

Journal of Peace Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly



Journal Homepage: <https://www.icpsnet.org/journal-of-peace-studies>

Kargil's Shia Connection with Iran: Between Faith and Geopolitics

Zainab Akhter, Independent Researcher, New Delhi

To cite this article: Akhter, Z. (2026), "Kargil's Shia Connection with Iran: Between Faith and Geopolitics", *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol 33, Issue 1, 113-115, January - March 2026.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20083489



© 2026 Published by Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), New Delhi.



Published: 31 March 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Vol. 33, Issue 1, January - March 2026



CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES, NEW DELHI, 110070

Website: www.icpsnet.org

OPINION

Kargil's Shia Connection with Iran: Between Faith and Geopolitics

Zainab Akhter*



The connection between Kargil and Iran is deep-rooted, spanning centuries of religious, cultural and linguistic history. This connection has evolved from early missionary activities to modern-day political and educational ties. The majority of Kargil's population belongs to the Twelver Shia (Ithna Ashariya) sect which began in the 15th and 16th centuries when missionaries and scholars, most notably Mir Shams-ud-Din Iraqi from Iran (Khorasan) visited the region to preach. For generations, Kargili scholars have travelled to Iranian holy cities like Qom and Mashhad for higher religious education. These scholars known as Agas and Sheikhs, return to Kargil as influential religious leaders, often bringing back Iranian theological perspectives.

While the local language is Purgi or Balti, many religious texts, elegies (Marsiyas), and poetry used in Kargil are written in or heavily influenced by Persian. In recent years, Iran has become a popular destination for students from Kargil seeking affordable higher education, particularly in medical programs at institutions like Tehran University.

Protests and rallies frequently erupt in Kargil in support of Iran and against US and Israeli policies highlighting a solidarity with Iranian Shia. The Iman Khomeini Memorial trust (IKMT) established in 1979, same year as that of Iranian revolution has been instrumental in organising religious, social and political rallies in the region. Although IKMT is also involved in education and charity but its main

** Zainab Akhter, Independent Researcher, New Delhi.*

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20083489

KARGIL'S SHIA CONNECTION WITH IRAN: BETWEEN FAITH AND GEOPOLITICS

aim is to propagate the idea of Islamic revolution.

The news of the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on 28 February 2026, triggered massive and emotional protests in Kargil. On 6 March 2026, tens of thousands of residents gathered in Kargil's Khamenei Chowk. The protest was jointly led by two influential religious groups in Kargil, Jamiat Ul Ulama Isna Ashriya Kargil (JUIAK) and IKMT. Although both are Shia religious organisations, the main difference is that JUIAK is influenced by religious schools from Iraq while IKMT is directly influenced by Iran. Demonstrators wore black, waved black and red flags (symbolising mourning and martyrdom), and performed matam (traditional the streets. The rallies featured intense chanting against the United State and Israel. Portraits of Ayatollah Khamenei were displayed on almost every street corner, and many protestors carried his image as they marched through the main bazar to the Isna Ashriya Chowk.

The religious leaders framed the assassination as a terrorist act and an attack on the global Shia community and emphasised that for Kargil Khamenei was not just a political leader but a Marja (source of emulation) and a spiritual guide. Not

only the Shia community, the Sunni Muslims also joined the protests and organised similar protests across the region. Zanskar, which is a sizeable pocket of Sunni Muslim among the majority Buddhist also took out protest in favour of Iran chanting anti US/ Israel slogans.

Another major highlight is the massive donation drives that has been organised across Kargil (and Kashmir) region to provide humanitarian aid (including cash, gold and livestock) to help Iran cope with the economic pressure and conflict related hardships. These donation drives are organised almost in all the villages in Kargil and the organisers are coming up with unique ways to collect cash for Iran's cause. In one village, a hen was auctioned and sold for almost one Lakh Indian rupees and an egg was sold for six thousand Indian rupees and people are coming forward and donating whatever item they can afford. The donation drive in Kargil has been described as one of the most unique grassroots humanitarian efforts in recent history, these campaigns not just stood out for its scale, but for the types of items being donated. One of the most poignant aspects of the drive involved children bringing their piggy banks to local imanbaras (religious centers) and breaking them open to contribute

KARGIL'S SHIA CONNECTION WITH IRAN:
BETWEEN FAITH AND GEOPOLITICS

their small savings to the war-affected civilians of Iran. The drive reached its peak during the Eid-ul-Fitr 2026, instead of traditional celebrations, many families redirected their holiday spending toward the "Iran Relief Fund".

For the people of Kargil, these donations were not just humanitarian; they were a symbolic message of spiritual debt. Community leaders stated that since Iran has historically provided religious and academic guidance to the region, the community felt a moral obligation to stand by them during their most difficult hour. The Iranian Embassy in Delhi issued a formal statement of gratitude, noting that this kindness from people of Ladakh and Kashmir will never be forgotten. While the total monetary value was significant, the drive's true impact was its viral visibility, which brought global attention to the deep-seated cultural and emotional bonds between the high-altitude border

regions of India and the people of Iran.

Known to the international community primarily for the 1999 conflict, Kargil has recently regained global attention, shifting focus toward its unique relationship with Iran and its implications for India and the broader geopolitical equilibrium. A new chapter in Indo-Iranian geopolitics opened with Iran's recent recognition of Kargil's local efforts. Notably, Tehran announced it would not obstruct Indian vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, framing the gesture as a tribute to the people of India rather than a concession to the government. Given its position, Kargil exists at a strategic crossroads: while it is geopolitically integral to India, it remains profoundly linked to Iran through shared cultural and religious ties. Consequently, the region possesses the potential to serve as either a vital diplomatic buffer or a significant bone of contention between the two nations. ■

Journal of Peace Studies



FOUNDING EDITOR
LATE PROF. RIYAZ PUNJABI

ADVISORY BOARD

SALEEM KIDWAI
SANDRA DESTRADE
RENÉ WADLOW
G BALACHANDRAN
PRAFULLA PRUSTY

EDITORIAL BOARD

NOOR AHMAD BABA
AJAY DARSHAN BEHERA
SMRUTI S PATTANAİK
P.V. RAMANA
RAJESH KHARAT

EDITOR (HONY)
ASHOK BEHURIA

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
MOHMAD WASEEM MALLA

ASSISTANT EDITOR
PRATEEK JOSHI

DESIGN
BRINDA DATTA

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY
SHEIKH KHALID JEHangIR

Centre for Peace Studies

Printed at:
A.M. Offsetters
Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi
PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

Office Address:
157/9, Block 4, Second Floor,
Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj,
New Delhi-110070

Regd. Address:
C-11 Jangpura Extension
New Delhi – 110 014
Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9810317972
<http://www.icpsnet.org>
Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com;
jps@icpsnet.org

SUBSCRIPTION

In India

This Copy	Rs. 350.00
Annual (Individual)	Rs. 1400.00
(Institutional)	Rs. 2000.00

Overseas (Air Mail)

This Copy:	US\$ 15.00 UK£ 11.00
Annual:	US\$ 60.00 UK£ 44.00

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the references. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard Manual Style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, preferably Ms Word. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

Journal of Peace Studies Research Section

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers
RNI No. 57199/93



CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

C-11, Jangpura Extension,
New Delhi – 110 014, INDIA

Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9560126157, 9810317972

Websites: <http://www.icpsnet.org> (Main),
www.icpsorg.com (Kashmir chapter)

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org