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Sadbhavana

DIGEST

KASHMIRIYAT

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Sadbhavana, Kashmiriyat and Moral Relativism

The incompatibility paradox



[Source: Image](#)

Introduction:

In 1947 when India gained independence the princely states had only two options, join India or Pakistan. In two states, Hyderabad and Junagadh the rulers were Muslim while the majority was Hindu, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir it was the other way round. In Hindu majority states India took military action and they were annexed.

Pakistan also tried military action in Jammu and Kashmir. While in Muslim majority areas of Jammu region there was rebellion against the Maharaja and joined Pakistan, in Kashmir valley, more than 90% Muslims, rejected Pakistan and opted to join Indian Union. The Maharaja signed the instrument of accession and India was vested with sovereign right over the territory.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is a multicultural state. For more than six centuries, Kashmiri Pandits and the Muslims had lived together peacefully; they shared language, ethnicity and social practices; there was Sadbhavana or goodwill labeled as Kashmiriyat.

Just forty years after independence, the next generation of Kashmiri Muslims would reject India, the goodwill and trust they had vested in India just evaporated. What followed was a violent Islamic insurgency leading to ethnic cleansing of religious minorities. Today, the paradise has become a war-zone, people live in constant fear, and those in exile live with trauma of separation, loss of identity, loneliness and uncertainty.

How did the goodwill evaporate in just a few decades no one has an answer. How could a civilized society regress to a state where in the name of religion, crimes against humanity are committed with impunity and there is silence? Is this an aberration, can normalcy be restored? These are the question that we explore in this paper?

Kashmiriyat: The enigma

Kashmiriyat remains a highly abused term, interpreted and misinterpreted to further conflicting ideologies. Aparna Rao (ISIM Newsletter, April' 99) claims that the word was coined in 1930s to highlight the distinct Kashmiri identity; it evolved with the liberation movement, explicitly involving both Muslim and Hindu intelligentsia, against feudal-cum-colonial rule. The fact is that the notion of a discrete Kashmiri citizenship goes back to the 1920s, when Kashmiri Hindus, facing competition from Punjabi Hindus, pressed for a formal definition of 'state subjects'.



[Source: Image](#)

Tremblay R. C. (*Kashmir's Secessionist Movement surfaces: Ethnic Identity, Community Competition, and the State*) is of the opinion that "Kashmiriyat was a secular ethnic concept expounded by the 14th-century Muslim ruler Zain-ul-Abdeen that had served to define the cordial relationship between the Valley's Hindu and Muslim communities in the past." She then asserts, "discrimination against Muslims was pervasive and evident throughout the princely state. For example, the 1927 "state-subject ordinances" protected employment exclusively for citizens of the state, but chiefly benefited the Hindu minority in both the Valley and the Jammu region." Sheikh Abdullah, whose impetus was the desire to improve the lot of poor Muslim peasants in Kashmir, succeeded in uniting both Hindus and Muslims in opposition to the autocratic Dogra rule by reviving Kashmiriyat, a composite Kashmiri identity irrespective of religion and a potentially salient historical symbol."

Another scholar has this to say: "It is the religious 'syncretism' that is said to have made Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits different from their respective co-religionists elsewhere. Kashmiri Muslims recite verses of the Quran and Darood (verses in praise of Prophet Mohammad) aloud after Nimaz (puritan form of 'Islam' strictly prohibits it) and there is no strict adherence to hijab or burqa among women. Similarly Kashmiri Pandits follow Shaivism, which incorporates numerous tantric rituals that would be considered unorthodox in usual behaviour of Brahmins (Sender 1988). Though there are differences among Brahmins in rest of India, Kashmiri Pandits consider themselves different from the rest of Brahmins and higher in hierarchy and they follow their own rituals and festivals. Heerath, Navreh and Tiky Tsoram are some of the religious festivals celebrated only by Kashmiri Pandits. One noteworthy point is that while Kashmiri Muslims avoided eating beef, Pandits regularly ate halal mutton".

A Pakistan supported Think-tank, “The European Foundation for South Asian Studies, Amsterdam,” presents the Islamist view, Kashmiriyat they proclaim is a reflection of Islam’s inclusiveness.

“Thousands of Hindus embraced the creed of Bulbul Shah with no sense of resentment or animosity of any sort against these conversions (Yousuf, 2019). As explained by Shafi Ahmad Qadri (2002), a prominent Kashmiri writer: “A revolution of far reaching consequences took place silently and imperceptibly not through the instrumentality of Muslim conqueror but a Tibetan refugee who was born a Buddhist.”

The arrival of a number of Sayyids further accelerated the Islamization of Kashmir. Prominent names amongst them included Sayyid Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Sayyid Taj-ud-din, Sayyid Mas’ud and Sayyid Ali Hamdani (Yousuf, 2019).

The latter, a fourteenth century Persian Kubrawi Saint, popularly known as Shah-i-Hamadan, was a well-travelled scholar who entered Kashmir along with 700 of his disciples, who eventually settled down in various parts of Kashmir, spreading Islam and the principles of the Kubrawi Sufi order.



Persian Kubrawi Saint,
popularly known as
Shah-i-Hamadan

[Source: Image](#)

The Muslim ruler Sultan Qutub-ud-Din made comfortable arrangements for Shah-i-Hamadan and his disciples out of his Sultanate. Shah- i-Hamadan was a prodigious scholar, credited with having 37,000 conversions to Islam in Kashmir; owing to his outstanding spiritual charism. He is popularly remembered as ‘Amir-i Kabir’ (The great leader) and ‘Bani-i Musalmani’ (The founder of Islam [in Kashmir]). (*The Mysticism and Glory of Sufism and Kashmiriyat: Origins, History and the Politics behind it*).

Rai (2004) claims that, “after 1947 Kashmiriyat was propagated by the National Conference and select cultural fragments from an “imagined past” were compiled to construct a Kashmiriyat that would appeal to Pandits and Muslims. It was used by National Conference repeatedly to show the distinct cultural identity of Kashmiris to support the demand for autonomy.”

Hangloo writes, “after Kashmir was taken over by armed insurgency in the late 1980s till date, the term Kashmiriyat has been used so often and in such diverse contexts that one begins to doubt whether it means the same thing at all times or refers to different things at different times.” Confronted with mass uprising, rebellion, violence and civil strife in Kashmir policy makers in Delhi were forced to take notice of the Kashmiri aspirations; and find ways of diffusing the situation.

“Most of the Muslim children born after 1970 adopted Pakistani cricket players' names or Arabic names. This was the Kashmiriyat of the elite. On the one hand local bureaucracy asked for huge development packages (from Indian Government) and on the other it foisted alienation.”

Hence, starting 1980's Kashmiriyat was resurrected by the political and administrative machinery in Delhi, to counter the rise of Islamist movement in Kashmir and their demand for independence. Muslims of Kashmir had to be distanced from Islamists and Kashmiriyat was packaged as Sufi Islam and composite culture.” (*Kashmiriyat Voice of the Past Misconstrued, Kashmiriyat: A Bogey Man*).

Madan (1989), one of the few sociologists who has studied Kashmiri society deep down to the village level, negates the idea of religious 'syncretism.' He points out that the two communities have always maintained their distinctive religious identities and practices. He does concede that in the social and economic sphere the two communities complemented each other; social interaction - visiting each other's homes or attending weddings was the product of co-residence and economic interdependence, and speculates that it could be an explanation for harmonious relationship.

Hassan (*Hassan, K. Migration of Kashmiri Pandits: Kashmiriyat Challenged?*) classifies these diverse explanations and opinions into four categories; (a) Shared history and traditions, (b) Religious syncretism, (c) Pluralism and co-existence and (d) Ethnicity and language.

Shafi Bhat points out (*Political Assertion of Kashmiri Identity, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research, volume 2, November 2011*) that “The Kashmiri identity politics is rooted in the pre-partition period. ...The regional marker of the Kashmiri identity thereafter became quite sharp as Muslim leadership of Jammu disassociated itself from the Kashmiri politics and followed an altogether different direction. .. (it) led Sheikh Abdullah to reject the option of joining Pakistan as it did not have much to offer to Kashmiri's except the idea of homeland for Muslims.”

What is missing in all these explanations and elaborations is an acknowledgement that Kashmir maybe geographically a part of the Indian subcontinent, however, philosophically, theologically and culturally it is highly differentiated from Hinduism.

Kashmir Shavism as a philosophy rejects both dualism and non-dualism; rooted in Tantra and Trika philosophy, it disavows Karma theory and Manusmriti. A Rishi in Kashmir, as Madan points out, is a Karma Yogi, his or her home is the temple.

Kashmir: The paradise

Situated on the Silk Road connecting multiple cultures, Kashmir, a land of beauty, was a major destination of scholars from various traditions, Buddhism, Jainism, Vedic Hinduism, Tantric practices and other esoteric religions. In course of time it became a sanctuary for mystics and nature lovers who settled this valley, and transformed it as the paradise on earth. Kashmir was conquered and ruled by invaders from Asian heartland and Indian subcontinent. In the recorded history of Kashmir, going back to Vedic period, Kashmir attracted a diversity of ethnic groups with different religious affiliations, Hindus, Buddhists, Jain and the Hill tribes and they lived in peace; violence was not a way of life.



[Source: Image](#)

It was during the Karkota dynasty (c. 625–855 CE), that Kashmiri Kings fought battles and built an empire. Lalitaditya Mukhtapida (724 -760 CE) is credited with the expansion of the boundaries of his empire to include large parts of Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. It was also the beginning of a renaissance movement in Kashmir. As trade and industry flourished it attracted wealth and scholars followed.



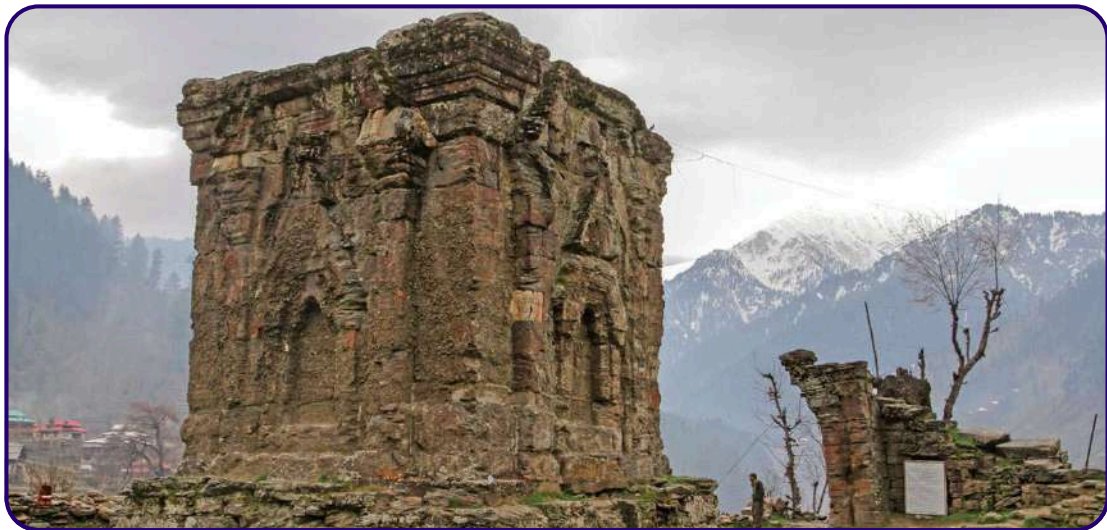
Lalitaditya Mukhtapida
(724 -760 CE)

[Source: Image](#)

Scholars from various traditions, Buddhism, Jainism, Brahmanism, Tantric practitioners and other esoteric religions would come to Kashmir to learn from the Masters. In 9th century Abhinavgupta, philosopher and Yogi, who had mastered all forms of Tantras, developed yoga practices for achieving physical and mental tranquility.

