

Examining the Concept of “Kashmiriyat” in Kashmir from the 15th to 17th century under the Muslim Rulers of Sultan Ghayas-ud-Din Zain-ul-Abidin, and Mughul Emperor Akbar

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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 15th 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 from Hinduism and the sprit of Eightfold Paths from Buddhism and incorporated these to the concept of transcendence of God and to the sprit 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 Akbar, 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 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 Buddhist of Kashmir.

Today Kashmir has been in intercommunity political dispute over the political future especially since 1989. One of the causes of the political dispute is Kashmiriyat. The main conflicting parties are Liberal Muslims, Fundamentalist Muslims and Non Muslim communities of Jammu and Ladakh. The Liberal Muslims who wants non-Muslim constituent region of Ladakh and Jammu to be part of the independent Kashmir based on “Kashmiriyat.” On the other hand, the Buddhist of Ladkah and Hindus of Jammu region demand separation from Muslim dominant Kashmir Valley on the basis of political inequality, religious and cultural differences. However, the fundamentalist Muslims who see “Kashmiriyat” as a deviation from Islam seek both independence and Islamisation 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

Socio-Cultural Space, Kashmiriyat, Rishi-Sufi, Socio-Political Space, Kashmir Conflict

Introduction

The history of Kashmir indicates that the encounters among the ethnic and the religious communities often resulted oppositional and dialectical relationships in the socio-religious life of its people. Often these encounters historically caused differentiation, competition, confrontation, and conflicting interactions among the communities. Moreover, the encountering religions, on the one hand, deepened the respect for once 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.¹ was developed into a socio-cultural space called “Kashmiriyat” where people of both religions were living harmoniously.² 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.³ 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 Sufi tradition of Islam.⁴

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 practice in Islam, Muslims as conquerors incorporated the Rishi tradition into the Sufism. Thus, syncretistic 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 deescalate 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 a value, that broadened the Hindus’ and Muslims’ horizon of intercommunity 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,⁵ the Hindus of Jammu and the Buddhists of Ladkha who seek autonomy from the dominant political control of the Kashmir Valley see Kashmiriyat as the Muslim religious tool for Islamisation of region.⁶ Thus, the current Kashmir conflict should be considered as an interreligious 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 the 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 article examines the nature and its role in the recent Kashmir inter-religious political dispute.

1. “Kashmiriyat” in Kashmir Conflict

This part of the discussion deals with the place of “Kashmiriyat” in Kashmir conflict. The Kashmir conflict refers to an ongoing dispute between China, India, Pakistan, and the people. The history of wars for Kashmir between China, India, and Pakistan and its effects are well known. However, the history of internal political struggle for self-rule and its effects on the Kashmiri society is less known to the international world. The internal struggles for self-rule among the communities of Kashmir have been triggered by “Kashmiriyat,”⁷ a social consciousness and cultural value found in Kashmir.

From the time of pre-independence in India, the people of Kashmir earnestly wished to be free from the British rule.⁸ However, they were divided in their opinions whether, to join the union of India, Pakistan or to form their own independent sovereign state in communal line.⁹ Later, these serious differences in the people's opinion paved the way for various disputes in Kashmir regarding its political status. While Hindus and Buddhist wanted to be part of secular Hindu majority India or to be independent secular state, the Muslim community was divided, to join the union of India or Pakistan or to form their own independent Islamic sovereign state.

The Muslims who wanted join India with Hindus and Buddhists of Kashmir were liberal Muslims. Their love for the traditional common social consciousness called "Kashmiriyat" caused them to feel closer to India, which had secular constitution.¹⁰ The fundamentalist Muslims who did not appreciate the common Kashmir consciousness were opting for the creation of Pakistan. The separatist Muslims searched for the establishment of Islamic independent state of their own. To have a brief understanding of the history of "Kashmiriyat" in the Kashmir conflict, the following points need to be understood.

To begin with, around 1930 Sheik Abdullah, a liberal Muslim, utilized Kashmiriyat as a political ideology, and started a revolt against the ruling king of the time who was ruling the land together with the dictates of the British in favor of Hindus. In this connection, in 1946 they organized "Quit Kashmir Movement" in an attempt to dethrone the king. In turn, the Sheikh Abdullah was arrested. Sheikh Abdullah was promptly supported by the leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC) party who were fighting for the independence from British rule. With the help of INC Sheik Abdullah got out of the prison. Consequently, Sheikh Abdullah became closely connected with the INC, which had highly secular ideology.

Due to Abdullah's inclination to Kashmiriyat and India, some Muslims supported him while rather more fundamentalist Muslims who formed "Muslim Conference" turned against him and backed another Islamic organization, called Muslim League that was led by Ginnah the founder of Pakistan.

The Muslim Conference mobilized Muslims for a movement toward the formation of Pakistan as state in 1947 under the leadership of Choudry Ghualm Abbas¹¹ who believed that the Kashmiriyat was a deviation of Islam, demanded the accession of the Kashmir state to Islamic Pakistan. With this development, the Islamic community in Kashmir was clearly divided by the issue of the political status of Kashmir. Furthermore, with the support of the INC party, from 1946, Sheik Abdullah attempted to replace the King, by which he hoped to create a secular state of Kashmir with the concept of Kashmiriyat.

