

Regional Identity of Kashmir: Sketching Multiple Dimensions of Kashmiriyat

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Abstract—Kashmir has been imagined as the home of the long-cherished ideal of Kashmiriyat. It is such an ideal which is coalescence for justice, accommodation, toleration, and above all, it encompasses communal harmony. In the upcoming time, it had undergone a plethora of events, which more often than not, ruptured its edifice in several ways. From an intrinsic good, this edifice leaned towards what can be more properly called as an unavailing instrument. There are miscellaneous ways through which the intrinsic capacity of this locally evolved identity had been diluted, within different epochs of history, by the external penetration whether religious or political. Thereon, this paper engages itself to understand and analyze how Kashmiriyat as a symbol of inclusive identity has evolved, and become the victim of political construction. Further, it will look into how this dilution eventuated because of external penetration in the first place. Furthermore, it highlights the ways in which people of the State responded according to divided loyalties being fabricated. For the aforesaid purpose, historical and analytical methods will help to reach the desired end.

Keywords: Kashmiriyat; Identity; Politicization; Polarization; Discord.

Introduction

Karl Marx, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of living". (Johnson 2003: 113) Any living organism cannot disown such historical inevitability, and the people of Kashmir cannot be an exception thereof. Geographically speaking, the state of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into three regions: Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh. Within these three regions, Kashmir has been portrayed, whether travellers or insiders, "Paradise on earth" and has been praised as an abode of "Saints". The portrayal of Kashmir as a repository of saints, whatever religion, over a period of time is itself an indication of the cultural hybridization. Such unique specification, which the other two regions lack, was an out product of the all-embracing philosophy of love. This philosophy of love manifested itself in the prevalence of social harmony, toleration, justice, and accommodation. But the term under which this philosophy is bannered, *Kashmiriyat*, became the sharp focus only in the writings of contemporary scholarship.

Other than this, genealogically speaking, the term was invented by mainstream Kashmiri and Indian leaders during the freedom struggle in the region against the tyrannous rule of Dogra dynasty. An invention as such was of great significance, invariably deployed by these leaders to fetch a common ground of support or legitimacy for Kashmiri leadership in the mainstream politics of the time.

However, no consensus has evolved over its meaning, intention, and interpretation so far. In academic circles a large number of scholarly debates, even among most prominent historians, transpired over what it stood for. For instance, multifarious variations of its meaning are: a historical promise which was never fulfilled (M.I. Khan), love of homeland and common speech (T.N. Madan), not an ideology but a behavioural pattern dear to Pandits (Hindus) and Muslims of Kashmir alike (Sampat Prakash), undoubtedly an un-Islamic rather anti-Islamic ideology (Suhail Shaukeen), homogeneity between Indian mainstream culture and Kashmiri culture (Indian mainstream), Kashmiri identity awaiting for political settlement of the political future of Kashmir and Kashmiris (Separatists), Kashmiri-ness or ethos of being Kashmiri (Nasreen Ali), self-proclaimed and externally endowed superiority of socio-religious, spatial, and cultural institutions of Kashmiri community of all religious shades who originally inhabit Kashmir (Hangloo), et al. (Hangloo 2012: 37) Any discourse gains legitimacy only when it becomes a normal mode of operational behavior of the people. It was not difficult in any sense for Kashmiriyat to be normal because of its highly ineffaceable inclusiveness. Since inception, it was rendered with high appreciation due to its inherent capacity of accommodation rather than erasure of heterogeneous identities.

The discourse of *Kashmiriyat*, within due course of time, underwent a plethora of changes because of its implantation by the leaders of time for political gains. Normally, it is taken as the bedrock of communal harmony, multiculturalism, and tolerance, but the term itself has been used so often and in such diverse contexts that one doubts whether it always means

the same thing or different things at different times. (Ibid) Further, to understand the root causes of present turmoil in Kashmir, we need to (re)visit and (re)trace the main themes and counter-themes deployed in the first instance, and then followed by its adherents' and hijackers' vis-a-vis its development in the state.