Grounded in the theory of aesthetics what developed was the philosophy of pure monism and pragmatism, distinctly different from dualism, non-dualism, Buddhism and Jainism. It would transform the world-view and the way of life of the people of Kashmir for centuries to come.

Known as Sharada Peeth, the abode of the Goddess of knowledge Kashmir was a major center of learning. Apart from Taxila Universities, Sharada University and Vijeshwara university, both located in the valley, developed as major centers of scholarship in Asia. They were home to poets, scholars, historians and philosophers, such as Vasugupta, Utpala, Abhinavagupta, Kshemraja, Anandavardhana and Kalhana who produced some of the greatest works in Sanskrit literature, poetry, art, philosophy and aesthetics. Sharada university library had the largest collection of Jain scriptures and attracted many notable scholars from outside Kashmir.



[Source: Image](#)

However, the great works of literature, poetry and plays of that period also suggest that Kashmir became a victim of “Great society syndrome.” The Lohar dynasty that followed could not keep the empire together. Fourteenth century was a period of disquiet in the region. In 1299 Ottomans established themselves in Turkey, soon after Timur would start his campaign of conquest and terror. In this turmoil, persecuted at home Persian Sufis found Kashmir an attractive destination. Kashmir thus attracted a steady stream of adventurers, missionaries, traders and vagabonds. Shah Mir, one such migrant, entered the service of King Suhadeva. In 1339 he organized a rebellion and would become the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir.

Thereafter it continued to be colonized by Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and finally by British/Dogras. However, in spite of tremendous cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, it retained its moral ethos, the people lived harmoniously. However, British colonization would introduce communal politics in Kashmir valley; the first communal clash between the Hindus and Muslims took place during the Dogra regime in 1931 and it would change the social dynamics.

Political islam and the rishi tradition

Islam came to Kashmir by accident of history. Shahmir's accession was a palace coup, his courtiers were Shavite scholars, Sanskrit remained the court language and the Vedic traditions were maintained in the court. Sanskrit would continue to be used for a few generations and was then replaced by Persian.



[Source: Image](#)

It was during the Karkota dynasty (c. 625–855 CE), that Kashmiri Kings fought battles and built an empire. Lalitaditya Mukhtapida (724 -760 CE) is credited with the expansion of the boundaries of his empire to include large parts of Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. It was also the beginning of a renaissance movement in Kashmir. As trade and industry flourished it attracted wealth and scholars followed.

Buffered by the mountains, Kashmir remained socially and culturally isolated from the political, social upheavals, religious wars, tribalism and anti-Brahminical movements in India. Mughal, Afghan and Sikh appointed Governors and ruled from distance, which brought stability, but religious persecution did not end.

During this period Kashmiri Pandits migrated and found employment in Indian Princely states, including Delhi, Lucknow, Lahore and Kabul. It created a cosmopolitan Kashmiri Diaspora. When Persian replaced Sanskrit in the royal court, the administrative class, particularly the Pandits adopted Persian as their second language. At the same time Kashmiri language became the lingua franca and was enriched by the yogis, poets and scholars.

Religious conversions was the work of Sufi's such as, Saiyid Ali Hamdani, an orthodox Kubrawi Sufi who came from Persia in 1384 along with a contingent of 70 relatives and followers. Mostly traders and craftsmen; they set up an establishment and trained the locals in crafts such as, carpet weaving.

Saiyid Ali sought royal patronage to build mosques and seminaries and is credited with 37,000 conversions. He also tried to impose his brand of Islam in Kashmir but did not find many takers, “devoid of originality his works did not receive widespread recognition. Sultan Qutubu’Din (1373-89) had welcomed him but did not pay heed to Hamdani’s advice; their relationship would deteriorate and the Saiyid would soon leave Kashmir. (Rafiqi; p. 111).” (*Abdul Qayum Rafiqi, Sufism in Kashmir from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century, Doctoral Dissertation, The Australian National University, 1972*).

His son Mir Muhammad, who arrived in Kashmir in 1393, was more persuasive; he convinced Sultan Sikander (1389-1413) to impose jizya on the infidels. Sharia laws were imposed for the first time, Kali Mandir in Srinagar was raised to ground and a Mosque built on the location.

Unable to pay jizya, Hindu peasants were forced to convert and those who did not very brutally executed. It was the first genocide of the Hindus in Kashmir. Those who could escape fled; it led to collapse of the local economy.

The social upheaval led Shrivara the historian and member of the Sultan Zainu’l-Abidin’s court, to ascribe the misfortunes of the people of Kashmir to their acceptance of changes in their way of life (p. 287). Sultan Zainu’l-Abidin (1420-70), also known as Badshah the ‘Great King,’ made efforts toward return and resettlement of the people who had left; he also helped rebuild temples and rescinded the Sharia.

A major concession with far reaching consequences was the grant of equivalence to ‘Rishi Order’ with other Sufi orders. In the process of rebuilding communities what followed was a structural change in the society. In Kashmir Sadbhavana or Kashmiriyat was the outcome of two major developments in 15th century.

First, there was a conscious functional differentiation in Kashmiri Pandit community, the Orthodox would perform the priestly functions and continue using Sanskrit and Sharda language, while the scholar administrators, who served the royal court adopted Persian as second language.

At the same time, during 15th century there was resurrection of Persian civilization as distinct from the Arab culture; Shias gained dominance in Iran and in Kashmir Chaks, who were nominally Shia, defeated the Shahmir dynasty and took political control.

The traditional cultural exchange, particularly the translation of literary works by Kashmiri and Persian scholars cemented mutual trust between Kashmiri Pandits and Shia nobles.

Second, there was resurgence of folk culture and language. Laleshwari or Lal Ded the poetess and a sage was the greatest proponent of Abhinavgupta’s Kashmir Shavism. Her poetry advocated the middle path, a good and harmonious life and it gave a new lease of life to Kashmiri language and philosophy. Her disciple Sheikh Nooruddin would establish an indigenous religious order called “Rishi Order.” Advocating a middle path, a good and harmonious life Nund Rishi writes:

“

"We belong to the same parents.
Then why this difference?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together)
Worship God alone.
We came to this world like partners.
We should have shared our joys
and sorrows together."

”



[Source: Image](#)

Rishis became the pillars of the society and provided the necessary moral leadership. Abul Fazl, the historian and writer of Akbarnama, writes: "The most respected class of people in this country (Kashmir) are the Rishis (Muslim). Although they have not abandoned the traditional and customary forms of worship (taqlid), they are true in their worship; however, they do not denounce men belonging to different faiths. They do not have the tongue of desire, and do not seek to obtain worldly objects. They plant fruit-bearing trees in order that people may obtain benefit from these. They abstain from meat and do not marry."

Similarly Emperor Jahangir writes: "Although they have not acquired learning and marifa, they live a frank and unostentatious life. They criticise nobody and ask for nothing from anyone. They neither eat meat nor marry. They always plant fruit-bearing trees in uninhabited parts, so that people may be benefited by them. But they themselves do not hope to reap any advantages from these trees."

Baba Dawood Khaki describes a Rishi as one who is an ascetic and leads a disciplined life different from those of other saints. He is free from all worldly pleasures. Baba Nasib calls them gracious to the pious and describes them as men of pure heart. Their presence has turned Kashmir into heaven, he says. Cutting themselves away from all worldly relationships, they neither marry nor bother themselves with a family life. Piety is their apparel (khirqa); their nights are devoted to worship and during the day they worship incessantly. Having abandoned all worldly desires, they have succeeded in controlling their carnal lusts.

British Colonialism: The paradise lost

The year 1846 is memorable in Kashmir's history. It was the year Kashmir was colonized by the British, and the beginning of the cultural assault and descent to anarchy. During the Mughal, Afghan and Sikh rule Governors were appointed to ensure that taxes were collected and to suppress any rebellion. Civil administration was in the hands of the local administrative class. However, the Dogra rulers would open the portal and ease entry of Wahhabi and other shades of Indian fundamentalists into Kashmir, with grave ramifications for Kashmiri society.



[Source: Image](#)

Islamic fanaticism that brought misery to Kashmir was nurtured in India almost two centuries ago. The story begins in September 1818 when the Egyptian Pasha with the aid of Turks crushed the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia and most of the Wahhabi's were beheaded. However, four Indians, Syed Ahmad Shah of Rae Bareilly, Ghulam Rasul of Benaras, and Haji Shariatullah and Titu Mir of Bengal would escape and on their return home they gave the ideology a new lease of life. Syed Ahmad, a senior member of Nakashbandi order and three notables of Patna, Fateh Ali (father of famous Ali Brothers), Elahi Bux and Syed Muhammad Hussain, would launch jihad against the British to restore Islamic rule and Sharia in India. Hounded by the British Syed Ahmad and his followers moved from Patna and Calcutta to North West Frontier. They tried to enter Kashmir but the Sikh rulers and their Afghan allies checked Syed Ahmad's forays into Kashmir.

Confronted with the Russian challenge in Afghanistan the British fought the Afghans; in Anglo-Afghan war of 1842 the entire British force of 16,000 troops was annihilated. Therefore, after winning the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1846, the British decided to install a friendly regime in Jammu and Kashmir. Gulab Singh who was a General in Ranjit Singh's army agreed to pay Rs. 75 Lakhs and in return he gained the right to administer and collect taxes from the people of Kashmir. Dogra rulers would now exercise their power to extract rent; almost one third of the taxes collected would be spent on the private consumptions of the royal family.

Rise of anti-colonialism and Kashmiri nationalism

Dogra rule introduced cultural racism; Kashmiris Muslims were barred from joining the army whereas Dogra Muslims made up almost half the numbers. Kashmiri's had no civil rights, could not indulge in any political activity, social or cultural association were regulated by the state, and printing and circulation of newspapers was banned.