However, Pandits of the Hindu community and Buddhist suspected the sincerity of his motives and saw the fact that many Hindus were converted to Islam under the pretext of Kashmiriyat. As a result, the Hindus of Kashmir gradually abandoned the support toward Sheik Abdullah.

Soon after the Independence of India in 1947, the ruling king of Kashmir hoped to make Kashmir be his independent territory. However, the Muslim tribals of Kashmir opposed his plans, and revolted against him. Under these circumstances, the king sought the help of the Congress leaders who were then ruling India. The INC leadership offered him assistance, on the condition that Kashmir be made an integral part of the Union of India. The king agreed to this proposal, and signed a treaty to that effect.

Consequently, the Indian army entered Kashmir, and chased away to Pakistan the revolting tribes who were in turn supported by the Pakistani government. The war continued, and later after UN intervention, the Kashmir was divided into two parts: 1) Indian occupied Kashmir and 2) Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Then the king was dethroned and with the support of the ruling INC Party, Sheik Abdullah became the chief minister of Indian occupied Kashmir.

However, gradually grievances arose both among the Muslim groups who wanted to be a part of Pakistan and among those who wanted to have an independent state of Kashmir. This may be said as the core reason behind the present political dispute in Kashmir and more specifically of the still continuing effects of the 1989 insurgency in the state about which we shall discuss briefly below.¹²

The 1989 “Insurgency” refers to the intense sporadic violence by the militants, both against the Indian rule, and against the non-Muslim ethnic communities and the Muslim who with their Kashmiriyat ideology favored India. In order to combat such a violent separatist movement and to protect non-Muslims and liberal Muslims in Kashmir, India reportedly have deployed more than 400,000 troops in the region by 1995.¹³

During this insurgency, nearly two thousand Hindu Pandits were killed with their houses burnt by the militant Muslims. As a consequence, Hindu Pandits were victimized. Nearly 360,000 Pandits were estimated to be internally displaced.¹⁴ Besides this, in Kashmir even later in April 30, 2006, the terrorists reportedly massacred thirty-five Pandits.

Further, from January 1989 to October 2009, more than 90,986 Muslims who were caught between the armed militants and armed Indian security forces were killed, and about 105,182 were said to be displaced.¹⁵ Among the victims, many of them were killed by the terrorists for promoting Kashmiriyat as a respect for religion and for supporting

Indian government.¹⁶ Yet, during insurgency since 1989, both the Hindus and the Buddhists of Kashmir became suspicious of the majority Muslim, and started to demand their region to be autonomous from Kashmir. However, the liberal pro Indian Muslims who wanted to have a multi religious Kashmir society, based on the traditional Kashmiriyat value opposed minority communities' demand.

Under these above-mentioned circumstances, the Hindus and the Buddhists of Indian-administered Kashmir became suspicious of the even pro-Indian liberal majority Muslims.¹⁷ Although the communities have been unable to resolve the Kashmiri intercommunity political dispute over the political future, they have agreed in recent years to take various measures to reduce tension. Thus, one can say that the idea of historically developed Kashmiriyat has even affected the recent Kashmiri political dispute among the communities of Kashmir. The next section will analyze the historical nature of the concept of "Kashmiriyat" and a debate among scholars regarding their views on "Kashmiriyat."

2. "Kashmiriyat"

This part of the discussions deals with what is Kashmiriyat according to various scholars. In Kashmir before pre-British colonial period, irrespective of religion and ethnicity, the people's traditional sense of belongingness were expressed by the term "Kashmiriyat."¹⁸ 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 the prominent proponents of the first view is T. N. Madan. According to him, "Kashmiriyat refers to Kashmiri identity cutting across the religious divide and can be defined as love of the homeland and even a common speech."¹⁹ On the other hand, a representative proponent of the second group, Pravez Dewas 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"²⁰ 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 Badshah, the great king) who ruled Kashmir from 1423 to 1474 A.D., and the Mughal emperor Jalal-ud-Din

Mohammed Akbar (known as Akbar the great) in 1542 to 1605 A.D. 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.²¹

Some scholars consider that it is not only brotherhood but also a social space that let people interact beyond religious and cultural walls.²² 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.²³ 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-e-Islami and his colleague, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, were medically treated by two top Pandits doctors namely Dr. U Kaul and Dr. Sameer Kaul. These two doctors rose above community feelings and overcame the pain of forced migration of the fellow Pandits to treat two separatists who are blamed for the Kashmiri 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.²⁴

Other scholars held a view that "Kashmiriyat" is a gradual outcome of mutual adaptation of the ethnic and religious traditions.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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 *Kashmiri-ness* and can be defined as a secular ethno-national as well as socio-cultural consciousness and/or a cultural value

that binds the people of Kashmir together.

In my field research with Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims in 2008, it was found that this unique syncretistic culture and a way of life “Kashmiriyat” have 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 living 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.²⁷



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir_conflict

3. Socio-Ethnic Structure of the Kashmiri Society

This part of the discussion deals with socio-ethnic structure that facilitated the emergence of “Kashmiriyat” until the arrival of Islam. Before the arrival of Buddhism 3rd century B.C., and that of Islam in the 12th century, the Kashmiri society was made of various races, ethnic groups and native religions.²⁸ This ethnic, racial, and native religious ethos and their way of life can be said to be a source of “Kashmiri Consciousness”

Kashmiriyat. There were various ethnic groups in the Kashmir society, residing in various parts of the region.

