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Sufism and Kashmiriyat

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Abstract

Throughout world Kashmir is known as brotherhood, tolerance, cohesive culture, communal hormone and Kashmiriyat. Sufism is a path of spiritual advancements, an expansion of consciousness, leading to awareness of self and the universe. The substance of Sufism is selfless experiencing and actualization of the truth. The practice of Sufism leads to the development of innate spiritual and intuitive abilities. Keeping in view, the aim of the present study was to explore the nexus between Sufism and Kashmiriyat. Hence from the above discussion, the investigator argued that there is a secular trait in the nature of the term Kashmiriyat. Composite culture, communal harmony and humanistic ethos worked as a bridge between Kashmiriyat and Sufism. It was observed that Kashmiriyat was the gradual outcome of mutual adaptation of various pre-Islamic religious traditions and the great tradition of Islam.

Keywords: Sufism, Kashmiriyat, humanistic ethos, composite culture, communal harmony

Introduction

Sufism is a path of spiritual advancements, an expansion of consciousness, leading to awareness of self and the universe. The substance of Sufism is selfless experiencing and actualization of the truth. The practice of Sufism leads to the development of innate spiritual and intuitive abilities. Sufis are divided into different orders of mystical brotherhood, although they share certain core beliefs. Some Sufis believe in 'wahdat-al-wujud' (unity of all existence), finding God in everything, while some Shariah-centric (Shariah: Islamic law), believe in 'wahdat-al-shuhud' (unity of all witness), all creatures observing one faith, God being transcendent. Some Sufis preach an extreme passivity to the point of renouncing the world, while some stress on worldly-involvement. In Kashmir, the major orders are the Naqshbandi, the Qadris, the Suhrawardi, the Kubrawi and the Rishis. All except for the Rishis, are said to have their origins in Iran and Central Asia. The people of Kashmir refer to their land as 'Pir Vaer' or 'Rishi Vaer', meaning, The Valley of Saints. Sufism Moreover during the 12th century Khanqah system was on its highest peak. And Sufi orders and the shijra spiritual pedigree connecting murid to the Prophet (S.A.W.) the spring head of all religious knowledge. The history of Sufism in Kashmir is spread over a long period of time starting with Bulbul Shah to the Sufi poets and Rishis, inspiring people by their mystical insights. The Suhrawadi, Kubrawi orders of Sufism have played a prominent role in the process of Islamisation of Kashmir, taken to a logical conclusion by the founder of Rishi order in Kashmir, Sheikh Noorud-Din, also known as Nund Rishi by his Kashmiri Pandit followers. Rishis, by their words and deeds, attracted not only common people but also high-class Brahmins.

"The candle of religion is lit by the Rishis, they are the pioneers of the path of belief. The heart-warming quality of humble souls emanates from the inner purity of the hearts of the Rishis. This vale of Kashmir that you call a paradise, owes a lot of its charm to the traditions set in vogue by the Rishis"Baba Nasib

Objectives of the study

Kashmiriyat was the result of shared religiosity and cultural practices between Hindus and Muslims. Even though many centuries have passed (and there is a religious difference among the diverse ethnic groups in Kashmir) most of the Kashmiri traditions remain very close to their original form. Indeed, modernization is transforming costumes and rituals at a fast pace. However, the whole of the native people (who call themselves Kashmiri) are trying to stick with their traditions. Keeping in view, the aim of the study as to explore the impact of Sufism and Kashmiriyat and its mutual nexus.

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Methodology of the study

The present study is purely based on analysis of available literature on the contribution and philosophy of Sufism and Kashmiriyat in the form of books, journals, research papers, online sources, historical accounts authored by various researchers, academicians, philosophers and Sufi accounts of various Sufis accessible to the researcher. Kashmiriyat was the mainstream definition of shared religiosity between Hindus and Muslims. Kashmir was always portrayed as the best example of a place where Hindus and Muslims could coexist in a peaceful way. Indeed, the region's essence is a mix of religious Hindu and Muslim costumes, beliefs, manners and rituals. In fact, this idea is strongly supported by the Indian government as a mean to justify unity among Kashmiris. The composted culture is the brain child of Sufism which is practically adopted in Kashmiriyat. The justification of the study is reported as under:

Sufism

The Kashmir valley of Kashmir is generally known as "*pir-vaer*" that is the land of *pirs*, as right from the ancient times Kashmir was inhabited by the Hindu *Rishis* and *munnis*, and they had nothing to do with the Islamic mysticism or *tasawwuf*. However, the establishment of Islam in Kashmir in the 14th century was due to the efforts of the first Turkistani Sufi Sayyid Abdul Rahman alias Bulbul Shah. The various Sufi orders viz, the Kubravi, Suhrawardi, Naqashbandi, Qadiri, Nur Bakshi and Rishi penetrated in the Kashmir Valley. Simultaneously the role of Rishi order can't be underestimated as they made the task of Sufis further easy for the propagation of their fold as well. However, a few Sufis and Sayyids (particularly Baihaqi Sayyids) in the Sultanate period enjoyed positions in the state politics. In Kashmir too Sufis contribution in comparison to Ulama is more significant with regard to socio-cultural conditions of the people.