In 1889 Urdu was imposed as the official language; it would facilitate the entry of Punjabi traders, administrators and more importantly the Islamists to Kashmir.

In 1899 Deoband funded Jamaat-e-Islami Kashmir. Wahhabis established their headquarters in Shopian region, which is today the centre of terror network.

In 1907 Punjab Provincial Muslim League proposed formation of an independent Muslim nation comprising the Muslim majority states of Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier, Baluchistan and Jammu and Kashmir. This movement had tacit support of the colonial administration as British Resident in Kashmir would now direct state policy.

Ahmadiyya Muslim Jammāt (AMJ), openly loyal to British Crown, set up an All India Kashmir Muslim Conference in Lahore to initiate and finance a socio-political movement for promoting its fundamentalist ideology in Kashmir.

Young educated but unemployed Kashmiri Muslims like Sheikh Abdullah were recruited to promote communal divide in Jammu and Kashmir. In 1931, Sheikh Abdullah, as a leader of Muslim Conference, orchestrated communal riots in Srinagar, the first Hindu-Muslim riots in Kashmir during five centuries of Muslim rule.

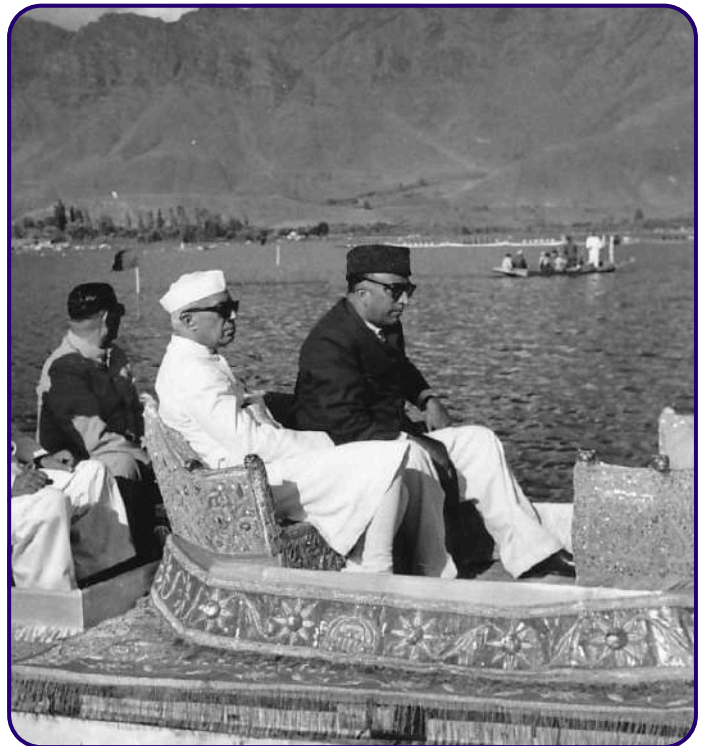


[Source: Image](#)

Kashmiri pandit diaspora and Kashmiri nationalism

Interaction with European scholars gave Kashmiri Pandits an impetus to rediscover their past, their heritage and created an intellectual fervor (see, Nitin Chandel, *Rebuilding Knowledge and Information on Kashmir by Hindus*, IJIRMF, Sep. 2016). The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and communalism in Punjab and the foothold that Ahmadiyya's and Islamic fundamentalist had gained in Kashmir administration became an issue of major concern to Kashmiri Pandits and they launched a counter movement. Kashmiri nationalism took form in Lucknow and Lahore. In 1903 Kashmiri Pandits in Lucknow organized an annual *quami Jalsa* (community festival) on the birthday of a Kashmiri Pandit Saint Reshi Peer, who lived (1637-1697) during the rule of Mughals. Reshi Peer had a large following of both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims, hence he became a symbol of Kashmiri identity. Young Jawaharlal Nehru on his first visit to Kashmir captures the sentiments of Kashmiri Diaspora; he writes:

Like some supremely beautiful women, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such was Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley and lake and graceful trees. And the other aspect of this magic beauty would come to view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and precipices, and snow-capped peaks and glaciers, the cruel and fierce torrents rushing down to the valleys below. It had a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, ever changing, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow. The mist would creep up from the Dal Lake and, like a transparent veil, give glimpses of what was behind. The clouds would throw out their arms to embrace a mountain-top, or creep down stealthily like children at play. I watched this ever-changing spectacle, and sometimes the sheer loveliness of it was overpowering and I felt almost faint. As I gazed at it, it seemed to me dreamlike and unreal, like the hopes and desires that fill us and so seldom find fulfilment. It was like the face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening. (Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, First Series, Volume XI, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1978, p. 403, in)



[Source: Image](#)

Motilal Nehru and a few other prominent members of the community argued that to protect Kashmiri cultural and ethnic identity it was imperative to ensure communal harmony in Kashmir. Community newspapers and periodicals, in Urdu, were published from Lahore and Lucknow and smuggled into Kashmir. More than a dozen new newspapers were published, such as, Motilal Nehru's "The Independent" in 1919. They focused on social reforms, education, politics, and the need to maintain communal harmony. They also delivered hard-hitting editorials demanding, civil liberty and investments in education, employment creation. Some of them gained wide circulation and gave impetus to the Kashmiri Pandits demand, "Kashmir for Kashmiris."

Indian communal politics and Kashmir

Jinnah, Iqbal, Gandhi, Patel and Nehru played important role in Kashmir's cultural journey and experimentation with modernity and liberalism. All were barristers trained in Britain, and well acquainted with Western enlightenment, rule of law, democracy and liberalism. Yet there were stark differences. Their discussions and communications are public and easy to find. Nehru and Jinnah in fact represent two contradictory archetypes.

Jinnah's communal ideology appealed not only to Indian Muslims but also to Urdu and Punjabi speaking Muslims in Kashmir, who exercised economic power during the Dogra rule. Farmers and Traders Associations with links in India were in favor of joining Pakistan. Communists Party of India, humanists and fellow travelers were also convinced that Kashmir was ready for revolution and preferred an independent Kashmir.

The Kashmir Socialist party had this to say, "(the party) has given their best and closest consideration to the question whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir should accede to India or to Pakistan or it should remain independent.

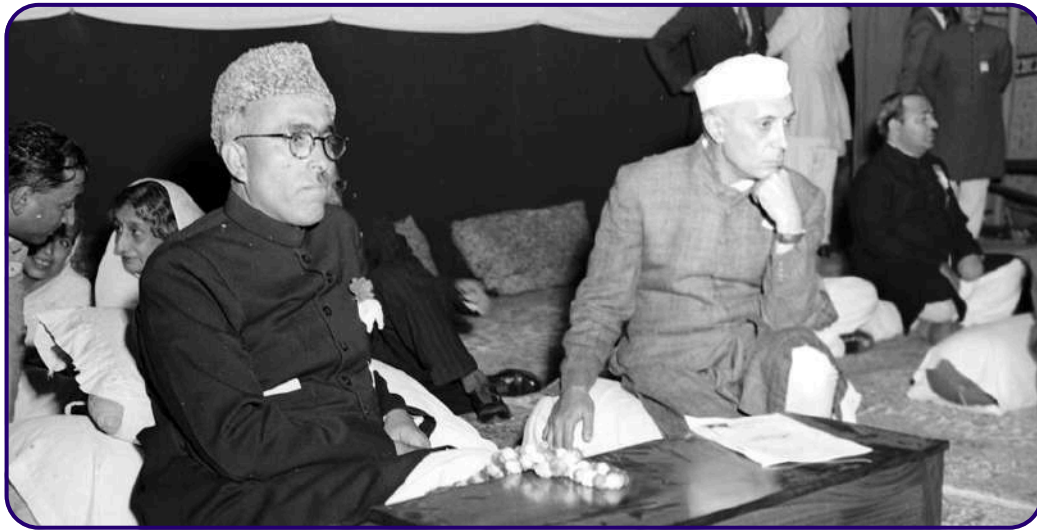
The Party is of the opinion that in view of the developments during the last few months the natural and the best course for the State to adopt would be to join Pakistan and not India (Sept. 18, 1947 resolution)."

However, Jawaharlal Nehru convinced Kashmiri political leaders that accession to a liberal, secular Indian federation of states was the best option for Kashmiris to retain their cultural identity. He like many other Kashmiri Pandits recognized that it was not an easy task.

In his note submitted to CWC in 1946 he had this to say: "The Kashmiris are very excitable people, timid and at the same time inclined to occasional violence, and politically rather immature. Having no proper press of their own they are influenced greatly by Punjab Urdu press which, as we all know is the lowest type – it is really the extension of Punjab and suffers from Punjab's communalism (from note on Second visit to Kashmir submitted to the Congress Working Committee at Wardha on 12th August 1946; in Sharma and Bakshi, 1995, 117-8)."

Seven years after the first communal riots of 1931 Muslim Conference was disbanded and a new political entity, National Conference was formed. Sheikh Abdullah, in his Presidential address would declared: "Like us the large majority of Hindus and Sikhs in the State have immensely suffered at the hands of the irresponsible government...Sooner or later these people are bound to join our ranks...We must end communalism by ceasing to think in terms of Muslims and non-Muslims when discussing our political problems."

However, in his address to the Constituent Assembly Sheikh was ambiguous, he recognized the communal divide and the validity of two nation theory but claimed to be a socialist and a constitutionalist who had trust in Indian Constitution.



[Source: Image](#)

“The Indian Constitution has set before the country the goal of secular democracy based upon justice, freedom and equality for all without distinction. This is the bedrock of modern democracy. This should meet the argument that the Muslims of Kashmir cannot have security in India, where the large majority of the population are Hindus.”

Jinnah visited Kashmir Valley in 1944 and was warmly received by Pt. Jia Lal Kelam of National Conference. In his address to a large gathering of National Conference workers he had this to say:

“As regards the Mussalmans, as I said, we are vitally concerned with their welfare, but I regret that although Sheikh Abdullah and his party and the Muslim Conference discussed matters with me in Delhi and in Lahore before my arrival here and were good enough to accord me a great reception, and were anxious that I should hear both sides and bring about a settlement, when I, after careful consideration, suggested that the Mussalmans should organize themselves under one flag and on one platform, not only my advice was not acceptable to Sheikh Abdullah but, as is his habit, which has become a second nature with him, he indulged in all sorts of language of a most offensive and vituperative character in attacking me. My advice to the Mussalmans is that the differences can only be resolved by argument, discussion, exchange of views, and reason and not by goondaism and one thing that I must draw the attention of Kashmir Government about is that goondaism must be put down at any cost, and there should be constitutional liberty of speech and freedom of thought, which is the elementary right of every citizen under any civilized form of Government.”

Three years later in October 1947, just two months after witnessing the massacre and displacement of millions of people Jinnah would break the stand-still agreement and send organized terrorists to kill and rape the Muslims in Kashmir, whose welfare he claimed was his major concern.