To begin with, while Kashmiris who originally migrated from countries like Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Afghanistan mainly occupy the Kashmir Valley,²⁹ they were also spread out in the other areas of the state like Kishtwar, Bhadarwah, Doda, and Ramban. They were distinct from other ethnic groups with their tall stature, broad shoulder, well-developed forehead, and long narrow face. As far as their dress was concerned, they wore short pyjamas, along with a loose-fitting and large sleeved gown locally known as *Pharan*, and a skullcap. They were intellectually sharp, friendly, cheerful and quite efficient in the fields of doing business and agriculture.³⁰ Although the majority of them were Muslim, they retained marked traces of the feudal social customs and religious tolerance. Even after their conversion to Islam, a good number of them retained customs such as the ritual in the Rishi temples that was originally practiced among Hindus.

The second dominant ethnic group in Kashmir is Dards. They were originally Buddhist and Hindu, latter embraced the Islamic religion, and they occupy the northern part of the Kashmir Valley.³¹ They earn their livelihood by through agriculture, trade, pasturing, and cottage industries. Although very strong physically, they are not said to have been very handsome or beautiful. Ethnically they were known for their aggressiveness and strong will. In their ethnic groups, they had various classes like rulers, religious leaders, cultivators, and menial workers.³² The majority of Dards were Muslims, with significant population of Hindus and Buddhists. They are exceptional in having retained their ancestral customs in Islam, and Buddhism. They, even after conversion to Islam, continued to believe that knowing oneself was knowing God, an ethnic practice in the Kashmir region.

The third group of ethnic community is called, Ladakhis, Their ancestry originates from a mixture of the Mongoloid and Aryan races. Known for their religious tolerance, honesty, and hard work, in a single Ladakhi family it is probable to see members practicing different religions. While the male child of the Ladakhi family belongs to the father's religion, and the female child belongs that of her mother. Basically, the Ladakhis are truthful, good natured, cheerful, friendly, industrious, and honest.³³ Majority of Ladakhis are Buddhist, with significant population of Muslims. They adhere to ancestral social customs like polyandry, food habits clothing that very much related to ethnic religious traditions especially in Buddhism and Islam.³⁴

Fourth group of the ethnic community in Kashmir is called Dogras. They embraced Islam during the 16th and 17th centuries, make another ethnic group who dwell along the

two lakes of *Saroinisar* and *Mansa*. While the low-caste Dogras have black complexion, the high-caste ones are white-complexioned. Muslim Dogras migrated to Pakistan after the division of Kashmir. Physically Dogras are short, slim, and high shoulder. In the 2008, in Kashmir I found out that they continued to sing folk music even after converted to Islam.

The fifth group of ethnic community is called Hanjis. They are water dwellers, who live in the areas of Dal, Wular, and Khanabal, which are places close to Anchar lakes and the river Jhelum. Some Hanjis consider themselves to be the descendants of Prophet Noah and it is believed that after migrating to Kashmir they became Hindus and later converted to Islam. The Hanjis earn their livelihood by involving in hotel management, tourism, and houseboat industry. There are different types of rich and poor Hanjis. However, the poorest Hanjis are Gad-Hanjis and Demb-Hanjis who live in very poor and unhygienic life situations. Majority of Hanjis are Muslims. They adhere to ancestral social customs like food habits and life styles in Islam.

Finally, Gujjars and Bakarwals who constitutes a major part of the population of the Kashmir are nomadic character and depend on flocks and cattle keeping for their livelihood. They have migrated from Gujarat (India) and Rajasthan (India). There are archaeological evidences to prove that there was a spell of dryness in the 6th and 7th centuries in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The spread of Gujjars in Kashmir is not known with certainty. The major concentration of Gujjars lies in Jammu, Rajouri, Udhampur, Poonch, Uri, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Daksum, Narang and the Kandi areas of Kashmir. Although some of them have started developing land connections, they are essentially cattle rearers and a section of them Bakarwals regularly moved between the southern slopes of the Siwaliks and the Margs of the Central Himalayas. The houses of the Gujjars and Bakarwals are generally a mud-house against the slope of a hillock. The walls are devoid of any ventilation except a small entry door. In one of the walls, there is a small hole, which is the only outlet for all types of bad gasses and smoke.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in the Kashmir are the followers of Islam, excepting a few who are settled in Bimber, Mirpur, and Rajouri. The Gujjars, because of their strict religious adherence, have emerged as the most outstanding tribe who are trusted for their honesty. Gujjars are known for their hard work and gentle nature. Rearing of cattle horses, goats, and sheep is their main occupation. They have simple food habits. Maize, milk, and milk products are the main ingredients of their diet. They do not use any type of toxic drinks as taking liquor is prohibited in Islam. Even tea is not consumed by all the Gujjars.³⁵ However, they adhere to ancestral clothing even in Islam. For example, even

now they wear a turban of a peculiar style that their ethnic ancestors used to wear. The women usually wear a long shirt and Shalwar with a cap or Dupatta on their head. They even after becoming Muslims continued to have reverence for the relics of holy men and folklore and folk music. Besides this, it also should be noted that folk music and folklore for the ethnic community is often prayer to ethnic Gods.³⁶

In the above discussions, it is striking to note that in most of the Kashmir's ethnic communities the members did not practice same religion. Besides this, above mentioned discussions point out that even after conversion Muslims and Buddhist of Kashmir retained quite a number of their ethnic traditions and practices. Thus, religions of Kashmir Valley functioned as a social space for the interethnic interactions.

