**“Ascendancy of Rulers and Mystics of Medieval Kashmir (14th to 17th Century): A Study on Kashmiriyat”**

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**Abstract**

Kashmir Hindu-Muslim encounter is representatively reflected in the concept called Kashmiriyat”. Although Kashmiriyat is imminent in all the aspects of Kashmiri people’s life, it is in fact the powerful shaper of religious and cultural life of its people. Rishi-Sufism, a socio-cultural religious space where several Hindus and Muslims once practiced their faiths, is one of the most prevalent expressions of Kashmiriyat in 14th to 17th century. The Rishi-Sufis practice shaped the concept of immanence of God, respect for all religions, beliefs in miracles, reincarnation, meditation, and asceticism and Hinduism and the spirit of Eightfold Paths from Buddhism and incorporated these to the concept of transcendence of God and to the spirit of “Five Pillars “ of Islam for launching the syncretic socio-religious space for inter-religious interactions. The “ethno-cultural symbiotic” consciousness, and Hindu-Buddhist inter-religious symbiotic spiritual consciousness, shaped the evolution of The “Kashmiriyat.” Moreover, the socio-political space, shaped by peaceful interactions among Muslims and Hindus under the leadership of Sultan Ghayas-ud-Din, Zain-ul-Abidin and Akber, not only helped both categories of religious groups to have a spiritual symbiotic consciousness but also helped them to contribute to the evolution of the “Kashmiriyat”. Within the context of the current ongoing, both separatist Kashmiri Muslims’ propaganda against the Hindus and Hindu-Buddhist prejudice against Muslims have complicated the nature of conflict. Yet there is one point that needed to be noted regarding the Kashmiriyat that is the philosophy involved in Kashmiriyat transcends the religious teachings of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Further, Kashmiriyat is not an Islamic tool of religious conversion as feared by the Hindus and Buddhists of Kashmir. Present political dispute is about the power sharing among the regional and religious communities. Thus, the continued peaceful political co-existence of the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities essentially depends on the further evolution of “Kashmiriyat” in Kashmir politics.

**Keywords:** Kashmiriyat, Koshur, Mysticism, Tradition, Belongingness.

**1: Introduction**

The history of Kashmir indicates that the encounters among the ethnic and the religious communities often resulted in oppositional and dialectical relationships in the socio-religious life of its people. Often these encounters historically caused differentiation, competition, confrontations and conflicting interactions among the communities. Moreover, the encountering religions, on the one hand, deepened the respect for one’s own religious believes, and on the other hand, deepened hatred towards believes, practice, and rituals of other communities. However, some encounters among people of different religions have created syncretic social space in which some peaceful interaction among them occurred. For instance, Buddhist-Hindu encounter in the 3rd century B.C. was developed into a socio-cultural space called “Kashmiriyat” where people of both religions were living harmoniously. From 14th century this socio-cultural space exhibits both blending of religious belief systems of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism and the incorporation of Hindu Rishi tradition into unrelated Islamic Sufi tradition.

This has been explained to have occurred for several reasons. First is the proximate existence of Islam with Buddhism and Hinduism due to the syncretistic Hindu-Buddhist culture of Kashmir. Second is the historical presence of the so-called Rishi tradition of Hindus that was utilized by Muslims when they attempted to conquer the territory by converting Hindus and Buddhists to Islam in 14th century. As the Hindu Rishi tradition was similar to Sufi practices in Isla, Muslims as conquerors incorporated the Rishi tradition into the Sufism. Thus, syncretic socio-cultural Rishi-Sufi practice emerged. Third is that the above- mentioned Rishi-Sufism practice gradually developed into a movement and it functioned as a mechanism to de-escalate the inter-religious tension among Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly Hindus and Buddhists.

The “Kashmiriyat,” as a matter of fact, functioned as not only a social space for inter-community interaction but also as value, that broadened the Hindus and Muslims’ horizon of inter-community tolerance and co-existence in Kashmir. However, in recent years, “Kashmiriyat” has been under attack from the communities of Kashmir for various reasons. While the Fundamentalist Muslims who demand autonomy from India see Kashmiriyat as deviation from Islam, the Hindus of Jammu and the Buddhists of Laddakh who seek autonomy from the dominant political control of the Kashmir Valley see Kashmiriyat as the Muslim religious tool for Islamisation of region. Thus the current Kashmir conflict should be considered as an inter-religious political conflict in which people among different communities demand their right to decide the future of politics in Kashmir.