In response Nehru had this to say:

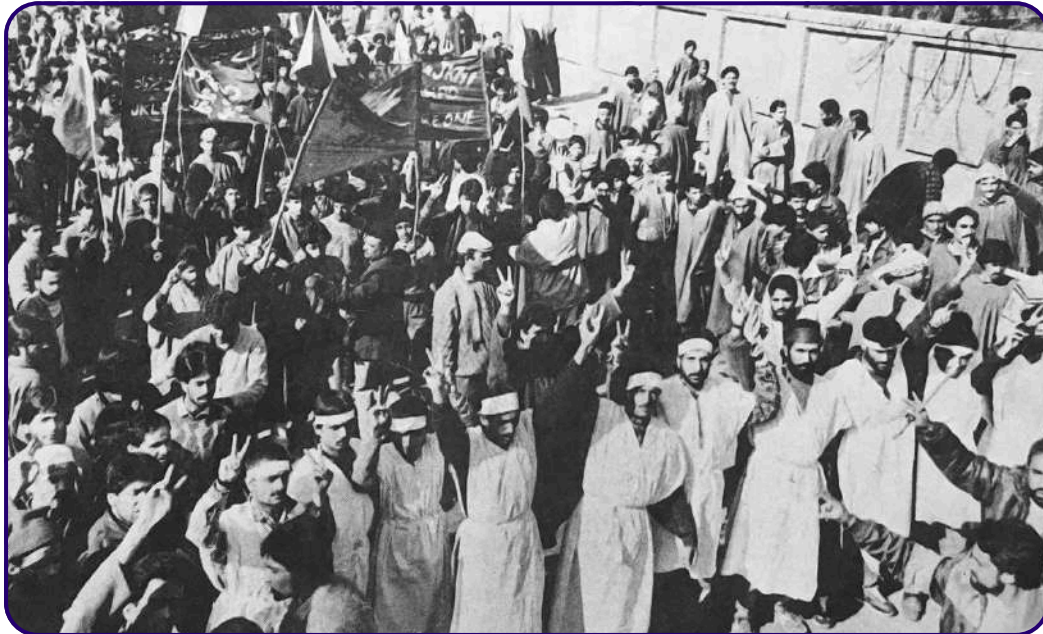
“This fair land, which nature has made so lovely, has been desecrated by people who indulge in murder, arson, loot and foul attack on women and children... whatever future may hold, this chapter in the history of Kashmir will be worth reading and we shall never regret that in their hour of distress we have been able to assist this gallant people. Kashmir and India have been bonded together in many ways from ages past. These last few weeks have forged a new link, which no one can sunder (from Nehru’s speech in the Constitutional assembly, New Delhi on 25th November, 1947; Sharma and Bakshi, 238-9).”



[Source: Image](#)

Liberalism: Judeo-Christian Cosmology

In 1990 something unimaginable took place, brutal assault on minorities, particularly the Pandits, civil strife, terror and senseless murders. Cynics ask: How could a society that lay claim to Rishi tradition descend into barbarism? What happened to Kashmiriyat? It is a fair question, considering that more than thirty years have gone by and life has yet to return to normal in Kashmir. We can ask a counter question: Why have Indian liberals, policy makers, administrators and scholars failed to comprehend Kashmiri world-view? To answer this question one has to understand the Indian mind.



[Source: Image](#)

In ancient times empires gave impetus to trade, knowledge exchange and cultural borrowings, which promoted learning and understanding; in the process diverse communities came together, thus civilizations evolved. Empires could sustain only when there was social harmony, hence co-opting and assimilating the local traditions and culture was important. Hence there was religious harmony, even hostile nations embraced, or at least respected, each other's superstitions; wars were fought for economic reasons, for material gains. And this was true of Kashmir. Situated on the Silk Road, at the intersection of many ancient civilizations – Vedic Brahminism, Greek, Persian, Tibetan Buddhism, it was a cosmopolitan state and a major center of scholarship.

On the contrary in Europe, by 9th century Catholic Church had become an expansionist state, destroying the indigenous religions and promoting the faith. Confronted with an equally expansionist ideology on its eastern borders the pure and austere morals of Christianity could not endure; the discipline dissipated, the ideals of equality and justice were sacrificed to win wars.

Organized violence - slavery, genocide, ethnic and religious wars, crusades, and inquisition - has been a constant feature of western civilization. It took 30 years of religious wars and 8 million deaths, for the Europeans to sign the treaty of Westphalia, which guaranteed freedom of conscience to Protestant faiths.

Joanna Bourke (2011; 2) points out “two of the most distinguished traditions of modern times - theology and humanism - were founded on espousing hierarchies of humanity.

According to the great Chain of Being, everything in the universe was ranked from the highest to the lowest - from the Divine to the human, then to the rest of the animal kingdom and finally incorporating inanimate objects” (Humanism, she continues, “installed only some humans at the centre of the universe.

It disparaged the woman’, ‘the subaltern’ and ‘the non-European’ even more than ‘the animal’ (p.3).” Racism was so deep-rooted that ‘the Portuguese Franciscans in Goa violently opposed admission of creoles to the order, alleging that ‘even if born of pure white parents’ [they] have been suckled by Indian ayahs in their infancy and thus had their blood contaminated for life” (Benedict Anderson, 1983; 60).

Colonization, sadhbhavana and good society:

Modernity and economic growth in the West was fueled by colonization and slavery, not liberalism. Colonization generated tremendous wealth for some, as it trickled down it created a large middle class and a “great society,” but it dehumanized a vast majority around the globe (Bourke, 2011). Industrialization led to urbanization, poverty and crime well documented in Dickens’ novels, hence focus on building robust institutions to protect class interests.

In Britain, between 1750 and 1900, the population grew by 260 percent and urban share grew from 15 percent to 85 percent. It led to inequity, poverty, mental stress and degradation of social life; the unemployable became undesirables and were shipped to colonies.

What transpired in colonies is well documented (Bourke); the transatlantic slave trade, which lasted till the middle of 19th century, involved almost 12 million slaves, 2 million died during the passage and the rest were treated no better than animals.

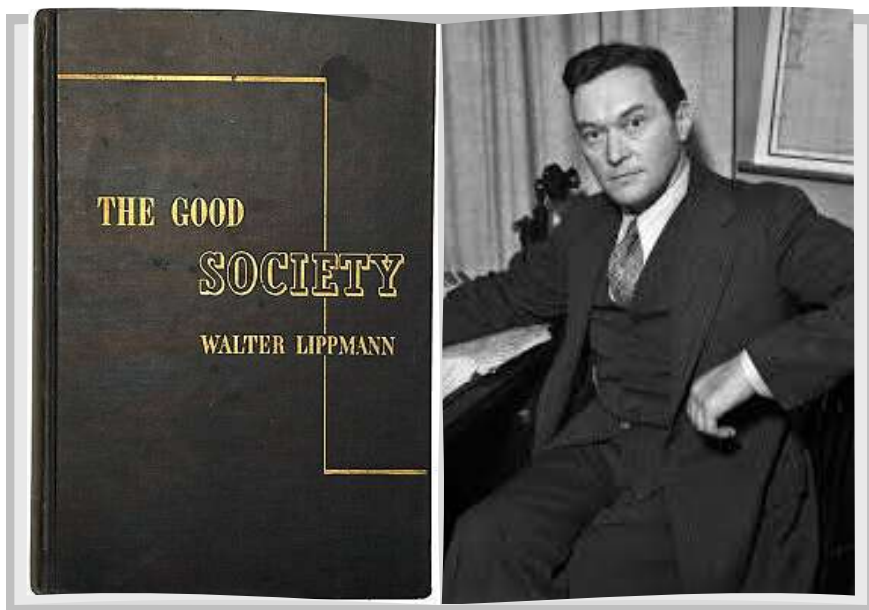
We live in an artificial world, a world where violence has been normalized and Hobbesian view that people are selfish, and competition drives social and economic development prevails. Darwinian evolutionary logic, struggle for existence and survival of the fittest provides scientific legitimacy to this view. Neo-Darwinians like Ian Morris (2014) provide justification for competition and violence: “War has not been a friend to the undertaker.

War is mass murder, and yet, in perhaps the greatest paradox in history, war has nevertheless been the undertaker’s worst enemy....over the long run it has made humanity safer and richer.” This in spite of the fact that “the hundred years after 1900 were without question the bloodiest century in modern history (Niall Ferguson *The War of the World*).”

Under the circumstances is it possible to fashion a good, an honest, free and just society. If violence and wars are intrinsic to human development then why concern for Sadhbhavana or *Good Will*? It is a troubling question.

Moral Relativism vs. Absolutism

There have been dissenting voices in the West. In *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), John Dewey highlighted the fact that modernity instead of creating a “good society” had led to disintegration of family and community; liberalism failed to recognize the difference between a great society (Wallas, 1915) and a great community (Royce, 1916). A decade later Walter Lippmann in *The Good Society* (1937), reminded Americans that while technological and economic developments transformed the country and produced a Great Society, colonization, extraction of resources and exploitation of slave labor was necessary to this capitalist enterprise. Concerned about the decline of religiosity and moral commitment to fairness and social justice, in the corporatized world, a good society he argued cannot be built without going back to Christian values.



[Source: Image](#)

With the apparent decline of West, Republicans now profess that demand for moral equivalence by particular groups weakens public institutions. They contend that post-modernism, deconstruction, multiculturalism and the critical theories lack coherence; Huntington asserts that clash of East and West is eminent and West has to win to protect democracy, freedom and equality. Public intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger are categorical, “The ethnic revolt against the melting pot has reached the point, in rhetoric at least, though not I think in reality, of the denial of common culture and a single society. If large number of people really accept this, the republic would be in serious trouble,” (Lemert, 1997; p.149). He thus asserts that the experiment with social pluralism and moral relativism has failed; the crisis is here.

However, colonialism brought these intellectuals together to impose their moral values. Hegel in *History of Religion* argues that while Vedic religion was nature religion par excellence, however, grounded in metaphysics and mysticism it has not evolved. On the contrary, Germanic culture has dynamism and is directed towards achieving the Christian values of equality, brotherhood and social justice.

Montesquieu resurrected “oriental despotism” as a system of oppression responsible for the economic, cultural, and civic backwardness, of the colonized people. Oriental despotism was now posited as a counter to Occidental rationality, property rights, capitalism and freedom. And this narrative of “oriental despotism” would now be linked not only to the “cultural inferiority” but also to racial inferiority of non-white races, and would greatly influence the evolution of modern social theory. Race, socio-political organization, religion and moral values will now become important instruments for explaining the rise of West and the decline of the East. Unfortunately, it would also shape Indian liberal mind and their approach to indigenous people and their cultures.