Kashmiri identity—*Kashmiriyat*—is characterized by the transcendence of religious and other affiliations and recognition of multiple identities rather than their erasure in expressing a vision of Kashmir as a homeland of Kashmiris. It exhibits a comfortable coexistence of regional specificity and religious universality in public discourse. (Zutshi 2003: 16) This can, in other words, refer to religious and philosophical renaissance. (Gayas U-Din 2007: 5) The two undisputed voices of which are: Lala Ded and Nund Reshi. Both of them, through the medium of poetry, rebelled against the existing apparatus and voiced for an alternative system in Kashmir. Besides, they portrayed a unique picture of Kashmiri culture, a culture which is eclectic and contains quest for the practice of noble truths, universal humanist tendencies, and synthesis of glorious cultural gains of Buddhism, Shaivism, and Islam. They presented a picture of society solely idealistic, sentimental or religiously humanistic in outlook. (Bazaz 1954: 71) Such metaphysical/philosophical rooted cultural lineage was continued by the numerous Sufi's from Abhinav Gupta to A had Sahab in present-day Sopore. Later on, both poets became the center of the contentious debate between the two communities of the region, i.e. Hindus and Muslims. (Zutshi 2003: 20) Lal Ded, inspired by the language of commoners rather than God's or elites, preached oneness of humankind and oneness of God for all, in her verses or *Vaakhs*. These verses carried language of Universal Humanism which channelized and reaffirmed the indigenous thought through language and the human agency with transparent, non-dominative conduct in localized forms (Kaul 2011: 29). She in one of her poems said:

Shiva (God/Allah/Brahma) abides in all that exists anywhere

Don't discriminate between Hindus and Muslims

Self-realization is true emancipation

Recognize your true self that is true knowledge of God. (Khan 2012: 59)

Her poetry has attacked and uninstalled all the inclinations with dominative potential in Kashmiri society. She constructed a middle way narrative by balancing diverse groups to work for a common purpose within an *Inclusive identity* installed upon their sense of common belonging i.e. *Kashmiriyat*. Different religions of that time responded in a positive manner as these verses were not in contradiction to any of the religion. This narrative clearly represented what John Rawls in the twenty-first century calls as *Overlapping consensus* or common ground within heterogeneous religions or communities. (Rawls 1987: 9) Her (source) intervention transferred the cultural capital by advocating a social structure

of mutual acceptance, and she left rest to Noor-U-Din (a flow of such source), of whose philosophy is said to be weaned at the breast of Lal Ded. Lal-e-Ded's successor preached the principle of life in everything, love of humanity, detachment from material things, and he believed in the oneness of Universe and man. In other words, he laid the ground for what is commonly called as Rishi Order, of which, followers are from both Hindu and Muslim communities, and to which, homage and respect is paid by all Kashmiris regardless of their caste, creed, religion, race, et al. (Kaul 2011: 35) As of now, there is the prevalence of shrine culture in Kashmir, meant to commemorate these devotees who paved the way for social harmony, operating in institutions like Dargahs and Khankahs. These institutions have acted and still act as powerful institutions that deeply influenced the course of politics, society, and culture. (Zutshi 2018: 51) This *order* strengthened the common identity of people. At the practical level, it was reflected by least differences in the patterns of living, dress code and norms of purity-pollution; and above all, the broad facade of Hindus and Muslims remained identical. Walter Lawrence, commenting on the difference between Hindus and Muslims of the region, muttered:

The Pandit wears the truck of turban on right, the Musalman (Muslim) on left. The Pandit fastens his gown on the left and Musalman on the right. The Pandits (Hindus) has long, narrow sleeves, the Musalmans short, full sleeves. (Bazaz 1954: 66)

Such an intellectually rich tradition laid down the framework for a regional culture defined by the coexistence of vernacular culture and universal religious faith. (Zutshi 2003: 28) In this entire epoch, a human was counted more an *end-in-itself* than a *means-to-an-end*. These saints were pioneers of Hindu-Muslim unity, and through their message of love of humankind, they strived to resolve the historical tension between Hindus and Muslims. (Gayas U-Din 2007: 104) Their persona and teachings made an everlasting impact on the minds of common masses of Kashmir. It led to the creation of a new social world of which justice and accommodation were cardinal virtues. Their philosophy of humanism was exemplified by Sultan Zain-Ul-Abidin who as a ruler of Kashmir institutionalized the secular-humanist values.

