

LIVING SEPARATE YET TOGETHER: HINDU AND MUSLIM IN KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir had remained an abode of different religions since ancient times. It had witnessed different religious ideologies and their interaction with each other. This interaction resulted into the development of a cultural synthesis and transformed Kashmir into what we called as pluralistic society. Kashmir was famous for Naga-worship, Buddhism, and Brahmanism and lastly witnessed the penetration and accommodation of Islam, from above, in the 14th century and within few centuries majority of the inhabitants got converted to Islam. Though both the communities were living separately and possess many differences, visible to a stranger as well. But at the same time these two communities were living together in harmony and kept the religious fundamentalism at bay. This paper is a humble attempt to highlight why the two communities, In spite of, differences were mutually living together and what were the cause behind this unity in diversity.

Keywords: Kashmir, Hindu, Muslim, social differences, Economic interdependence, Harmony.

INTRODUCTION

From Ancient, Kashmir has remained milieu of many religions. Religion though abstract yet is the dominant part of every culture. Once Kashmir had witnessed changes in its existing religion, it had brought remarkable changes in its culture too. From the known history of Kashmir Naga-worship was the earliest flourishing religion followed by Buddhism and Brahmanism. All the three religio-cultural ideologies, one after other, had accommodated one another by inter mingling with the existing one and eventually resulted into the development of syncretic culture. This give and take process had remained the dominant discourse of the valley and had left permanent mark on its society and culture and, developed Kashmir what we call as pluralistic society¹.

¹ P.N.K, Bamzai, Socio-Economic History of Kashmir (1846-1925), Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 1st ed., 1987. p. 18.

Islam that took its birth in an Arabian Desert in 6th century was successful in bringing whole central Asia under its sway by the end of eighth century. The neighboring territories situated close to the North and West of Kashmir also fell into the hands of Muslim armies in the beginning of 11th century. And by the end of the 13th century whole Northern India except Kashmir was under the political control of Muslims². The Muslim military commander Mohammad bin Qasim made an abortive attempt to establish Muslim kingdom in Kashmir³. But his failure was because of the tough geographical location of the valley and partly he was called back by caliph Walid. But if we trace history from below, Muslims had started pouring into the valley as early as in the 8th century that is more than 500 years before the foundation of Muslim dynasty in Kashmir. Also, we have evidences that show five hundred years before the Sultanate, Muslims occupying high positions in the army of Chandrapida⁴. It was only in 14th century that Muslims were successful in establishing political control over Kashmir. In that century certain developments took place that resulted into the spread of Islam from above. In the second decade of this century Rinchana (A Buddhist Tibetans prince) took the reins of Kashmir from AD, when the ruler of valley fled to Kishtwar due to fear of Mongol invasion. Rinchana who moralized the demoralized people and fought for them was accepted by masses as their savior in distress. The brave man accepted Islam at the hands of Bulbul shah and became first Islamic ruler in Kashmir (1320-23 AD). Though his rule did not last for long but it happened by the end of third decade of 14th century when Shahmir became the Sultan and founded the mighty Sultanate Empire in Kashmir that lasted till 1561 AD. During these centuries (Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth) Kashmir witnessed mass conversion to Islam. It should be mentioned except for a few immigrants the predominant majority of Kashmiri Muslims were converts from Hinduism and a thin slice from Buddhism. What is, however, remarkable about the spread of Islam in Kashmir is that the conversion did not follow any military occupation in the valley by the Muslims. But both the Muslim rulers, Rinchana and Shahmir, saved the people from recurrent foreign military invasions and spared people from centuries of misrule, internal chaotic conditions and economic suffering that had become the rule of the day. That is why, Shah Mir occupied the throne primarily with the help of people and mostly with the support of local feudal lords who constituted their nobility, army and bureaucracy but were mainly non-Muslim until gradually brought under the fold of Islam⁵. In medieval times kings were considered Gods representative on earth or Shadow of God on earth. The king was considered not only the protector and defender but also role model and hero by the general public and this ruling-class ideology was followed by the proletariats in their way of living. Alike in Kashmir this hero worship⁶ had overall impact on the culture of people including religion which was fastened by the easiness, equality, compassion of the principles

² Muhammad Ashraf Wani, Islam in Kashmir Srinagar: Oriental Publishing House (2004), p. 46

³ Chach- nama (Eng. Tr. K. F. Mirza), p. 160

⁴ Kalhana's Rajatarangini: a chronicle of the kings of Kasmir. Vol. 1. Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1989.