It is in this context that Kashmir Shavism as a cultural practice has to be differentiated from Hindu India, for it played an important role in containing communalism and racism of the Islamists in Kashmir. Abhinavgupta was a pragmatist and anticipated Hegel’s criticism of Brahminism. As a Tantric who had acquired deep insight of human body (Tantraloka) he rejected dualism and mind-body problem. As a philosopher who had experienced the symphony of nature and discovered the beauty of living, he rejected monastic asceticism and non-dualism.



[Source: Image](#)

He argues that (i) the world we experience through our senses is the only reality, (ii) human purpose is to be happy, achieve a state of bliss, tranquility or moksha in this life rather than in afterlife, (iii) every human being, irrespective of caste or class, is capable of achieving a state of blissfulness, (iv) duality - night and day, male and female, good and evil, etc. are essential aspects of nature, two sides of the same coin, (v) all that we perceive or experience is real, (vi) time flows like a river and as a boats man we perceive changes, at times there is calm and then there are waterfalls, just because things change does not mean that what we experience is Maya or illusion it is real, Newtonian universe is a false assumption, (vii) we have memories and can go back and forth in time and thus we cognize and gain understanding; “recognition” is a process of “to enter and to be entered,” Heidegger calls it “inter-subjective experiencing” and (viii) once we recognize self and others, we acquire power or Shakti, we become free. To perceive (darshan) truth and beauty and achieve tranquility one has to develop aesthetic sensibility or understanding of the “intentional” other.

Kashmiriyat: The Requiem

Indian independence movement led to an upsurge of Kashmiri nationalism; however, unlike the Muslims in other parts of India, the masses in Kashmir rejected Muslim Conference and communalism in favor of creating a “Naya Kashmir,” a good community, egalitarian, respectful of ethnic and religious diversity and free. Inspired by leaders such as Nehru they joined National Conference and subsequently in 1947 National Conference opted to join the Indian republic, with the understanding that its Rishi culture, what is Kashmiriyat, will be better protected in a secular, democratic, culturally diverse India than in Muslim Pakistan and the union with India will bring economic prosperity. But it was not to be.



[Source: Image](#)

Instead Kashmir would inherit institutionalized communalism, caste hierarchies and sectarianism. For example 90% of the Valley's Muslim population is classified as minority (euphemism for foreign ancestry). Many, particularly, youth have asked me: Why are we always referred to as Kashmiri Muslims in the media and in public discourse; why is Kashmir called a Muslim majority state while Gujarat is not called a Hindu majority state, why are we not just Kashmiris. Similarly, while the official language of every state in India is the local language in Kashmir Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, continues to be the State language. Indian politicians and public intellectuals have a patronizing and colonial attitude, winning the hearts and minds and Indianizing the Kashmiris is at the top of the agenda.

The tragedy of Kashmir stems from the ignorance of the politicians and policy makers in Delhi about Kashmir's history and culture. Ignorance leads to arrogance, reflected in policies, programs and attitudes of people in power. Before 1947 there was Sadbhavana; Pandits and Muslims in villages or cities lived in close proximity, as a composite community, while acknowledging and respecting their differences in religious and cultural practices. They were unified by ethnicity, language, functional interdependence, above all by shared moral values and love for their homeland and its beauty, transmitted by Rishi's. Kashmir is probably a rare place in India where Rishi's born in Pandit families had large Muslim followers. Today most Kashmiri's of Rishi temperament, Pandits and Muslims, alike have left. There can be no peace in Kashmir unless they return.

baaghi nishat ke gulo....

- The Best of Mahjoor

Flower of Nishat Bagh,
Come with your graces,
Come with your laughter,
Come showering pearls !

When you entered the garden,
The kusum kissed you,
The yemberzal glowed with passion.
Come filling glasses !
See, spring has come
To Dal, Nishat and Shalamar,
O, use these my aching eyes as boats !
Come rowing across !
Stranger to all pity,
O hard-hearted tyrant !
See my bloom is wasted.
Come, love me true.
Who'll heed my woes
But you, my love.
I'm dying of grief.
Come showering love !
Mad after achhiposh,
You have chosen retreat.
But, come setting jewels
On the anklets of sonaposh !
God grant we never part,
Nor pull down what we've built !
Keep singing this song
Of Mahjoor, and come !



Abinavgupta: A Portrait



[Source: Image](#)

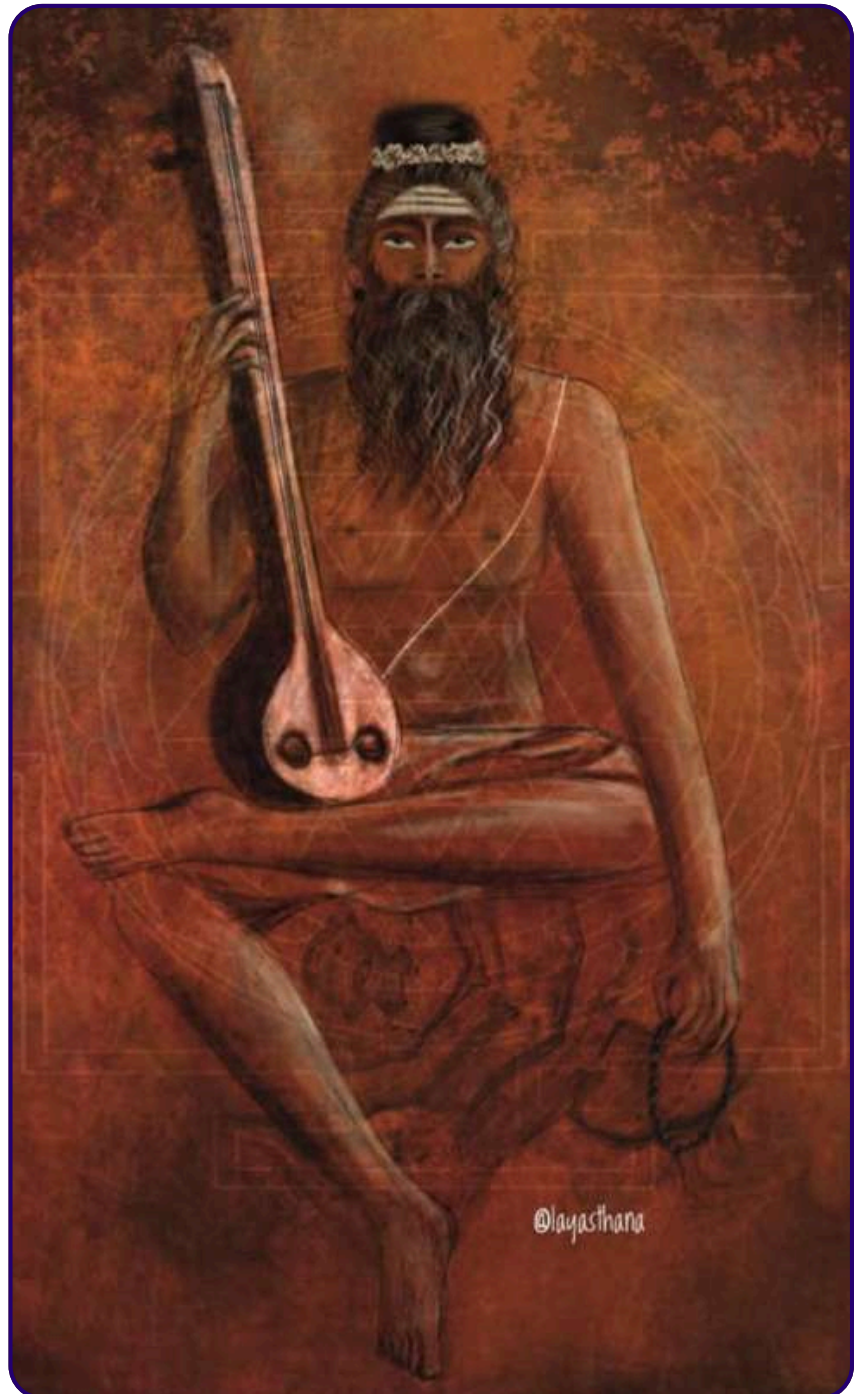
A thousand years ago to the year one of the world's most prolific and brilliant literary critics is said to have penned his final work. If our historical estimations on the birth date, the date of Abhinavagupta's final literary work—his luminous commentary, *Reflections on the Recognition of the Lord* (Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśinī)—and death are accurate, then this brilliant Kashmiri polymath put down his pen around the age of 66 at the time of the winter solstice in 1015, some five years before dying, or as lore would have it, transforming back into his divine, Bhairava self. Looking back through the lens of time we can only imagine what Abhinavagupta would have done after concluding his final work.

Certainly, his options would have been many. During his life (ca. 950-1020) he had over 19 respected teachers who aided him in the mastery of a variety of subjects, ranging from grammar to logic to Buddhist philosophy to tantric ritual and meditative practice to art, music and aesthetics. One wonders, did he put down his pen and pick up his brush? Did he sip wine with a beloved consort (dūtī) or did he tune his veena and play an intoxicating raga? Or did he sit in meditative stillness after first engaging in the worship of the deities of his tantric tradition? Perhaps he did all these things.

Certainly, the great master had many options at his disposal for how he might live out his “retirement” days. By that point he had written at least 44 works (21 extant, 23 referenced from known works), ranging across four general categories: philosophy, Tantra, aesthetics and hymns. His education was unrivaled. He had esteemed teachers in grammar, poetry, logic, philosophy, esoteric ritual practice, yoga, art, music and aesthetics. By the end of his career he had already earned widespread regard as one of the greatest teachers, writers and spiritual masters of his day. A millennium later, he is recognized by many as being not just one of India’s greatest intellectuals but as one of the most brilliant writers, philosophers and aestheticians the world has ever known.

Of his many teachers, five stand out (Müller-Ortega 1988, 45-47). The first of these is Lakṣmanagupta, disciple of Utpaladeva in the lineage of the revered Somānanda, author of the Vision of Śiva (Śivadr̥ṣṭi) and initiate of the esteemed Tryambaka lineage (Nemec 2011). From Lakṣmanagupta, Abhinavagupta learned several systems of non-dual philosophy and practice that were central to his own eventual systematization, including the Triad (Trika) and Recognition (Pratyabhijñā) systems. From Bhūtirāja he learned the Sequence (Krama) system. Under the tutelage of Bhāskara he learned the Vibration (Spanda) system and guided by Bhaṭṭa Tauta he immersed himself in aesthetics and philosophy of language. The most important of his many teachers is undoubtedly Śambhunātha who initiated Abhinavagupta into the Kaula or Embodied tradition and guided him into what Abhinavagupta believed to be the highest stages of spiritual realization.