In this study, an attempt is made to explore the emergence and development of “Kashmiriyat”, which is a social consciousness and a sense of belongingness shared among Kashmiri residents. By examining the Kashmiriyat concept, in the ethnic-religious, inter-religious Buddhist and Hindu interaction with Islam, and in the Rishi-Sufi movement, this paper examines the nature and its role in the recent Kashmir inter-religious political dispute.

**2. Kashmiriyat**

This part of discussion deals with ‘question of Kashmiriyat’ according to various scholars. In Kashmir, pre-British colonial period, irrespective of religion and ethnicity, the people’s traditional sense of belongingness were expressed by the term “Kashmiriyat”. There are several studies that have been carried out by scholars regarding the concept of Kashmiriyat. These studies have come up with two contradictory findings regarding the concept of Kashmiriyat.

The first scholarly view, considers Kashmiriyat as a constituent element of Kashmir society. The second groups perceive Kashmiriyat as a Muslim instrument for converting Kashmiri people to Islam.

One of prominent proponents of first view is T.N. Madan. According to him, “Kashmiriyat refers to Kashmiri identity cutting across the religious divide and can be defined as a love of the homeland and even a common speech.” On the other hand, representative proponent of the second group, Pravez Dewan holds a view that Kashmiriyat is an Islamic Sufi movement aimed at the conversion of Hindus and Buddhist into Islam. He considers that Sufi movement is an evidence of the fact that “Islam did not need the sword, or even state patronage, to flourish in Kashmir”. The Kashmiriyat is generally thought to have been developed under the rule of the Muslim governor called Sultan Ghayas-ud-Din Zain-ul-Abidin, (popularly known as Budshah, the great king) who ruled Kashmir from 1423 to 1474 A.D., and the Mughal emperor Jalal-ud-Din Mohammad Akbar (known as Akbar the great ‘1542 to 1605’). It is under the strong leadership of these two great rulers that the social consciousness of brotherhood was created among the communities of Kashmir. Again, it also needed to be noted that through the communities’ intercommunity encounters, value of brotherhood slowly became a personal value for many Kashmiri people.

Some scholars consider that it is not only brotherhood but also a social space that let people interact beyond religious and cultural walls. That is why despite of their religious differences, even after the death of the kings, Kashmiri people cherished mutual brotherhood and handed over the “Kashmiriyat consciousness” from generation to generation. The common feature of sharing surnames among the Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir unlike in other parts of India has been considered a symbol of Kashmiriyat. This brotherhood even now often found felt intuitively people living in the common territory of Kashmir Valley.

Although some Hindu and Muslim critique of the Kashmiriyat claim that with the 1989 insurgency Kashmiriyat is dead, the trust and brotherhood created by it is alive to some extent even today. Despite all the conflict between the Muslims and Hindu Pandits, in Kashmir Valley, Muslim Liberation Front (JKLF) Chairman, Yasin Malik, Jamat-i-Islami and his colleague, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, were medically treated by two top Pandit doctors namely Dr. U.Kaul and Dr. Sameer Kaul. These two doctors rose above community feelings and overcame the pain of forced migrations of the fellow Pandits to treat two separatists who are blamed for Kasmiri Pandits’ exodus from the Valley. An equally note-worthy fact is that these separatist leaders still esteem Kashmiri Pandit doctors with whom they can speak in their mother tongue.

Other scholars held a view that “Kashmiriyat” is a gradual outcome of mutual adaptation of the ethnic and religious traditions. The most profound example of the reciprocal adoption of the culture and tradition in terms of Kashmiriyat is found in the interaction between the ethnic and religious communities. Many members of the ethnic communities were converted to Buddhism or Islam by the time 17th century. The ethnic converts to Islam and Buddhism even after conversion as Muslims and Buddhist retained quite a big number of traditional practices and beliefs. Thus, one can say that the ethnic communities attained a new religious identity without losing the previous ethnic identity.

The overview of the views expressed by various scholars leads us to generally conceive the idea of Kashmiriyat as follows. It is an expression of solidarity, resilience, and patriotism among the people of Kashmir. It means Kasmiriness and can be defined as a secular ethno-national as well as a socio-cultural consciousness and/or a cultural value that binds the people of Kashmir together.