Kashmiriyat

Kashmiriyat is a term attached with deep emotions, communal harmony, hospitality, behaviours, non-violence, mutual accommodation, good will and love that people of Kashmir have for each other. A tradition of syncretism flourished due to the mutual efforts towards coexistence, embraced by adherents of both religions. While the administration changed many hands and each time minorities suffered in the name of the dominant religion of the State, Pandits and Muslims continued to live in harmony till 1989, when Pakistan aroused the communal sentiments of the majority population of Muslims in Kashmir and changed the course of a passive, an otherwise secular in nature, movement for greater political rights, into a violent religious movement. Kashmiriyat's idea can be traced to the historical past of Kashmir. In the 13th century, the main religions of the valley (Hinduism and Buddhism) encountered Islam⁸. The new religion seemed appealing to many of the inhabitants of the region who converted to Islam. Such religious and cultural encounter created a new culture by assimilating various ethno religious traditions and beliefs that were shared among the different communities. This idea of sharing traditions came to be called the Hindu-Muslim "Rishi-Sufi" movement. The most important part of such movement was experienced between the 14th and 15th century. It was during this period that there was a clear socio-cultural assimilation process in Kashmir. Certain

characters such as Lalla Ded influenced this concept. Ded was a Sufi mystic (born in a Hindu household) from the 14th century. She managed to prove that there could be an in between among Hindu Vedic traditions and Muslim mysticism. Among her legacy relies the foundation of Kashmir's biggest Sufi order? Indeed, the success of Islam in Kashmir is strongly linked to the fact that Sufi Saints were able to cope with the cultural differences and managed to live collectively together. Also, Sufism is a division of Islam which does not preach strict orthodox values. Hence, this facilitated cultural assimilation. Just as Ahmed and Saklani state:

"So, the Islam practiced by the people of Kashmir has been predominantly Sufi in nature rather than orthodox, that led to the development of the composite culture and more a kind of society in which people were well aware of their religiosity, but never let come in between their relationships with each other".

In his piece, Hangloo cites the work of T. N. Madan (a Kashmiri himself) who elaborately describes the term Kashmiriyat. Yet, now it is less surrounding because some of the groups (the Pandits) that were part of the notion Kashmiriyat have fled the valley after the first set of violent episodes. Just as Kashmiri historian Mohammad Ishaq Khan explains:

"Our earnest participation in each other's festivals and marriage ceremonies was proverbial until the mass exodus of Pandits from their homeland, following the onset of militancy in Kashmir Valley in 1989."

Hence, from the above discussion, the investigator argued that there is a secular trait in the nature of the term Kashmiriyat. Yet, this has become more contestable after the unrest and growing division of religious and cultural identities". Besides, it is imperative to mention here that Kashmiriyat is not an ideology, but rather a behaviour pattern shared by Pandits and Muslims in the region. Besides, Kashmiriyat is also perceived as the sense of mutual supports which still not wholly free of tensions. In other words, this notion refers to a *pluralistic culture* of tolerance, but does not *represent syncretism*. Shah-i-Hamadan's teachings were based on the pillars of 'Tawheed' (oneness of God) 'Taqwa' (God-fearing piety), 'Ikhlas' (purity) and Unity. The traditional communal harmony that once existed in Kashmir enabled the peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) and other minorities. The Kashmiri society evolved to be more open to various beliefs, under the influence of Islamic Sufis and Saints of the Rishi order.

