

**Thesis Title:** *Land Reform, Class Relations and Political Islam: Understanding the Rise of Jamaat-e-Islami in Kashmir*

## **Abstract**

Political insurrections and peasant uprisings have historically compelled post-colonial states to implement agrarian reforms, notably redistributive land programs – but can such transformative agrarian reorganisations also backfire and catalyse anti-state movements? This thesis aims to analyse this possible dialectical relationship between state-led land reforms – intended to pacify rural unrest – and agrarian restructuring that creates new social formations with a revolutionary consciousness rooted in religious thought. This study examines these dynamics in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by investigating changes in land tenure systems resulting in the emergence of new rural classes, the rise of Political Islam in the form of *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Party of Islam), and the eruption of armed insurgency in the late 1980s. In so doing, this thesis challenges some of the conventional assumptions about the stabilising effects of redistributive policies. Specifically, I analyse the connection between agrarian transformation and the emergence of Sunni Islamism in Kashmir's countryside, and how this Muslim revivalist movement subsequently triggered a counter-revolution against the (Indian) state and its clientelist regime in the territory. Additionally, the study examines how the Indian state operationalised land legislation and pre-existing colonial revenue structures as mechanisms of territorial governance and control, facilitating what scholars have conceptualised as a settler colonial project in Kashmir.

The thesis further explores the historical, socio-political and economic factors that played a role in advancing support for *Jamaat-e-Islami* among Kashmir's peasant and rural working classes, and how Kashmiri Islamists parallelly operationalised Islamic doctrine to reshape the region's rural political economy. I argue that this revivalist movement, in contrast to other manifestations of Islamism globally, emerged mainly from the middle, smallholding peasants and rural working classes, forming a political force that partook in the armed insurgency in a region where peasant uprisings were previously considered non-existent. I analyse how new forms of social differentiation were created through agrarian restructuring and how this process produced a new middle peasantry that subsequently mobilised the rural classes around a broader nationalist liberation agenda rooted in ideas of Islamism. To this end, I integrate a Marxian class analysis of agrarian change with a historically embedded anthropological inquiry to study the dynamics of political Islam in this disputed Himalayan territory. This methodological approach highlights the dynamic relationships between material conditions, ideological formations, and the collective mobilisation of peasants and workers in a territory where questions of sovereignty, identity, and territorial control remain contested. The historically embedded anthropological method provides crucial context for understanding how wider

Islamism currents shape localised practices among Muslims, while the political economy framework illuminates the material foundations underlying religious (and nationalist) mobilisation.

Beyond illuminating the underlying factors behind the emergence of Kashmir's Islamism and subsequent armed rebellion, theoretically, this thesis provides fresh insights into the articulation of class and capital in relation to religious ideology within socio-political movements associated with political Islam. The study aims to contribute to the critical analysis of land reforms and agrarian social movements in contexts characterised by ongoing forms of (settler) colonialism. Moreover, the research traces the historical development of Kashmir's Sunni Islamism in conjunction with broader contemporary Islamic currents in South Asia — examining the process of ideological circulation and adaptation. Lastly, the thesis sheds light on Indian state's instrumentalization of colonial-period land revenue systems to advance a new settler-colonial project through land control and demographic transformations in the disputed territory.

**Key words:** *Land redistribution reform, Agrarian change, Jammu and Kashmir, Jamaat-e-Islami, Political Islam, Muslim revivalism, Peasant movements and Settler Colonialism.*