As Pandit Anand Koul noted:

Zain-Ul-Abidin possessed of a broad and tolerant outlook and dominated with a desire to benefit mankind, he ruled with such equity and justice and did so much to improve the material prosperity of the people that one cannot fail to admire him. His benevolent rule demands special homage in as much as he lived at a period when he had no worthy and enlightened contemporary to emulate. In the world around him, he could have found little to help him. He was encouraged to be tyrannical and selfish by tradition and especially by the example of his father, Sikander. Zain-Ul-Abidin was deservedly named as Bud Shah or Great King. Despite six centuries have rolled by since he lived, his name is still remembered with general reverence and gratitude. Take the

name of Bud Shah before a Kashmiri and at once he will with a happy countenance rhyme it with "Pad Shah". (Bamzai 1994:329)

The Kashmiriyat received a death blow at the hands of Dogra dynasty, the dynasty which laid the foundation of modern Jammu and Kashmir through the Treaty of Amritsar signed by Dogra Raja of Jammu Gulab Singh and Britishers. (*A treaty in the history of the world which treated human beings as mere commodities or purchased property, signed on 16 March 1846, between Britishers and Maharaja Gulab Singh*). Under it, British:

Transfer and makeover forever in independent possession to Maharaja Gulab Singh and the heirs male of his body all the hilly and mountainous country with its dependencies situated to eastward of the River Ravi including the Chamba and excluding Lahul, being part of the territories ceded to British government by the Lahore state for a sum of seventy five lakhs". (Ibid, 46)

Maharaja Gulab Singh laid the foundation of his empire, constituted of three distinct units: Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh', primarily by adopting Machiavellian politics. AsK.M. Panikkar, biographer of Maharaja Gulab Singh puts it:

The Maharaja did not achieve his ends by methods which were always beyond criticism. He did not hesitate to resort to tricks and stratagems which would, in ordinary life, be considered dishonourable. He was trained in a hard school, where lying, intrigue, and treachery were all considered part and parcel of politics. (Bazaz 1941: 38)

At the cost of multiple identities, he encouraged Hinduism by reviving laws banning cow-slaughter, constructing temples beyond limit even out of state funds, establishing Hindu religious institutions like Dharmarth, translating Hindu scriptures into multiple languages and imposing policies of persecution towards 'other' religious sects'. These policies of Maharaja created resentment among his subjects especially Muslims and more importantly broke the historical harmonious relations between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus, the Pandits.

Gulab Singh's successor's whether that was Maharaja Ranbir Singh, Maharaja Pratap Singh, or Maharaja Hari Singh, all continued such policy—based on *difference and discrimination*—to buttress the legitimacy of their rule. Looking keenly at the tenure of the successors of his Highness, our cogency easily confronts with the multiple attempts being made to foist differences among masses. Ranbir Singh's reign clearly manifested Hindu inclinations of Dogra state. He himself consecrated a shrine to the worship of Rama, from whom, according to Dogra tradition, their dynasty descended; and he ordered for the construction of 144,000 idols of Lord Krishna in the state. (Zutshi 2003: 49)The Muslim populace of the region felt disappointed over such state of affair, for which they complained and protested,

fretted and fumed, but all remained in vain; and even he remained inhuman to such an extent that to save the expense of feeding his slave subjects during the famine, he drowned Muslim subjects by boat-loads in the Vular Lake.(Ibid)

Pratap Singh and his administrative structure continued to make Muslims slaves and continued to inflict untold miseries on them; at the same time, Pandits or local Hindus were patronized.(Hassnain 1988:16)No doubt external penetration started earlier but it touched pinnacle during this period. In 1923, Madan Mohan Malavia met Maharaja and suggested him to convert Muslims of the valley to the Hindu fold religion. In retaliation to counter this strategy of Hindus, few of the social and religious organizations among Muslims, like the Anjuman Nasrat-Ul-Islam, Anjuman Hamdard Islam, Anjuman Islamia from Srinagar, and the Youngmen Muslim Association and Anjuman Islamia from Jammu came forward and invited Muslim missionaries to counteract the devised propaganda of Hindu missionaries. (Ibid: 17) It is clearly evident that anew tussle between two communities of the region had popped up and its ultimate repercussions' were the loss of common brotherhood and social harmony.