In our research, discuss with some ethnic groups during the recent unrest in Kashmir in 2019, it was found that this unique syncretistic culture and a way of life “Kashmiriyat” has been founded on humanism and that tolerance is a way of life for many Kashmiris. It should be also noted that the constituent communities of Kashmir share the idea of “Kashmiriyat” without losing their original identity and people there are inclusive of others living different communities on the level of their social lives. For example, Muslims even after conversion keep their Hindu family name. Hindu-Muslim shared folklore and folk music has contributed to the mutual recognition of cultural togetherness.

**2.1: The Kashmiri language**

The aboriginal Dardic tribes of Kashmir evolved their own language, which can be termed as Koshur. But with the advent of the Vedic Aryans, this language which had Dardic base underwent a change and came under the influence of the Indian-Aryan or Iranian language. Though the language was completely Sanskritized in succeeding centuries, yet the Kashmiris retained their own way of pronunciation. The original Kashmiri words, idioms and proverbs can still be traced in the present day Kashmmiri language, which is mixed of many languages, such as Aramaic, Sanskrit and Persian. In the ancient literature Kashmir has been mentioned as of Gandhara, which may be termed as which may termed as a cultural or political unit extending from Anantnag to Peshawar, with Taxila as its center. Before the rise of Buddhism, the whole of Gandhara was under the Nagas. In the old traditions, we find some Naga scholars, like Kapila, Patanjali, and the author of Paramaratha-Sara. In the same way Naga-Arjuna and Naga-Bodhi, who command much respect in the Buddhist world, were also Nagas. They were Dards, with the base of Nagar in Dardistan, garnished with such lovely wild flowers and fruits, that one exclaims,”surely the tales of fair Kashmir can only fairy tales of good kings and happy prosperous people”. Koshur , the language spoken by the Kashmiris is their identity. In its literature, we have proverbs, riddles, folk tales, mystical compositions, love lyrics, folk songs.

In this language, the Kashmiris have preserved their history of 8000 years besides the beauty of their land and versatile genus of its people. In Koshur are preserved their feelings, the life of toil, their sufferings under alien rulers and their aspirations. This language has kept all Kashmiris bounded together. An inhabitant of Kashmir is called Koshur and so also his language. As such, Kashmiri language is the symbol of Kashmiri nationhood or “Kashmiriyat”.

**2**.**2:** **Historiography**: We Kashmiris have the distinction of having a recorded history of over six thousand years. In the field of historiography, we have written histories in Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu and English from ancient times to the present century. In the field of historiography, the names of Ratnakara, Kalhana, Suka, Srivara, Jonaraja, Mulla Ahmad, Mulla Nadri, Mohammad Mehdi, Mohsin Fani, Narayan Koul, Muhammad Azam, Birbal Kachru, Ghulam Hassan, Bamzai, G.M.D. Sufi and Fauq are well known.

**3. Hazrat Bulbul Shah**

Hazrat Bulbul Shah a Sufi mystic, arrived in Kashmir in about 1320, during the reign of Lha Chen Gyalbo Rinchana the Buddhist king of Kashmir. At that time the king was highly agitated due to the reason Devaswami, the head priest of the Brahmans had refused to admit Rinchana into the Shaiva food. He ordered his councilors to invite the Dervish to his court and asked for interpreters. Hazrat Bulbul Shah told the king, that he was a Sufi and his religion was Islam. As such the king got interested to know more about Islam and continued discussing with the Dervish for a month or more. Finally, he decided to embrace Islam.

The above would show that Islam was brought to Kashmir by the Buddhist king, who became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. Following his examples, his queen Kota Rani, his councilors, including Ravachandra, his Laddakhi Buddhist retainers and bodyguards, his Kashmiri Buddhist nobles and officers of the government became Muslims at the hands of Hazrat Bulbul Shah. This was unique and silent revolution in which a mass of people along with their ruler changed religion in a most peaceful way.

It was mixing and blending of three cultures: Buddhist, Shaivism and Islam into one culture, known now “Kashmiriyat”. It is due to this unique event that the tomb of Hazrat Bulbul Shah at Bulbul Lankar, Srinagar has become a symbol of the Kashmir’s composite culture.