From the above discussions, we can further conclude that the adoption of new religious beliefs that differ from the ethnic beliefs involved both a change from ethnic to religious identity and internalization of the new belief systems. For ethnic converts it implies a new reference point for one's self identity and is a matter of belief and social structure of both faith and affiliation. Thus, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam functioned as a common identity that reduced competition, tension, provided security, higher esteem, social status, and self-maximization to the members of the various ethnic groups.

Thus, from the above discussions one can conclude that the ethnic communities attained a new identity called religious identity without losing their ethnic identity.

The next part of the discussion deals with how the Kashmiriyat lived in the socio-religious structure of Kashmir.

4. Socio-Religious Cultural Structure of Kashmir Society

This part of the discussion deals with the socio-religious structure of Kashmir until the end of the Muslim rule. Inter-religious interactions of religious communities were very common in Kashmir especially from the 15th to 17th century. The most profound example of the reciprocal adoption of the culture and tradition in terms of "Kashmiriyat" is found also in the interaction among the Hindus, Buddhist, and Muslims. Many members of the ethnic communities were converted 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 number of traditional practices and beliefs.

The history of socio religious structure of Kashmir Valley can be divided in to three phases. The first phase can be dated back to the earliest inhabitants of Kashmir Valley probably who cherished some aboriginal beliefs, the details of which are not traceable now. The second phase, the snake-cult, or Naga-worship in the socio-religious structure

seems to have been established in the valley from a remote period and undoubtedly had been one of the earliest religions of the land.³⁷ The third phase starts in the third century B. C., when the Buddhism seems to have made some headway, converted a large number of people, and overshadowed the Naga cult, which ultimately sunk into oblivion. Since no written documents available regarding interreligious interaction during the early period for our research, we will start from 3rd century B.C. when the world religion Buddhism made its footing in the socio-religious history of Kashmir. The history of Socio-religious structure of Kashmir in the third phase can be divided in to three periods. Chart given below gives us the history of socio-religious structure of Kashmir society at a glance.

| Phase | Time Line | Religion |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| First Phase | Prehistoric | Aboriginal beliefs |
| Second Phase | Prehistoric | Hindu Naga-worship |
| Third Phase | Recorded historical period (From 3 rd B.C. onwards there are recorded history of Kashmir. | |
| First period in the third phase | 3 rd Century B.C. to 6 th Century A.D. | Buddhism |
| Second period in the third phase | 6 th Century A.D. to 12 th Century A.D. | Hinduism |
| Third period in the third phase | 12 th Century A.D. to 18 th Century A.D. | Islam |

This chart is arranged by the author based on the facts in the book called “A History of Kashmir” by Parevez Dewan.

The first period of the third phase begins with the King Ashok (273-232 B.C.), the greatest Buddhist emperors of the Mauryan empire. The king Ashok’s conquest of Kashmir in around B.C. 250 to A.D.600 is called the beginning of the Buddhist period in Kashmir. During the Buddhist period Buddhism was promoted under state sponsorship. Following historical incidents indicate that during this period Kashmir had a peaceful life mostly devoted to religious, academic, and beautifying cities. First thing that should be noted during the period is the rule of Mauryan king Ashok. This devout Buddhist king is credited with developing the cities in Kashmir. It is said that during his rule the Kashmir was a major center for Buddhist scholars and perhaps dominated by the Sarvastivadan School. Second incident is that many renowned Buddhist monks from the east and central Asia said to have visited Kashmir during this period. Third thing is that the famous fourth Buddhist Council was also held in Kashmir during this period. Fourth thing that happened

during this period was that the valley also boasted of one of the best place of leaning because of the “Sharda” University. The university also became an important centre for the propagation of Buddhism in the region. Up to second century A.D., this was visited by scholars from all over the world and had a very large collection of books and manuscripts. Many Hindus also cooperated with the Buddhist in their academic and cultural pursuits. Thus, it should be noted that through the Buddhist’ and Hindus’ inter-religious interaction in Kashmir, they became tolerant and liberal towards each other’s faith.³⁸

The second period of the third phase begins around 600 A.D. and ends at around 1390 A.D. During this period, the Kashmir deepened broadmindedness and the commitment to tolerance to all streams of thoughts by introducing monotheism in Kashmir. The Kashmir was glorious Hindu Kingdom known for serving as the seat of learning of Hinduism both during the pre and post Buddhist periods. However, the Hinduism followed here was the Trika School of Saivite philosophy. It promoted monism. They believed in one monistic God called Shiva. To maintain monistic faith, although Kashmiri Hindus worshipped Brahma, Mahesh, and Vishnu as Gods, they believed that these three Gods are three manifestations of God Shiva. This form of Hindu religion is very different from the one followed in other part of India which is the Vedanta philosophy. Kashmiri Brahmins who consider themselves the elite of Brahmanism are called Pandits. They as priest developed the philosophical background for the Hindu-Muslim interactions. There were many famous Hindu Kings of Kashmir right from Gonanda-I to Laltaditya, Avantivarman, Harsha, Queen Dida and so many others. This strong leadership of Hindu kings strengthened the Hindus’ self-respect and development of monistic faith helped the Hindus’ to understand later the Islam better.³⁹