(A Thousand Years of Ever New Secrets Revealed: Reflections on the Millennial Legacy of Abhinavagupta, Jeffrey S. Lidke)



[Source: Image](#)

Gerow comments that logically, Abhinava's is a very risky thesis, for it appears to admit multiplicity and variety into the supreme principle. "Abhinava recognizes the variety or multiplicity of powers, nature exists as a creative force (Sakti), thus it departs from Sankara's advaita; he explains and accounts for activity as a constituent element of the absolute, for Sankara, of course, activity is itself a sign of lesser reality (maya), which will fall away in the gnosis of the absolute.

Abhinava appears to abet this ambiguity by speaking of two powers (sakti), which together characterize the absolute: that of knowing (jnana) and that of acting (kriya). On the face of it, a dualism similar to that of the Samkhya seems to have been posited. The absolute, in its guise of "knowing" is manifested in the subjective world of awareness and reflection; in its guise of "acting," in the objective world of presentation, typology and change. Indeed, these postulates would appear to "realize" activity in a way more satisfying than Sankara's, but at the expense of positing an inconsistency in the character of the absolute itself."

This understanding of power translates into freedom as an inherent, intrinsic thrust, rather than freedom over something. This makes freedom a positive endeavor that subjects are to seek freedom the immediate consequence of recognizing power in terms of freedom is that we acknowledge inherent difference.

Freedom is something that is actualized, experienced, in dynamism, and this dynamism is possible only on the foundation that acknowledges difference. We can confirm this from Abhinavagupta's understanding that power is always 'many.' Power in this paradigm is recognized as inherently differentiating and creating a circle rather than abnegating or seeking for its singularity. To begin with, there are indefinitely multiple śaktis, not only one single śakti. Difference, accordingly, is what underscores the parameters of power.

Even when this power is ritualized and theologized, their pluralistic appeal is not lost. Grounded on a pantheistic and polytheistic ritual paradigm, Abhinavagupta gives substance and meaning to tantric rituals. His ritual maṇḍala is over-populated with Śaktis, personified powers. It becomes vivid in ritual maṇḍala that every single deity retains the possibility or potency to assume the manifold. This is what enables the powers to constantly push their boundaries, as every last emanation retains the same amount of power to extend further, creating its own maṇḍala.

While, on the one hand, Abhinava's philosophy is monistic, on the other hand, it also accepts freedom as an inherent property of consciousness, with this freedom reserving the power to assume the manifold. This is to argue that the same ontological entity can assume the manifold, or have multiple properties, with a form of property dualism leading to the metaphysics of power. Śakti, in this account, differentiates itself from itself; that it is able to constitute its own other and is able to recognize its inherent difference. It is in this recognition of difference that the others are constituted. This is how the power creates its own maṇḍala, a circle, with the center of gravity being co-constituted by the members that constitute the circle.

By borrowing Bharṭṛihari's notion of time and appropriating it in a Śākta theological paradigm, Abhinavagupta equates consciousness to temporality and makes time foundational for all powers.

The centrality of time in the conversation on power has both metaphysical and phenomenological domains. The Śākta theology of Kālī worship expands with recognition of the centrality of time in creating and sustaining diversity. The manifoldness of subjects and objects, and the diverse ways the networks can be realigned, and maṇḍalas reconstituted—this is all founded on the dual recognition that Kālī is time itself while also transcending time, as well as being pure consciousness (citi) that governs time and makes temporality possible. Time is a fundamental articulation of power. It is by means of time that power unfolds, while time itself is a mode of power. The semantic power that expresses temporal modes is not distinct from metaphysical power.

Time is accordingly viewed as autonomous in constituting difference, in maintaining diversity, and also in reversing the gaze from the external surge of power to inner actualization of being. It is in time that the being finds its own subjectivity and actualizes its freedom. The other significant aspect of this śakti is that it is identical to creativity (pratibhā). Power to create something requires freedom, and that freedom cannot be separated from creativity itself. Every act of creation is an expression of freedom, and every experience of freedom, every actualization of freedom, returns the subjects to recognition of innate creativity. (Gerow).

At the end of the Tantra loka, Abhinavagupta shares with us in exquisite detail his love for the land and people of Kashmir, providing us with an intense, dramatic, and aesthetic portrait of Kashmir. Significantly, he paints Kashmir as a “synaesthetic garden,” Alexis Sanderson refers to this tantric stance, as “aesthetic intensity.”

(This note is a short summary of the work of a few western scholars.)



[Source: Image](#)

4

Pir Pandit Padshah

"The puff that Kindled the divine spark in him"



Rishipeer at Alikadal, Srinagar

Reshi Pir Pandit was one of the greatest saints of Kashmir of the 17th Century A.D. He was a Karmyogin type of a Saint who helped people both in spiritual and temporal pursuits and he became famous as "PIR PANDIT PADSHAH HARDU JAHAN MUSHKIL ASAN" i.e. Emperor of two worlds and answer to difficulties of all kinds.

His father was Pandit Gobind Kaul resident of Batayar Mohallah Ali Kadal Srinagar (Kashmir). He was a well-to-do man but could not get a girl to marry. What worried him was that he was advancing in age. However, he ultimately succeeded in marrying a girl in Gushi Village of Handwara Tehsil. When the bride-groom came for the marriage ceremony to Ghoshi Village, his mother-in-law noticing some grey hair on her son-in-law's head fell into a swoon.

After the wedding, the mother prayed at a nearby "Sacred spring" for her daughter. One day while praying earnestly at the spring, she heard a voice telling her "Oh old lady-go to your house and get your daughter to this spring. A bunch of flowers will come out of the spring let your daughter smell this bunch of flowers and your ambition would be fulfilled and your daughter will get a holy son".

This was done by the lady and Pir Sahib's mother smelt the coloured bunch of flowers. When the time of delivery was approaching she left her parents house to go back to her husband. While travelling in a boat to Srinagar, she delivered a male child in the boat itself at Sopore in the year 1637 A.D. This boy was given Reshi as his name. A temple has been constructed at this spot and is known as "Resh Sund Mandar". Pandit Gobind Koul was extremely happy when his wife and child reached his home in Srinagar.

When Reshi was 7 years old he was married and his father died soon after. By the time he attained the age of 12 years he became indifferent to worldly affairs and devoted his entire time to Sadhana in temples, visiting saints and searching for a Guru. With this predominant idea in his mind, he started circumambulation of Shri Sharika Bhagwati Shrine situated on a hillock in the city of Srinagar during nights for 40 days crawling all the way on his knees (a distance of about 3 miles).

On the 40th day when he was in Deviangon (an open space below the hill) Goddess Sharika Bhagwati gave him Her Darshana and enquired of him as to what he wanted. He prostrated himself before Her and implored Her for being granted the boon of a Guru. The Devi ordained that the first man he would come across henceforth would be his Guru. After he left Deviangon and reached the place known as Hari on the northern side of the Hillock, he encountered a "MASTANA" saint sitting on a big stone and bowed to him, but he - the saint bolted away without saying a word leaving Reshi Pir far behind.

The Mastana saint reached Reshi Pir's house before he himself reached there, asked Reshi's mother to give him Reshi's Hokka and smoking a puff or two told her to give the Chellum to Reshi for smoking after he returns home, and left the house. As soon as Reshi reached his home, his mother told him that a Mastana had come, who asked for his Hokka, smoked a puff and said the "Chellem" should be given to him (Reshi) for smoking. Reshi had a puff. The second puff kindled the Divine spark in him, his Jana Nitra opened and he became a God-intoxicated Trikaladarsh. This "Mastana" saint who initiated him was Pandit Krishna Kar. After his initiation he continued his intense Sadhana for 14 1/2 years.

It is said that for a bath he would throw live red hot charcoal on his shoulders and body daily, for a number of years. After this period he became famous as "Pir PANDIT PADSHAH" as he helped many people out of their worldly difficulties. This news reached Aurangzeb who disliked his being called king "PADSHAH" and sent his messenger to Srinagar to arrest him and get him to Delhi.

As the messenger met Pir Sahib, he made arrangements for his food. etc. and told him that he would accompany him the next morning to meet the king. By his miraculous powers he went to Delhi during night and enquired of Aurangzeb what he wanted of him.

On seeing Reshi Pir, Aurangzaib trembled, became convinced of his spiritual prowess and greatness and wrote to Saif Khan Governor of Kashmir not only to cancel the orders of his arrest but also to keep a Jagir in his name in Devsar Village. Pir Pandit had fixed 14 pies as Niaz or offering to him. This practice is continuing even to this day among Kashmiri Hindus.

A contemporary of Pir Sahib, Mulla Ahmad Badkshani used to have discussions with him on spiritual topics. Dara Shikoh was his (Mulla Sahib's) pupil. It is believed that he "Reshi Pir" influenced Mulla Sahib greatly with Vedantic thought and he induced his pupil Dara Shikoh to translate it in Persian and named the book "SAIR-I-AKBAR".

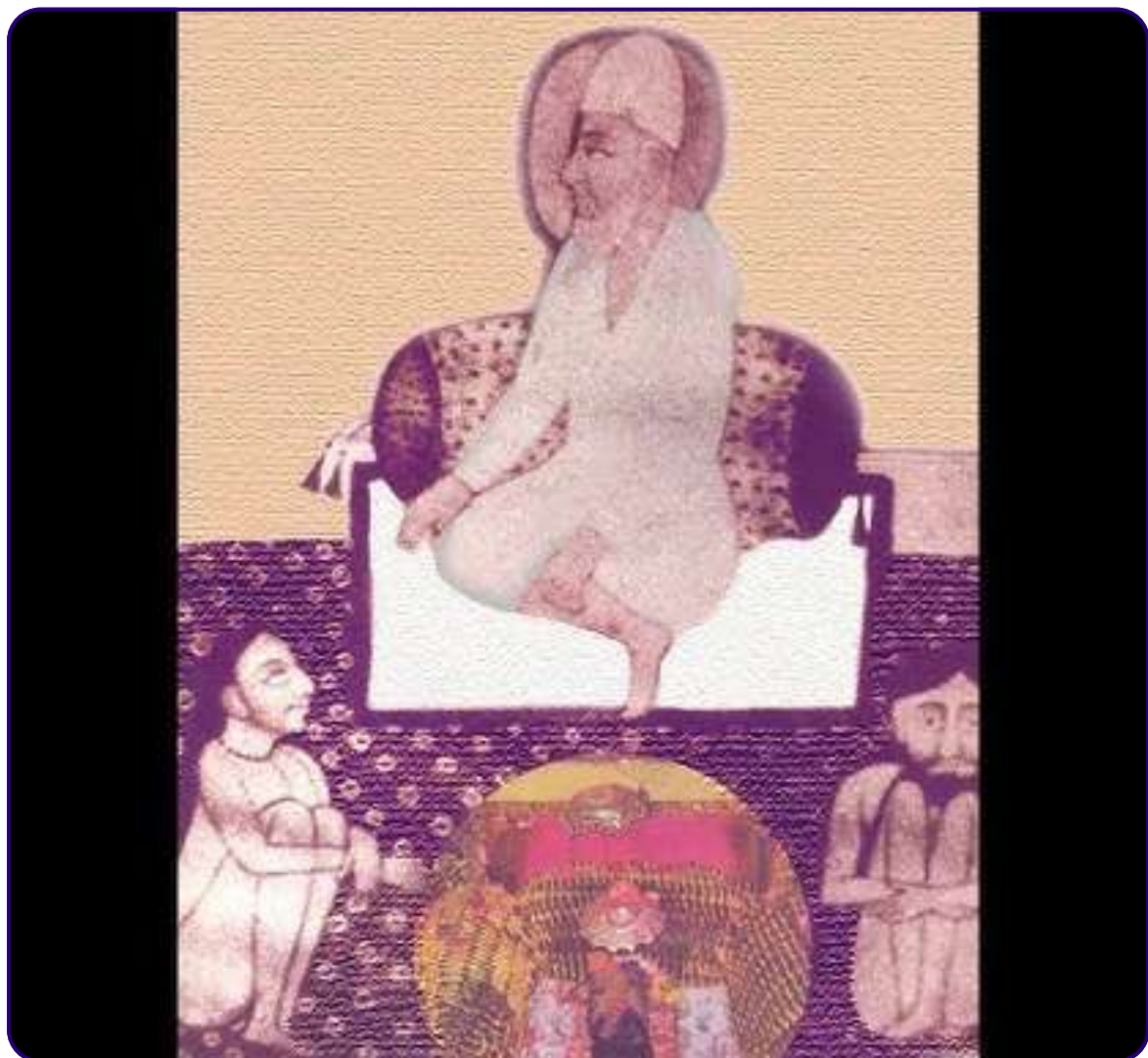
Source: [Koshur Samachar](#)