**3.1: The Sultanate Period (1320-1586)**

The Sultanate period in the history of Kashmir to the end of the 16th century is considered as the glorious period of Kashmiriyat. It was the period when Kashmir had its own rulers, which were not only great builders but also benevolent to their subjects. Most of them did much to ameliorate the conditions of the people. Irrigation facilities were provided by constructing of canals. Many new arts and crafts such as paper mashie, shawl and carpet weaving, Namda-sazi, wood work were introduced. It was during the period that Kashmiris established its trade and commercial links with Central Asian countries, the Punjab, Afghanistan, and Tibet. Kashmir became an important post on the Silk-Route and its branch route to Lahore. During the Sultan Shihab-ud-Din (1354-1373), the Kashmiris subjugated Kashgar, Badakshan, Kabul and Sind.

Another great ruler of this period was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin who ushered benevolent rule for his people. Irrespective of religious considerations, he paved the way for religious toleration, long before the Mughal emperor, Akbar. During the sultanate period, the Kashmiris evolved a humanistic philosophy known as the Rishi Order, founded by the saint patron of Kashmir, HazratNund Rishi. These Muslim Rishis played an important role as they preached love, justice, social reforms, piety and Islamic principles of peace and brotherhood. These Sultans were patrons of culture. During the period, Kashmir remained not only independent but the enjoyed benefits of material prosperity and cultural advancement. With the advent of the Mughals in India, a time came when Kashmiris lost their independence and Kashmir sank into oblivion.

**4. Lalla Ded**

Lalla Ded, Lalleshwari and Lalla (1320-1389), had expressed her ideas in Kashmiri –her mother tongue, instead of Sanskrit or Persian. Despite the fact that she was a Hindu and a votary of Shaivism, she spoke in the language of Muslim Sufis. In fact, it was the resurgence of the Kashmiriyat, which embodies toleration, secularism and brotherhood. In her Vaakhs, she tells all to make no distinction between human beings on the basis of religion. Rather they are asked to look inward and realize God. Her greatest contribution was her grooming of Hazrat Nund Rishi, who later rose to the position of the saint patron of Kashmir.

**4.1: Silsila-I-Rishian (Rishi Order)**

With the advent of Sultanate period in 1320, the Kashmiris evolved a new humanistic philosophy known as the Silsila-I-Rishian or the Rishi Order. It was founded by the great patron saint of Kashmir, Jagat Guru Shaikh-ul-Alam, HazratShaikh Noor-ud-Din Wali whose real name was Nund Rishi. His disciples, who belonged to the various faiths, were the harbingers of secularism, brotherhood and peace. All mystic movements aim at the same thing; purification of the heart and attainment of bliss. The ***Silsila***-***i***-***Rishian*** was a meeting ground for the aforementioned movements and is indigenous to Kashmir. The standard bearer of this order is Shaikh Noor-ud-Din wali alias Nund a Rishi. Some call him Shahajanunda, while his other names Alamdar-i- Kashmir or the standard bearer of Kashmir. The banner or the flag of Kashmir can be no other than Kashmiriyat which means fear of God, love for mankind, sympathy for the poor and service to the fellow human beings. He founded a composite philosophy which has been the hallmark of the Kshmiris for centuries now. In fact, the Kshmiris identity cannot be separated from the Silsila-i-Rishian. The great Rishis of kashmirhad a quest for peace and harmony and worked towards the attainment of the same. Shaikh Noor-ud-Din not only taught spiritual equality of man but desired to extend it to the economic and social life also. He desired everyone to be the votary of the unity of man. He loved all and respected all faiths. In his teachings, he did not use the terminology of a particular faith.

The poetic compositions of Nund Rishi are termed as ***Shruks***. In these, he expresses what is best and noble for human beings. He says:

*“There is one God*

*But with different names”!*

*“We belong to the same parents:*

*Then why this difference*

*Let Hindus and Muslims (together)*

*Worship God alone”.*

**4.2: An Icon of Kashmiriyat**

Sultan Zin-ul-Abidin, popularly known as Sultan-al-AzamBudshah or the great king of Kashmir, is perhaps the most liberal amongst all Muslim rulers of India. In the words of contemporary historian Jonaraja, “the king knew many languages, was the master of learning, who was benevolent, accessible, tolerant, kind, virtuous, meritorious and liberal. It was his magnanimity that as a ruler professing Muslim faith, he got rebuilt the two temples of Martanda and Amarnatha. Sultan Budshah, who ruled over Kashmir from 1420-1459, can be termed as most popular icon of “Kashmiriyat”, for he treated all his subjects, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists with love and affection. It was due to great qualities that his Hindu subjects titled him as an incarnation of Narayana.