"Shiva (God) abides in all that is everywhere, then do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim. If you are wise seek the Absolute within yourself. That is true knowledge of the Lord"-Lal Ded/Lala Arifa

Nexus between Sufism and Kashmiriyat

The nexus of Sufism are deeply rooted in Kashmiriyat. The Sufism and Kashmiriyat are the two sides of same coin. Kashmiriyat is a term attached with deep emotions, communal harmony, hospitality, behaviours, non-violence, mutual accommodation, good will and love that people of

Kashmir have for each other. A tradition of syncretism flourished due to the mutual efforts towards coexistence, embraced by adherents of both religions. While the administration changed many hands and each time minorities suffered in the name of the dominant religion of the State, Pandits and Muslims continued to live in harmony till 1989, when Pakistan aroused the communal sentiments of the majority population of Muslims in Kashmir and changed the course of a passive, an otherwise secular in nature, movement for greater political rights, into a violent religious movement. The investigator explored the nexus between Sufism and Kashmiriyat in below mentioned captions:

Communal harmony

Obviously speaking, Sufism has endorsed Kashmiriyat through composite culture. Some of the festivals in Kashmir which had originated in the Hindu mythology attained a secular character and both Pandits and Muslims celebrated them, birthday of river Vitasta (Jhelum) being one such festival. The King, Zain-ul-Abidin, also known as 'Bud Shah' (Great King) used to function as a high priest on such occasions promoting a collective identity, often referred to as 'Kashmiriyat', which further evolved as a representation of religious tolerance, with saints like Lal Ded/Lala Arifa, Shiekh Noorudin/Nun Rishi further helping the cause by spreading the message of oneness and sowing seeds of the concept of religious-humanism.

Humanistic ethos

The humanistic philosophy of Kashmiri Sufis and Rishis has played a prominent role in building the Kashmiri ethnic identity. As times progressed despite of varied political leanings and conflicting attitudes to history of Kashmir, Kashmiris (Pandits and Muslims), continued to have a remarkable degree of tolerance, respect and concern for each other in day to day life. Pandits and Muslims celebrated the onset of spring by celebrating a festival called 'Badamwari' (Almond festival) as flowers blossomed in almond gardens. In many areas Muslim 'Asthans' (shrines) and Hindu shrines stood facing each other while people together made pilgrimages to shrines and also visited living Sufis. Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims together attended gatherings where Kashmiri Sufi poetry was sung at the abodes of living Sufis. Until the year 1989, the year that marked the beginning of a rather political movement for rectification of political grievances, soon taking a violent turn; nobody would have imagined that the soil over which walked the Sufi Saints, spreading the messages of spirituality and oneness, would be one day soaked in the blood of countless people whereby also, a minority community would be forced to leave their ancestral land, all in the name of religion. Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits share several common customs and beliefs; numerous Sufi shrines that dot the Valley are held in high devotional esteem by people from both these religious communities in large numbers. While Pandits and Muslims lived in harmony for certain periods of time, several Muslim rulers of Kashmir were bigoted and intolerant of other faiths. Sultan Sikandar Butshikan (1389-1413) is often considered the most tyrannical among the Muslim rulers in Kashmir. Ironically, Sikandar's son, Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470) was known for his religious tolerance. The administration changed several hands in Kashmir, after the Mughals,

Kashmir was ruled by Afghans (1753-1820), who were known for harassment and persecution. There are plentiful accounts of oppression during the Afghan rule, and especially the women of Kashmir were subjected to invasive and humiliating treatment.

Composite Culture

The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir has a unique and rich Sufi tradition which is an integral part of the Kashmiri's Civilizational ethos. The growth of composite culture of Kashmir in the form of socio religious harmony was due to the efforts of various Sufis and Saints of the time. Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits share several common customs and beliefs; numerous Sufi shrines that dot the Valley are held in high devotional esteem by people from both these religious communities in large numbers. While Pandits and Muslims lived in harmony for certain periods of time, several Muslim rulers of Kashmir were bigoted and intolerant of other faiths. The lessons of composite culture were more facilitated in the ethos of Sufism.

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to explore the nexus between Sufism and Kashmiriyat. Hence from the above discussion, the investigator argued that there is a secular trait in the nature of the term Kashmiriyat. Composite culture, communal harmony and humanistic ethos worked as a bridge between Kashmiriyat and Sufism. The socio-religious Harmony in Kashmir valley in the form of such a rich unique Composite culture known as Kashmiriyat especially in Medieval period was the product of real philosophy of humanism promoted by Sufis and Shaivite Hindu Saints in their times. It was observed that Kashmiriyat was the gradual outcome of mutual adaptation of various pre-Islamic religious traditions and the great tradition of Islam. To him, the Rishis (holy Vedic Hindu sage, saint or inspired poet) were the main exemplars of the developing of such a dialectic process. In fact, the spirit of this dialectic was mystical religious experience and universal love. The Sufism thought Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits share several common customs and beliefs; numerous Sufi shrines that dot the Valley are held in high devotional esteem by people from both these religious communities in large numbers. While Pandits and Muslims lived in harmony for certain periods of time, several Muslim rulers of Kashmir were bigoted and intolerant of other faiths. Additionally, it is imitative to mention here that prevalence of Kashmir conflict has added fuel into fire by collapsing the communal harmony and Kashmiriyat.

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