The Festival Of Lucknow Pandits

Saint Reshi Peer was born to Pandit Govind Joo Khashu of Batyar, Ali Kadal, Srinagar. He lived (1637-1697) during the rule of Mughals. His popularity as a saint was unrivalled. When many Kashmiri Pandit families migrated to Lucknow during 18th Century, they continued to observe shradh (which incidentally also happens to be the birthday of the saint) of Reshi Peer. This used to be called 'Rishi Pir Ka Jag'. A detailed description of this celebration is available in KashmirDarpan, May 1903, p.5 (Pran Nath "Murasla Kashmir"), KashmirDarpan, August 1903 (Tajkira Quami by Bishamber Nath Mushran; p3) and Bahar-i-Gulshan-i-Kashmir, Vol. II pp 418-419).

A nineteenth century Kashmiri Pandit of Lucknow, Pt. Tribhuwan Nath Sapru 'Hijr', while highlighting the significance of Jag as a quami Jalsa (community festival) which fostered unity wrote, "It is the Jag that has sent out an invitation to all. It is the Jag that has called both young and old. It is the Jag that has brought all the brothers together. It is the Jag that has laid the foundation of happiness".

Source: Kashmir Sentinel

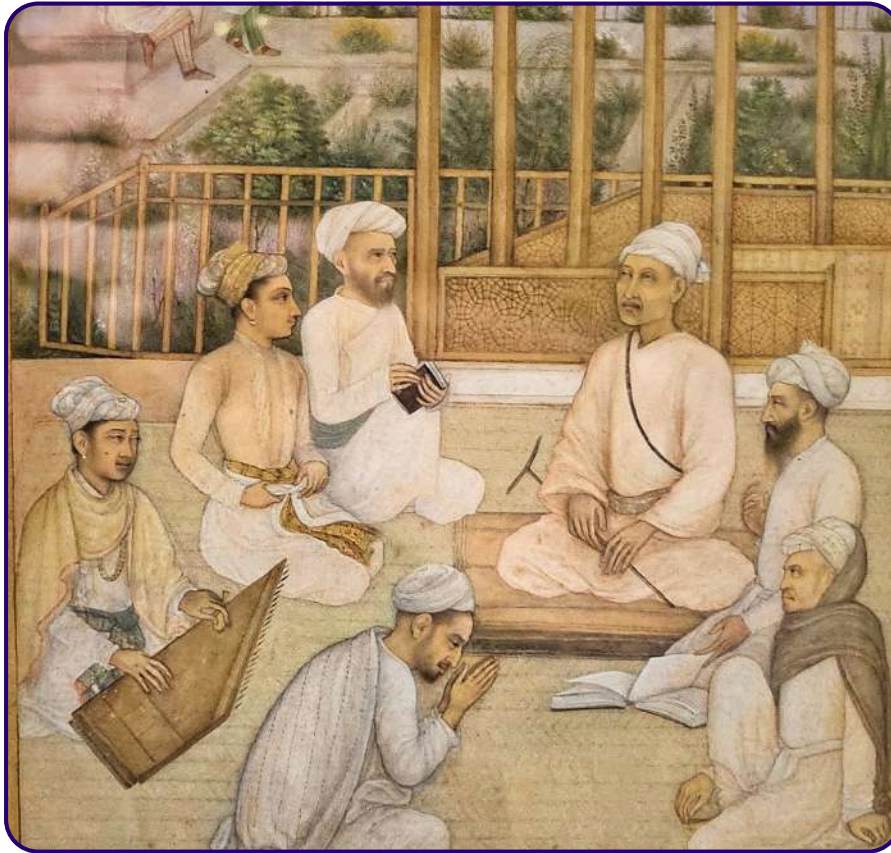


Source: Image

Kashmir: Where Sufis are Rishis and Rishis are Sufis!

- Sultan Shaheen

6 February 2006



[Source: Image](#)

The most dominant influence on the Kashmiri Muslims, in terms of their Kashmiriyat, is that of the Rishi order of Sufis. While the Sufi orders like the Suharwardi, Kubravi, Naqshbandi and Quadri, arrived in Kashmir from Persia, Central Asia, and Central and North India, the Rishi order evolved in the valley itself indigenously in the beginning of the fifteenth century. The Kashmir valley was already permeated with the traditions of Hindu ascetism and Buddhist renunciation.

The term 'Rishi' itself is clearly a derivation from Sanskrit and Indian traditions, though some Medieval Muslim scholars have tried to show that it is derived from the Persian word raish or rish meaning the feathers or wings of a bird. Baba Dawood Mishkati, for instance, gives a rather tortuous explanation. A bird whose feathers have been removed has no control over its own movements and depends entirely on the wind. And this is also the case with a Rishi; he is alienated from the world and lives alone, buffeted by fate. This and similar explanations, have, however, failed to impress the average Kashmiri Muslim and he, by and large, accepts its Sanskrit derivation and uses it loosely like his Hindus brethren as synonymous for a sage. In fact many Kashmiris do not even associate the word with any particular order of sufis, but use the word to denote any and every sufi saint.

The indigenous Rishi order of Sufis, however, does differ not only from the establishmentarian and fundamentalist Muslims but also from other Sufi orders in its philosophy and way of life. Many writers who have chronicled the life and times of Kashmiris of this period have been attracted to the unique way of life and philosophy of the Rishi order of Sufis.



Abul Fazl

[Source: Image](#)

An important chronicler of this period, Abul Fazl, for instance, is all praise for them. He writes: "The most respected class of people in this country (Kashmir) are the Rishis. Although they have not abandoned the traditional and customary forms of worship (taqlid), but they are true in their worship. They do not denounce men belonging to different faiths. They do not have the tongue of desire, and do not seek to obtain worldly objects. They plant fruit-bearing trees in order that people may obtain benefit from these. They abstain from meat and do not marry."

This account is corroborated by Emperor Jahangir. He writes: "Although they have not acquired learning and marifa, they live a frank and unostentatious life. They criticise nobody and ask for nothing from anyone. They neither eat meat nor marry. They always plant fruit-bearing trees in uninhabited parts, so that people may be benefited by them. But they themselves do not hope to reap any advantages from these trees."

The Kashmiri Muslim Rishi's ascetic and unworldly life thus bears a close resemblance to the lifestyle of the Hindu Rishis and Munis as well as Buddhist and Jain monks. Baba Dawood Khaki describes a Rishi as one who is an ascetic and leads a disciplined life different from those of other saints. He is free from all worldly pleasures. Baba Nasib calls them gracious to the pious and describes them as men of pure heart.

Their presence has turned Kashmir into heaven, he says. Cutting themselves away from all worldly relationships, they neither marry nor bother themselves with a family life. Piety is their apparel (khirqa); their nights are devoted to worship and during the day they worship incessantly. Having abandoned all worldly desires, they have succeeded in controlling their carnal lusts.

With such deep commitment to spiritual growth and the Islamic philosophy of Divine Unity (wahdat-ul-wajud), which is not different from Hindu philosophy of no duality (Advaita), it is not at all surprising that the Rishis consistently preached complete harmony among different religions and peace and understanding among their followers. Aware of the tension created between Hindus and Muslims during the reign of Sultan Sikandar, one of the foremost Rishis, Sheikh Nooruddin wrote:

"We belong to the same parents.
Then why this difference?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together)
Worship God alone.
We came to this world like partners.
We should have shared our joys
and sorrows together."

Source:

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This site is maintained by Md. Sadiq and friends



[Source: Image](#)

Caste away for love: How caste bias works in Kashmir

- Adnan Bhat

In his book *Directory of Caste in Kashmir*, Kashmiri sociologist Bashir Ahmed Dabla classified Kashmiri castes into three different groups. At the top are the 'Syed castes' – Geelani, Andrabi, Qadri, and Bukhari. Below them are 'occupational castes' which include surnames like Wani, Bhat, Lone, and Khandey. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy are 'service castes' such as the Hanjjs (those who dwell on water bodies), Bangi, or Sheikh.