The third period of the third phase begins from the end of 12th century and ends at the end of the 18th century. During this period, many Hindus and Buddhist were converted to Islam. Definite historical facts that would account for the extraordinarily large number of conversions that took place in Kashmir are not available in the historical documents of the Kashmir. “The Hindus and Buddhists conversion in to Islam were multifaceted process that included external and internal stimuli with material bases and socio cultural dimensions contributed to this process of conversion.”⁴⁰ To an extent mass conversion of Hindus were due to the work of Muslim missionaries. Islam was preached by preachers came from Iran. According historical record Bulbul Shah was the first to come followed by Mir Sayed Ali Hamadani popularly known as Shah-i-Hamadan who came with over 700 missionaries.⁴¹ They preached the religion of Islam, which the local Kashmiris often voluntarily accepted. Missionaries sometimes made the conversion of the Hindus and

Buddhist through preaching and sometimes by incentives and force. The majority Hindus became minority with the conversion of its followers in to Islam.

With the conversion of Rin Cin Shah, the last non-Muslim ruler of Kashmir, Islam became the state religion. The Hindus who had been reduced to a minority reconciled to their fate and got along well with the Muslim majority.⁴² There were instances of special recognition for the Islam in the Kashmir society made the Hindus to feel alienated in Kashmir.⁴³ During the time of Sikander, the father of famous King Zain-ul-Abdin popularly known as Budshah, the Hindus were persecuted. During his reign, idols and Hindu temples were demolished. He continued torture the Hindu priests. Due to the forced conversions during his reign, a large number of Kashmiri Hindus migrated from Kashmir.⁴⁴

However, Budshah brought these back as soon as he became the King of Kashmir. In fact, he enacted special legislation for the return and rehabilitation of Hindus. He also put them in prominent positions in the state administration. Kashmir stayed as an independent sovereign state with a Muslim majority until Mughals annexed it to their empire in 1586. Badshah made royal pronouncements that had great impact on the community and reshaped the outlook of the majority Muslim community. His decisions and action had a profound effect on restoring full citizenship to Pandits. While instilling pride among Kashmiri Muslims, he taught them that cultural identity based on human values, diversity and tolerance are not inconsistent with their own faith and religious beliefs. Thus, while belief in the Islam as the only true religion; a Muslim could simultaneously express respect for all the religions of the region.⁴⁵

This common social consciousness of Kashmiri people was further developed by the Mughul King Akbar when came into power. By the time when Akbar started rule the Kashmir, all cultural, economic and political liberties provided to non Muslims by Badshah over a hundred years earlier had declined and they were again fleeing the valley in large numbers. Against this context, Akbar restored human rights of the Kashmiri minority, and for the first time since the advent of Islam in Kashmir in the 14th century, Kashmiri Hindus were allowed to celebrate their religious festivals without payment of special taxes or tributes. In reality, Akbar's policy turned out to be an ethical system of personal conduct that stressed the virtues of piety, prudence, and kindness among the people of Kashmir. Thus, there is no denying that as the political and military leader of a vast empire Akbar set a new standard for human values of religious tolerance, pluralism, and personal ethics in Kashmir Valley. Thus, it is natural that the Muslims have not felt obliged to distance themselves totally from region's ethnic beliefs and practices, at least to

the extent these did not contravene their Islamic beliefs.⁴⁶

Thus from above discussions one can conclude that religious communities without losing their original individual community identities maintained a social space for interactions.

During 12th century to 18th century even during the non-Muslim occupation, the Muslim character of the Kashmir Valley remained unchanged. It continued to be a Muslim majority region. Moreover, even after conversion, Muslims retained quite a number of ancient traditions basically of a Hindu character. One of the traditions that have been retained in Kashmir Valley Islam is Rishi movement carried out by the Muslim Sufis known as Rishi-Sufi movement.

5. “Kashmiriyat” in Hindu-Muslim “Rishi-Sufi” Movement and during Insurgency

The best expression of Kashmiriyat is found in Hindu-Muslim “Rishi-Sufi” movement. Before the arrival of Islam, the Kashmir valley was already permeated with the traditions of Hindu asceticism called Rishism and Buddhist renunciation. The origins of the Rishi movement go back to pre-Islamic times. In Hinduism, Rishis were world-renouncing hermits who retired to caves in forests and mountains to meditate and subject themselves to stern austerities. In the later Buddhist era, Rishis took the form of wandering monks, who lived a simple life and dedicated themselves to serving the poor and the needy. The founder of the Muslim Rishi movement in Kashmir, Nuruddin Nurani (1377-1440), sought to mould the pre-existing Rishi tradition, transforming it into a vehicle for the Hindu-Muslim cultural space for interaction. The use of local institutions and methods to teach Islam made Islam more intelligible to the Kashmiris.⁴⁷