Pratap Singh's was succeeded by Hari Singh, whom Sir John Simon called, "*a poor, green shivering subject wretch*".(Ibid: 20) It was during his reign that atrocities inflicted upon Muslim subjects captured heights. In return, a mass movement was launched against the misrule of this communal and autocratic dynasty of Dogra's. The mass movement was not only the product of and a challenge to such chaos, but it rendered the will of the alienated Muslim with high esteem since inception. The relationship between religious identities, community definitions, and state underwent significant change anew, due to change in the social, political and economic landscape. (Zutshi 2003:118) In such social transition, the onus of redefinition and restatement of identities straightforwardly went to Dogra state, but they played a negligible part in it. They gave the onus of redefinition and restatement to respective religious clerics and political leaders, whether Hindu or Muslims. All this in return strengthened the pretext of communally polarized groups within the region. What Samuel P. Huntington latter observed, "The fault lines between civilizations would be their battle lines in future(Huntington 2000: 21), but in Kashmir, the fault lines between and within different religious groups became the battle lines on community redefinition issue. These groups eschewed the assimilative tendencies of their religions and maintained the *difference* of their overarching ideas, ideologies, and world views. It clarifies the fact that on the one hand, Dogra state claimed religious neutrality or secular character and on the other side, they intensified the communal hatred by providing legal sanction to the societal division on religious lines. Arguably religious identity became the basis of community formation, but within it, different factors like class, caste, region, and sect played a defining role in the identity formation. (Zutshi 2003: 120)The whole process not only created dissections and distortions among Hindus and

Muslims groups of the valley but within Muslims divided loyalties cropped out between diverse sects based on their beliefs, ideological orientations and sect affiliations. The Dogra urge to gain the legitimacy of their rule paved the way for the internal strife and discord among the people of the region. People, then and now, began to focus on different visions of their freedom based on distinct lines of their socialization process. As those who followed the state apparatus considered the mass movement against Dogra autocracy as communal as it was threatening their interests. While defending their position within mass movement, politico-religious leaders of state upheld that all those aligned to state structure are enemies of the human values- freedom, democracy, secularism, etc. During the first half of the nineteenth century, people became largely divided into the religious, political and economic lines, and even nowadays it continues. These all divisions laid the ground for the multiple visions of belonging and assertion of identity. After the partition of sub-continent and the birth of the Kashmir problem, the meaning of Kashmiriyat has remained dependent on the imposed meaning of India and Pakistan and their respective affiliated actors suitable to their national identities.

State construction of people's identity has made the inherent and indigenous identity of Kashmiri region, Kashmiriyat, a victim of manipulated multiple interpretations leading to the murder of what it actually is and acceptance of what it is not. The manipulated and multiple interpretations of Kashmiriyat are: it is a secular philosophy, it is part of the universal project of Islam, it aims at the establishment of homogeneous identity or it represents the ideology of either majority or minority community. The essence of Kashmiriyat consists of none of them. It is more than secularism as religion is the driving force behind it. It represents neither universal religion of Islam nor Hinduism, but what can be called the lived religion, the religion being a product of Kashmiri context not only differs from but sometimes contradicts with the universal project of Islam and Hinduism. It does not represent the ideology of win and loss as it is based on the celebration and recognition of multiple identities.

Conclusion

Historically, Kashmiriyat represents the lived experience of Kashmiris. However, such experience has not remained constant and the same in all historical epochs as conventional theories of identity believe in. In each epoch, Kashmiri identity has been subjected to a number of interpretations which seems good as such action can contribute to bringing to light new dimensions of an identity of the region. However, such interpretations are backed by power equation to such extent that instead of arriving at the true essence of Kashmiriyat, they have led to the creation of a new category of Kashmiriyat with competitive meanings. Each meaning aims at to justify itself and delegitimize the power of others causing the death of substance of Kashmiriyat.

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