**5: Glorious Reign**

Sultan Mohammad Yusuf Shah Chak (1578-1586) made every effort to rule the kingdom on the basis of justice and fair play. He also worked hard for the welfare of his subjects, irrespective of caste and creed. He was a secular minded kind who abolished the much hated Jazia tax, which had been imposed on the Hindu subjects. The king also terminated most of the taxes and exactions, which had been made current by the previous kings. As killing of cows hurts the sentiments of the Hindus, the king issued a farmaan, which banned cow slaughter. As a lover of nature, he issued orders prohibiting cutting of forest trees. He gave orders to his army to remain in discipline and refrain from indulging in unlawful acts. Prajyabhatta and Shuka in their historical work, the Rajtarangini speak very high about the glorious reign of Sultan Mohammad Yusuf Shah. They write:

King Yosobha ruled the country, even as the sun rules the lotuses when darkness departs. When the king began to rule the country, Indra sent rain in due measure, the breezes that gave pleasure to all blew, and the sun god shone in person. His fame spread over the world, but his prosperity stayed in his house bound by his merits, and did not stray anywhere else. The king had many good qualities, but his only fault was that he sheltered prosperity, which was fickle, in his house, and sent out fame which was steady. The moon is well known to be a foe of the meritorious, and how could he equal the king who was friend to worthy men?

The philosophy behind the conception of Kashmiriyat is the pride of the Kashmiri people in greatness of its independent kings. In this connection Sultan Mohammad Yusuf Shah Chak is a Kashmiri icon of “Kashmiriyat”.

**5.1.Kashmiriyat invaded**

On July 23, 1589, Sultan Mohammad Yaqub Shah presented himself to the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who deputed him to Bihar to remain imprisoned along with his father. With his submission the independent identity of Kashmir came to an end and it amounted to the surrender of Kashmiriyat. The contemporary historian remarks:

“What is worse for the love of life, he submitted abjectly and disgracefully to the great Mughal. Had he died fighting for the independence of his country, he would have left behind the name of a hero and an ardent fighter for the freedom of his country”.

**Conclusion**

“Kashmiriyat” represents the best fruit of the centuries of interaction between ancient ethno-religious traditions of Kashmir and Islam. It is a synthesis of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islamic teaching. It was through the cultural appropriation of Hindu-Buddhist religious elements such as immanence of God, respect for other religions, belief in reincarnation, the right path developing mind’s potential through meditation and absorption, belief in miracles, and love of idols of gods and goddesses by the Sufis created the social religious space of “Kashmiriyat”. Thus, “Kashmiriyat” could not have been possible without the Muslim interaction with the spiritual symbiosis that existed between ethnic communities, Buddhism and Hinduism. It also needs to be remembered that though Kashmiriyat has evolved through influence of the religious teachings, in essence it remains primarily secular movement. Above all, meeting between Hinduism and Islam resulted cultural and psychological change in both religions. At the group level, these changes have been shown in the culture, customs, and religious rituals. Noticeable group level effects of Hindu-Muslim encounter included changes in the religious food, clothing, and prayers. At the individual level, changes have been shown to be associated not just only with changes in daily behavior, but with numerous measures of psychological physical well-being of Hindus and Muslims. Thus, the “Kashmiriyat” is essential for social unity and well-being of the Kashmiri people.

Now Kashmir is in intercommunity political dispute regarding its political future. In this regard, it also needs to be noted that political dominance of Kashmiri majority Muslim is the root causes of the political dispute. A continued peaceful co-existence of the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities in Kashmir is essential for the further development of Kashmir. The context of intercommunity dispute, it demands a balance of political power between the communities in the governance of the Kashmir region. It need to be remembered that this demand possibly contented by going back to the Kashmiriyat spirit, and by instituting a federal legislature for power sharing in the communal line with democratic spirit and love for once own region.

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