⁵ Ashraf Wani, Op cit, p. 111

⁶ Walter Roper Lawrence, The valley of Kashmir. Asian Educational Services, 1895, p. 300

of Islam and the privilege provided under its rule. Only that section refused to knot with Islam who were ex-rulers or beneficiaries of the ex-rule. This beneficiary comprised mostly of the Brahman class (popularly known as pandits in Kashmir⁷). Thus by the middle of the sixteenth century Hindu society of Kashmir was left to be represented by only caste that was *Brahamans*.

During 19th century, Muslims became the major religious community demographically in Kashmir, constituting 94% of total population and rest of the population consisted almost exclusively of Hindus, though few Sikhs were also present in few villages.⁸ The Hindu population after their mass conversions in previous centuries turned minority in their own land and this confusion developed into them a sort of collective minority fear. They were successful in overcoming this fear by taking advantage of dominant linguistic and literary discourse and always remained at the helm of administrative affairs even during the Muslim rule. Majority of the Muslims engaged themselves with the land and for the land having very less time for the education and less value for job⁹. Both among the Muslims and Hindus, there emerged higher and lower castes within the society. Among Pandits; those who turned to religious literature (that was in Sanskrit) and to the administration of spiritual and ritual needs of the Hindus were called as *Bhasha Bhatta* and those who got engage in the administration of the state came to be known as *Karkuns*, who looked down upon *bhassa bhattas*. Thus the pandits got divided into a rigid division of two endogamous sub-castes.¹⁰ And among Muslims; those who visited Kashmir for the spread of Islam like *sayyids*, *pirzadas*, *sheikhs* and other received land grants from the rulers came to be identified as superior castes while the indigenous converts got recognized as inferior castes.¹¹ The differences within these two communities were essentially economic in nature. As those who has authority and own means of production or economy were considered as high or superior castes.

1. LIVING SEPARATELY:

Talking about Hindu and Muslim relations, both the religious groups were different from one another and there was no problem in identifying ones co-religionist, because both maintain their distinctiveness from their religious opponents that starts from facial outlook. Muslims grow beard more often than Hindu and with a distinct cut and Hindus wear *tyok* (saffron mark) on their forehead¹². Walter Lawrence had observed certain differences that distinguish Hindu and Muslim from one another. He says, “There are certain peculiarities in dress which

⁷ Rajatarangini, completed in 12th century, mentions the presence of all the four varnas and outcastes in Kashmir

⁸ Census of India, 1911, Vol. XX, p. 88; Lawrence, *opcit*, p.224-25.

⁹ Tyndale-Biscoe, Cecil Earle. *Kashmir in Sunlight & Shade*, Mittal Publications, 1925.

¹⁰ Madan Vandana, ed. *The village in India*. Oxford in India Readings in So, 2004, p. 309

¹¹ Lawrence, *OpCit*, p. 310

¹² Madan Vandana, *OpCit*, p. 299

distinguish the Pandit from the *Musalman*. The *Pandit* wears the tuck of his white turban on the right, the *Musalman* on the left. The *Pandit* fastens his gown on the left, the *Musalman* on the right. The *Pandit* has long, narrow sleeves, the *Musalman* short, full sleeves. It seems that the *Musalman*s were enjoined to distinguish themselves from the Hindus, for I find that *Musalman*s will invariably mount their ponies from the off side while the Pandits mount from the near side. And while the *Pandit* begins his ablutions from the left leg, the *Musalman* invariably begins from the right leg. Other distinguishing peculiarities may be mentioned. The *Pandits* wear tight drawers, headdresses of narrow white cloth, of twenty yards in length, and a smooth skullcap. They also retain a small lock of hair on their head, which is carefully guarded from the barber. Further, the *Pandit* uses his long narrow sleeve as a kind of glove, and though he may have put on his shoes with this glove he does not hesitate to eat food with the same sleeve. *Musalman*s on the contrary wear loose drawers, *pagri* of broad white cloth, never more than ten yards in length, skullcaps with raised patterns; they shave their heads entirely, and they would regard food touched by the sleeve as impure. There are many differences between the *Musalmani* and *Panditani* style of dress, and there are wide differences in their character. The *Panditani* wears a girdle, but no drawers. She has a white headdress, and has no embroidery except on her sleeves and around the collar. She never wears leather shoes but sticks to the old fashioned grass sandal. She will never mention her husband's name on calling him. The *Musalmani* wears no girdle, but if she be of good position she will never stir out of the house without drawers. She wears a red headdress and has her tunic richly embroidered. She uses leather shoes. She feels no shame to mention her husband's name.¹³