The Muslim Rishi movement shares several beliefs, practices, and techniques with its counterpart Hindu Rishi and Buddhist renunciation movement. To begin with, all three movements upheld the belief that ‘knowledge of God’ could be attained through true ‘knowledge of the self.’ Like the Hindu Rishis and Buddhist, the Muslim Rishis also adopted stern austerities and often retired to the mountains and caves to meditate. Most of them remained unmarried.⁴⁸ Although the Islam bans celibacy, the Muslim Rishis justified their remaining unmarried on the grounds that Jesus, also a prophet for the Muslims, was single, as well as such great Sufis as Hazrat Uwais Qarni and the female mystic Rabia of Basra. The Muslim Rishis, like their Hindu predecessors, refrained from eating flesh. So strict were they in their refusal to take the life of any sentient being that they survived simply on dry wild vegetables and grasses.⁴⁹

The second cultural element that was taken by Sufis from Kashmir Rishi is the

doctrine of immanence of God. Although the Islam believes God is transcendental being, the Muslim Rishis like the other Hindu Rishis believed in both the transcendence and immanence of God. In this regard, many Muslim Rishis believed that God is everywhere, not confined to one place.⁵⁰

Third cultural element that was adopted from Kashmir by the Sufis to Islam was the idea of respect for other religions. Kashmiri Sufism promoted respect for other religions, and even belief in reincarnation. In this regard, generally Islam does not promote the idea of reincarnation as taught in Hinduism. Many Muslims in Kashmir who were influenced by the Rishi-Sufis believed in the theory of Karma and related rebirth.⁵¹

The fourth cultural element that was adopted by the Sufis to Islam was “eight-fold path” taught in the Buddhism. Kashmiri Sufism emphasizes on following the right path as the “eight-fold path” taught in the Buddhism. In Islam, submission to God is considered as the means of salvation. However, for many Kashmiri Muslims’ wisdom, ethical conduct and mental development are also important for attaining salvation.

The fifth cultural element that the Sufis adopted from Kashmir to Islam is Meditation. Sufis developed mind’s potential through meditation and absorption, using primarily a technique called *paas-e-anfaas*, like meditating the breathing in Hinduism, a form of “*pranayama*” (extension of the breath).⁵²

The sixth practice that Sufis incorporated in to Islam from Kashmir is belief in miracles. It is said that the Sufis promoted belief in miracles performed by the Sufi saints and his or her capacity to intercede with God on behalf of the followers. Muslims in Kashmir interceded to Rishi saints for miracles. Praying to Rishis to intercede with God on behalf of the followers was common thing in Kashmir.⁵³

Finally, Muslim Sufi-Rishis incorporated love of idols of gods and goddesses in their teachings in Kashmir. They considered idol-worship as part of the phenomenon of mystical love. Some of the Muslim Rishis like Sheikh Yaqub taught in Kashmir that faith itself is the love of idols.⁵⁴

Yet, despite these similarities with Hindu Rishism, there are differences in the Muslim Sufi Rishism. The Muslim Rishis saw themselves as Muslims. They were spreading Islam with mystical poetry (*shruk*), and adopting several practices associated with the pre-Islamic Rishis. Rishis were world-renouncing mendicants, concerned simply with their own salvation. Under Muslim Sufis, the Rishism emerged as a powerful social movement that taught the rights of the downtrodden, bitterly critiquing social hierarchies and oppression. This accounted, in large measure, for the immense popularity of the Muslim Rishis. It is striking to note in this regard that almost all the Rishi shrines are

located in outlying villages, there being almost none in the towns. This suggests that the Rishis clearly sought to distance themselves from the political elite, cultivating close ties with the common people instead.⁵⁵

The Kashmir Rishism under Sufism rather than searching for liberation from the worldly existence, as in the Hindu Rishi tradition, insisted on a detached involvement in the affairs of the world. This corresponds to the Sufi concept of ‘solitude even while in an assembly.’⁵⁶

The Muslim Rishis earn their daily bread through their own labor. It is said that many of the Muslim Rishis helped the poor by providing them free food in community kitchens run in their lodges, as well as planting fruit-bearing trees and constructing bridges, inns and mosques for the general public. This shift from concern with individual salvation to a concern with the welfare of ordinary people is one of the distinctive features of the Sufi- Rishi order.⁵⁷