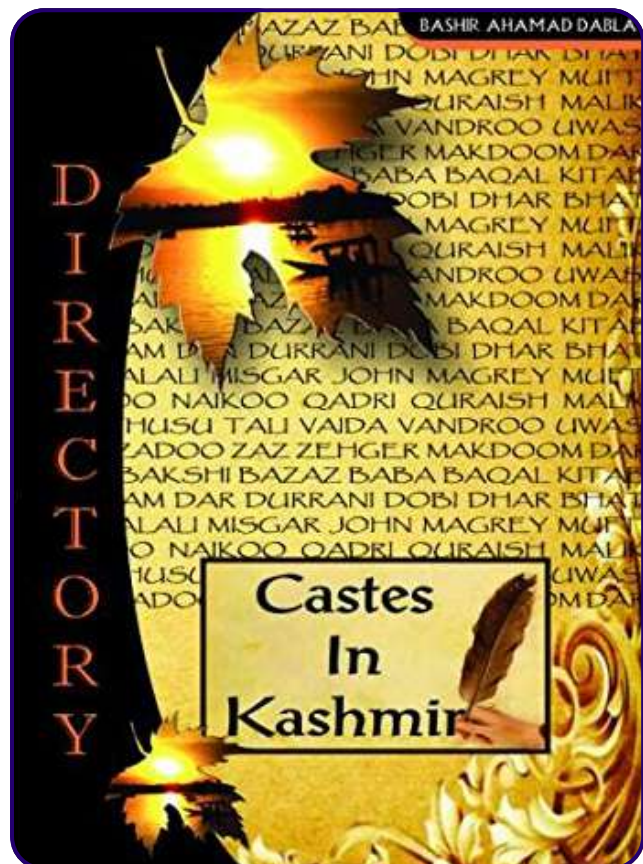
Caste hierarchies among Kashmiri muslims

Contrary to the outsider's notion that caste plays no role in Kashmir's Muslim majority society, particularly in the Valley, the reality is quite the opposite and complex. The renowned Kashmiri sociologist and former head of Kashmir University's sociology department, late Bashir Ahmed Dabla, in his book titled *Directory of Caste in Kashmir* writes:

"(T)here prevails an unrealistic notion among some individuals and groups that caste as a working social institution does not exist in this society. But that does not stand as a social reality. The actual reality is caste as a functional social institution prevails in Kashmiri society."

Dabla adds that even if caste does not exist in any ideal Hindu varna sense in Kashmir, it is still very significant. He has classified Kashmiri castes into three different groups. At the top are the 'Syed castes' – Geelani, Jeelani, Andrabi, Qadri, Hamdani, Bhukhari, Shah and others. Syeds claim to be the descendants of the family of the prophet. It is believed that Syeds came into Kashmir from Central Asia in the early 14th century and spread Islam in the region. Consequently, they have a somewhat proprietary attitude towards Islam in Kashmir.

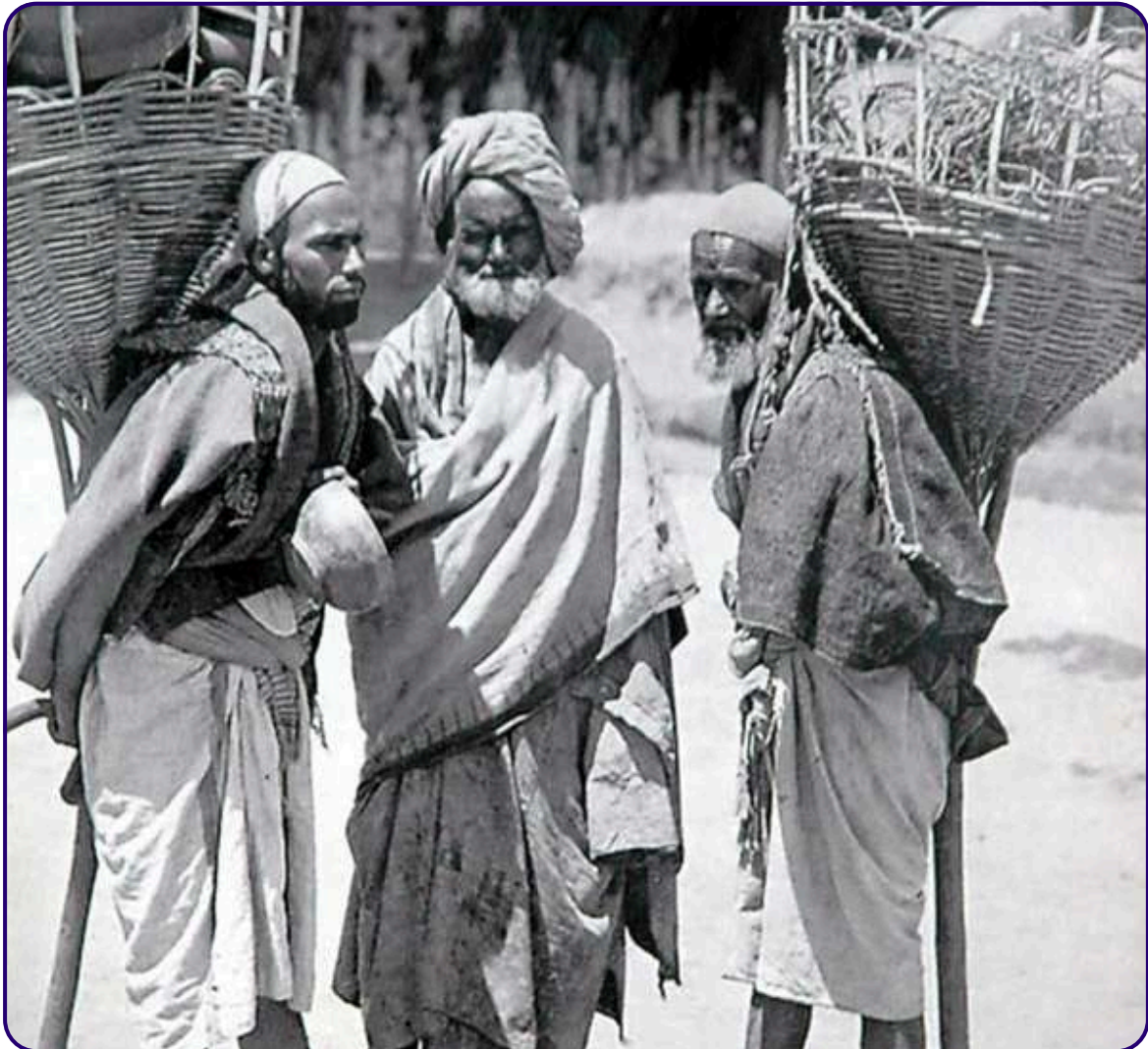
This group is followed by the 'occupational castes' which include surnames like Wani, Zargar, Bhat, Naqash, Lone, Khandey, Ahangar and others. While Syed castes are a representative of the different tribes they belong to, this is not the same with occupational castes.



[Source: Image](#)

These surnames denote only the occupations they or their ancestors had taken up. For instance, Zargar means goldsmith in Kashmiri and the bearer of this caste name would be someone who is either currently in this occupation or has descended from a family of goldsmiths.

At the bottom of Dabla's caste hierarchy are the 'service castes' with names like Hanjis (people living in houseboats), Waza, Gilkar, Sofi, Dobi, Ganie, Bangi, or Sheikh. These are generally landless people, or those whose occupations are considered menial.



Source: Image

Sheikh is an interesting caste here. If this title is used as a prefix it indicates the person has descended from Brahmin landlords like the National Conference party leader Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. If, however, Sheikh is used as a surname, this indicates belonging to the sweeper community.

The role of caste in Kashmiri society comes to the surface at important social functions like marriages. Syeds rarely marry people from occupational castes. And similarly, those belonging to occupational castes refrain from marrying into service castes.

Source: [Adnan Bhat](#) Dec 10, 2017, *Wire*

Cradle of Castes in Kashmir (From medieval period to present day)

- Tariq Ahmad Sheikh

Caste in Kashmiri language is known as Kram and there is a long list of krams in Kashmir. During Ancient Kashmir, the inhabitants were mostly Hindus followed by Buddhist and Jains.

The society was divided into four castes which was a direct inspiration from Indian society but the caste system was not rigid. With the influx of muslim divines from the neighboring countries, large number of hindus got converted to Islam except the Brahmans.

After the process of proselytization castes got mixed and there was the emergence of new castes. These new castes were both indigenious and foreign.

Every caste has a detailed history with a sound background. Generally speaking castes in Kashmir were mainly of two types- caste by origin and castes by occupation, which will be discussed in the paper at length.

In this paper an attempt has been made to understand the galaxy of castes and their lineage in Kashmir.

The paper is also an endeavor to see the influence of foreign castes of Muslim divines who visited Kashmir in fourteenth century A.D. Furthermore, the amalgamation of the castes and their relevance in the social structure would be realized.

Source: Tariq Ahmad Sheikh *Cradle of Castes in Kashmir (From Medieval Period to Present Day)* <http://www.serialsjournals.com> © **Serials Publications Pvt. Ltd. Volume 15 • Number 21 (Part 2) • 2017**

As a lower caste Kashmiri Muslim, I have had a very close encounter with the monster we try to hide beneath our pherans, trust me none of you would ever want to be in the situations that lower castes in Kashmir are put into. This isn't a rant or I don't want to sound condescending towards anyone, but my observations are deeply personal.

The next example is a deeply personal one.

I attended biology tuition for a few days with a known teacher in Srinagar. He was so obsessed with castes that he would ask every student in the class, kraam kyah chei (which caste do you belong to)? Upon learning my caste, he jibed tohie kar pyeath logvu parrun (since when did you guys start studying? Of course he was a higher caste. I was left with an astounding sense of humiliation and helplessness that has stayed with me till today...

Source: *Wande Magazine. Aquib Hussain April 26, 2020.*

Kashmiri Pandits and Caste

Srivara has mentioned that during the time of Sultan Zain-ul-abidin (1420-70), there are references of the existence of various low castes in Kashmir during the medieval period like Dombas, Kiratas, Chandalas and Nisadas. Most of them were the hill tribes. However, we cannot establish the fact of four traditional castes of Hindus during medieval Kashmir, as there is not sufficient evidence of various intermediary castes as were found in other parts of India.

Kashmiri Pandits are divided into three sub-castes of *Karkuns* and *Bashya- Bhattas* and *Bohras*. *Karkuns* were those who studied Persia as their second language and entered Govt. services from the time of Zain-ul-Abidin onwards. The priestly caste, who performed the ritual ceremonies continued to use Sharda and second language was Sanskrit those were known as *Bashya- Bhattas*. The *Bohras* were involved in trade and business. However, in Kashmiri Pandits there was no rigid caste hierarchy.

Many of the converts to Islam, however, continued to bear their old surnames. *Kauls*, *Bhattas*, *Mantus*, *Ganais*, *Aitus*, *Rainas* and *Pundits* were converts from the *Brahman* caste, where as *Dars*, *Magreys*, *Rathors*, *Thakors*, *Nayaks*, *Lons*, *Chaks* came from that of the *Kshatriyas*. They retained their old caste rules and even their functions and intermarriages between the different groups were exceptions rather than the rule. The activities of the *Magres*, *Rainas*, *Chaks* and *Dars* bear close resemblance to those of the feudal lords of the later Hindu period.



[Source: Image](#)

Postcard from Kashmir

- Agha Shahid Ali

*Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,
my home a neat four by six inches.*

*I always loved neatness. Now I hold
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.*

*This is home. And this the closest
I'll ever be to home. When I return,
the colors won't be so brilliant,
the Jhelum's waters so clean,
so ultramarine. My love
so overexposed.*

*And my memory will be a little
out of focus, in it
a giant negative, black
and white, still undeveloped.*





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