics, and human rights collide, revealing the profound limitations of international legal order. The abrogation of Article 370 represents the triumph of a hardened, domestic sovereignty model. The human rights dimension presents a powerful moral and emerging legal counter-narrative that challenges the legitimacy of that sovereignty. Yet, the geopolitical reality ensures that this legal and ethical contest remains largely academic in terms of enforceable outcomes. The international legal framework provides the vocabulary for the dispute but not the adjudicative or enforcement power to resolve it, as power politics effectively neutralizes its mechanisms. Consequently, Kashmir persists as a stark illustration of a fundamental truth: in the absence of a centralized sovereign, international law functions not as a definitive adjudicator but as a discursive battleground, where norms are invoked and contested but where ultimate outcomes are determined by material power and strategic interest, leaving the Kashmiri people trapped in a legal limbo with profound human costs.

### Conclusion

The Kashmir dispute, scrutinized through the rigorous lens of international law, ultimately reveals a profound and perhaps irreconcilable normative schism at the heart of the international legal order itself. This analysis demonstrates that the conflict is not a simple clash between right and wrong, but a tragic collision between two foundational, yet opposing, principles: the *jus cogens* right to self-determination and the inviolable principle of state



sovereignty and territorial integrity. The historical legal record, particularly the UN Security Council's plebiscite resolutions, establishes a powerful conditional framework that privileged the will of the Kashmiri people as the ultimate source of political legitimacy. Conversely, India's subsequent legal strategy anchored in the bilateral Simla Agreement, deep constitutional integration, and the assertive invocation of domestic jurisdiction has constructed an equally robust edifice of sovereign claim, effectively seeking to render the historical conditionality obsolete through the doctrines of effective control and *uti possidetis juris*. The 2019 abrogation of Article 370 is the apotheosis of this sovereignty-driven approach, a unilateral attempt to transform a contested legal reality into an immutable political fact. Yet, as this article has argued, such actions cannot extinguish the underlying legal question; they merely transmute it, exacerbating the tension by adding severe human rights concerns to the original procedural denial of a democratic verdict.

Consequently, the impasse in Kashmir stands as a stark testament to the limits of international law as an adjudicative mechanism in the face of hardened sovereignty and geopolitical realpolitik. The law provides the eloquent, contradictory vocabularies for both claims but lacks the centralized authority to weight them definitively or to enforce a solution contrary to the interests of a determined major power. The international community's practice marked by strategic silence and a preference for bilateralism over multilateral enforcement demonstrates that in the contemporary order, the presumptive stability of territorial control often outweighs the imperative of enforcing peremptory norms like self-determination, especially when such enforcement carries significant strategic costs. Thus, Kashmir remains trapped in a legal and political limbo. It is a territory where a people's right to choose remains a suspended, unimplemented promise of international law, while the state's right to rule is enforced through domestic power but remains perpetually contested in the court of international legitimacy. This unresolved contradiction ensures that Kashmir is not a relic of history but a continuing, festering grievance, a permanent question mark on the map that challenges the coherence and moral authority of the rules-based international order itself.

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