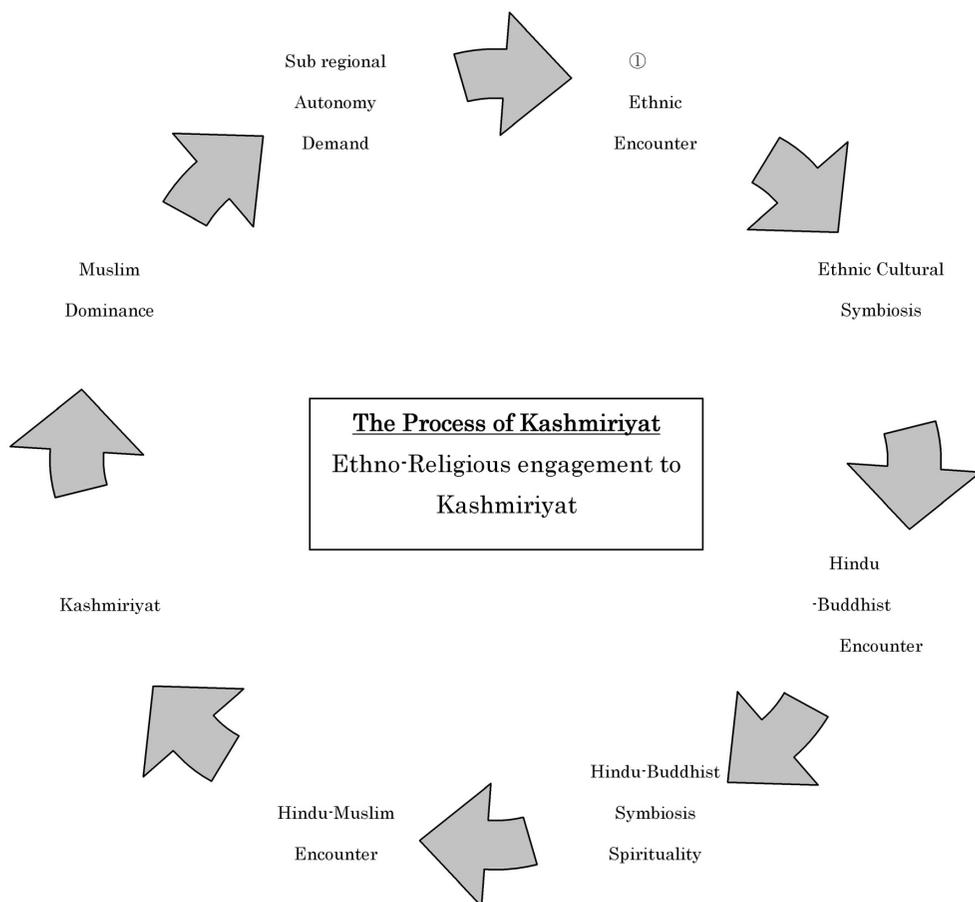
Hindu Rishism, because of its concern with individual salvation, did not emerge as a social movement. In Hindu tradition, the individual Rishis would retire into the forests to meditate and perform stern austerities for years, severing all ties with the world around them. In contrast, under Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani, Rishism took the form of a regular spiritual order, with the candidate taking an oath of allegiance from his spiritual master.⁵⁸ The local Hindus held these Muslim Rishi in great respect and reverence as well, for they preached a universal love and brotherhood transcending differences of caste and creed. For many Kashmiri Hindus, Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani was ‘the blissful one’ and until this day, many Sikhs and Hindus are regular visitors to his shrines found in the Kashmiri countryside.⁵⁹

Thus, the Muslims and Hindus while keeping their religious faith, during the Rishi-Sufi period simultaneously discovered eclectic and syncretic nature of their spiritual beliefs. It also needs to be noted that it is natural that the Hindu converts to Islam did not feel obliged to distance themselves totally from their previous beliefs and practices in Islam, at least to the extent these did not contravene their new Islamic beliefs.

However, from 1989, Kashmiriyat is under attack. The fundamentalist Muslims who want separate state of Kashmir for Muslims call Sufism a deviation from Islam. It also should be noted in recent politics the fundamentalist Muslims want to retain the pure spirit of Islam in whole region of Kashmir by Islamisation of the region. They see Kashmiriyat tradition built by the Rishi-Sufis hinder their objectives.⁶⁰ However, the Hindus and Buddhist see Sufism and Kashmiriyat as a Muslim tool for Islamisation of Kashmir and demand political separation from Muslim majority Kashmir Valley. These

demands for autonomy by the various communities indicate that the Kashmir intercommunity interactions have thrived from socio-religious sphere to a political sphere.

The diagram given below indicates the process that made the ethno-religious social cultural space “Kashmiriyat” possible. Besides this, the diagram below also indicates that the more the number of the engagement groups, like the space within the circle, the wider the space of the interaction. The starting point of the development of “Kashmiriyat” begins with the ethnic encounter that began before the arrival of Buddhism.



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 thorough 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 and 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. In 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.

Notes

¹ T. N. Madan, "Kashmir, Kashmiris, Kashmiriyat: An Introductory Essay," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵ Mohd Sadiq, *Attack on Mosque: Militants Outraging Kashmiriyat*, available at <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/insights/insight20061111a.html>, accessed on 2012-09-29.

⁶ Parvez Dewan, *A History of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manas Publication, 2008), 113.

⁷ Based on the author's field research in New Delhi IDP Pandits' Camps, August 10-30, 2008 and in

Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011.

⁸ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 138-140.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Based on the Author's field research in Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011.

¹¹ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 141-144.

¹² Manoj Joshi, *Kashmir 1947-1965 A Story Retold*, (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2008), 54-60.

¹³ Global Security ORG., *Border Security force*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/bsf.htm>, accessed on 2012-9-30.

¹⁴ Kashmir News Net Work, *Islamic Terrorism, and Genocide of the Pandits*, available at <http://ikashmir.net/history/genocide.html>, accessed on 2012-9-31.