Not only in the dress but both the communities maintain distinction in food, housing and social relations as well. The pandits do not use onion, leeks and garlic. The red tomatoes, red fleshed *kabuli*, vegetables marrow, red carrots, red beans and red apples were proscribed by Kashmiri Pandits while as the Muslims have no such taboo. The Pandit houses had also distinctive identity style and pattern that signaled it out from a Muslim house. Both the communities didn't maintain any social intercourse with each other by way of inter-dining or inter-marriages¹⁴. The differences are also visible in individual and family names. Besides, there was division of labour between the two communities in the Kashmir. The pandits did not opt menial jobs which always remain open to the professional Muslims. The pandits used to have differences with the Muslims not only in their daily items of life but their concept about Muslim was different. They regard Muslim ritually impure and referred to them as *mleccha* (of low birth, outsider). They regard Muslim outside the pale of values and identify them with world of *tamas* (darkness, ignorance)¹⁵.

¹³ Lawrence, *Opcit*, p. 252-53

¹⁴ Triloki Nath Madan, *Family and kinship: A study of the Pandits of rural Kashmir*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

¹⁵ Ashraf Wani, *Opcit*, 275

2. LIVING TOGETHER

When Kashmiri Pandit visits India he used to be extremely strict in following the rules of *Brahmanism* but in their own country they do things which would horrify the Orthodox Hindus of the Hindustan. They show less concern on rituals of purity and pollution while dealing with the Muslim in their daily social life. They drink water brought by a *Musalman*, they ate food cooked on a Muslim boat, and they select foster-mother for their child from Muslims.¹⁶ When Maharaja Gulab Singh tried his best to stop eating or drinking brought by *Musalman* it was all to no effect. They were less scrupulous in maintenance of their rituals of purity and pollution than their much rigid counterparts in Hindustan and they were more willing to interact with Muslims in a series of common rites and cultural practices.¹⁷ This laxness that had crept into the Hindu religion had resulted in the development of a bond between the two communities that differentiated them from their Indian fellows. The reason behind this laxness and living together was economic interdependence of both the communities on each other.

Agriculture was the primary source of sustenance of life in Kashmir since times. The ownership of land used to have a significant importance. Most of the land was owned by the Pandits who were already in minority. Moreover, pandits were traditionally debarred from a large number of occupational activities and it was very uncommon for a pandit to cultivate land himself, even a petty Pandit landowner would choose poverty and share the crop with a tenant, rather than cultivate the land himself. At the same time, the pandits were unable to cultivate all the lands by themselves as they don't have sufficient Pandit agrarian labour.¹⁸ To overcome the blockage, they need to hire the Muslims for the cultivation of their land. Again Muslims didn't have sufficient land to cultivate; they had surplus labour which needed daily work for their sustenance.

Moreover, the Varna system in Kashmir didn't lasted further once mass conversion took place in the preceding centuries as all the castes, except pandits, accepted Islam. These pandits, by the norms of religion, can't engage in polluting activities such as barbering, washing clothes, obtaining oil from oilseeds, removing and skinning dead animals, making shoes, winnowing pans and drums, slaughtering goats and sheep and so on.¹⁹ So much was Hindu dependent on the Muslim that the idols worshipped by the Hindu were furnished and decorated by the Muslim potter and in carrying on their religious festivals and rituals absence of Muslim barber halts the celebration. Consequently, pandits found it impossible to carry on without the service of Muslim cultivators, artisans, village servants and other specialized groups therefore invited them to live with them. Peasants and non-

¹⁶ Lawrence, *Opcit*, p.300

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.300

¹⁸ As per census 1911 Pandits constitute only 6 percent of the total population of the valley.

¹⁹ Madan, T. N. "Religious ideology and social structure: The Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir." *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India* (Imtiaz Ahmed, ed.) Delhi: Manohar (1981).

agricultural occupation groups among Muslims provide their respective services to these Pandits and were entitled to the share of produce as remuneration at the time of harvest. These Muslim specialists were much attracted towards Hindu landlords who because of their good economic position could fetch them more than their co-religionists. In such a situation it was not at all surprising that the two communities treat each other as an essential component of their social system.

CONCLUSION

The cultural pluralism that emerged and sustained in Kashmir was basically an outcome of the existing situations at the period of time.²⁰ Hindus were reduced to a minority after their mass conversion and totally dependent on the Muslims. Though, there existed cultural differences between the two communities but the economic dependence between the two communities did not left any scope for religious fundamentalism or communalism. This is in agreement what Marx has rightly argued that it is existing situation that determines consciousness of mind and economy acts as base in structuring the society.

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