¹⁵ National Assembly of Kashmir, *Draconian Laws in Indian Occupied Kashmir*, available at <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/content.php?id=90>, accessed on 2010-9-29.

¹⁶ Based on the Author's field research in New Delhi IDP Pandits' Camps. August 10, 2008.

¹⁷ Based on the Author's field research in New Delhi IDP Pandits' Camps, August 10-30, 2008 and in Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011. In these interviews, 100 Pandits and 120 Buddhist disclosed that they even have become suspicious of the liberal Muslims.

¹⁸ Madan, *op.cit.*, 28-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 75-92.

²² Madan, *op. cit.*, 29.

²³ For any Kashmiri – be a Hindu or a Muslim – his surname has more relevance than his first name. It is this surname that is Kashmir's identity. It recalls him of his history, origin, roots, and the profession of his fore-fathers.

²⁴ Kashmiriyat in the Separatists Health, available at <http://www.shvoong.com/social-sciences/1659667-kashmiriyat-separatists-health/>

Top heart specialist – Dr. U Kaul, an ace oncologist – Dr. Sameer Kaul both these two doctors are Kashmiri Pandits and have two “prestigious and top” separatist leaders their patients. In early nineties, when the militancy was at peak in Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Chairman Yasin Malik had to undergo an open-heart surgery at New Delhi's Batra Hospital. Dr. U Kaul, presently Director of India's top heart institute, performed the operation. Forgetting the fact that his fellow community members were driven out from Kashmir by the separatists, Dr. U Kaul, accepted Yasin Malik as his patient and saved him. Separatist leader Malik too showed a big faith in Dr. Kaul for the sake of his heart!

Given the status and public following, Malik could have hired the services of any doctor across the globe for his open-heart surgery but he preferred Dr. U Kaul, possibly to have heart-to-heart with a Kashmiri speaking doctor.

It is now more than a decade that Malik, who has already picked up the threads of life, is still under the constant “medical surveillance” of Dr. U Kaul.

Jamat-e-Islami's leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani is another high profile patient, who was operated at Tata Cancer Hospital Mumbai in March 2007 after his trusted doctor – again Kaul by surname – Dr. Sameer Kaul diagnosed him having metastasis kidney. Geelani too could have contacted any oncologist. However, like Malik, he too pinned high hopes and faith in Kaul, forgetting the fact that Kauls, Ambardars, Parimoos, Bhats and other Kashmiri Pandits do not now live in valley after their exodus at gunpoint and killings of several fellow community members.

Despite all these turbulence within the community, these two doctors rose above community feelings with their profession, while treating two separatists who are blamed for Kashmiri Pandits' exodus from the valley. And equally marvelous is the fact that these separatist leaders still hold Kashmiri Pandit doctors in high esteem with whom these high profile patients can speak in their mother tongue while convalescing or discuss any post-operative complications.

²⁵ Mohmmad Ashraf Wani, *Islam in Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Oriental Publishing House, 2005), 280-290.

²⁶ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 123.

²⁷ Madan, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁸ Rekha Chowdhary, "Multiple Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir," in Rekha Chowdharry (ed.), *Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2010), 6.

²⁹ Madan, *op. cit.*, 10.

³⁰ Kashmiri Overseas Association, *Kashmir Geography: Major Ethnic Groups*, available at <http://koausa.org/geography/ethnic.html>, accessed on 2012-1-17.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Alexander Cunningham, *Ladkah: Physical, Statistical and Historical*, (Varunasi: Pilgrim Publishing, 2005), 304.

³⁵ Kashmiri Overseas Association, *ibid.*, footnote 30.

³⁶ Based on the Author's field research in Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011.

³⁷ Madan, *op. cit.*, 4.

³⁸ L.N. Dhar, *An Outline of the History of Kashmir*, (Kannyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, 1984), 3-20.

³⁹ Mushtaq, A. Kaw, "Land Rights in Rural Kashmir," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 209-211.

⁴⁰ Rattan Lal Hangloo, "Land Rights in Rural Kashmir," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴² Dhar, *op. cit.*, 10-30.

⁴³ Hangloo, *op. cit.*, 98-108.

⁴⁴ Dhar, *op. cit.*, 9-10.

⁴⁵ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 58-59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 112-114.

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- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-125.
- ⁴⁹ Based on the Author's field research in Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Jaishree Kak, "Lalla's Relation to the Shaivite and Sufi Traditions in Kashmir," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 186.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 188.
- ⁵² Shaheen Sultan, *Kashmir: Where Sufis are Rishis and Rishis are Sufis*, available at <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/insights/insight990901.html>, accessed on 2012-09-29.
- ⁵³ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 11.
- ⁵⁴ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, "Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 169.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168-169.
- ⁵⁶ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 125.
- ⁵⁷ Madhu B. Wangu, "Maji Khir Bhavani," in Aparna Rao (ed.), *The valley of Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 267.
- ⁵⁸ Dewan, *op.cit.*, 124-125.
- ⁵⁹ Chandra Ram Kak, *Kashmir: Sufis, saints, and Shrines, in Kashmir Ancient Monuments*, available at <http://www.koausa.org/Monuments/Illustrations.html>, accessed on 2012-09-29.
- ⁶⁰ Based on the Author's field research in Leh (Kashmir), October 10-20, 2011.