

Kashmiriyat and Its Relevance In The Current Perspective



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Abstract

Undoubtedly, the terrible and insecure situation witnessed political failure in Kashmir. These political complexities have created distrust among communities. Apart from political problems, since the past seven decades Kashmir witnessed the cultural contemptuous and social division. In order to reverse these unfortunate problems, the term "Kashmiriyat" have been playing an important role in drafting future strategies by adopting the philosophy of syncretism and negotiations. However, the critical approach perceived by icons of Kashmiriyat has ignored yet. This write-up is focused on exploring the critical approach of founders of Kashmiriyat that seems the need of the hour to reverse the unfortunate conditions prevailing in Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmiriyat, Syncretism, Social-Setup, Culture, Tolerance, Critical Approach.

Introduction

Kashmiriyat, as a term itself, reflects its meaning, and has been used as a collective name of what Kashmiris have experienced in social, religious and cultural aspects through the ages. However, one can understand simply that Kashmiriyat is a newly coined word, used by political leaders to either denote the collective aspects of Kashmiri society or secure the secular identification of State. The term Kashmiriyat revolves around the theme of centuries-old indigenous secularism, cultural and religious harmony, tolerant nature, patriotism, spiritualism and traditional values of Kashmir. The word Kashmiriyat was first used by political leaders of Kashmir in order to evoke the brotherhood of Kashmir against Dogra rule. The folk beliefs of Kashmir reflect Kashmiriyat as a term that established a positive response towards the tolerant teachings of Sufi Islam and Shaivite philosophy. The legacy of negotiations has exercised its potent role in shaping the unique existence of Kashmir during the power struggle between Brahmanism and Buddhism. So was in the case of Islam too. The liberal attitude and tolerant nature which Sufi Islam and Sultan 'Zain-ul-Abidin' showed and experienced towards non-Muslims in medieval Kashmir, both in cultural and religious aspects.

However it is a strange paradox, that every historian and writer on Kashmiriyat has written, that main contributors to Kashmiriyat are Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, but they have focused only on their tolerant nature in religious, social and cultural aspects. How they ignored their critical and intolerant role towards social and religious evils which lead them to earn a lot of fame and popularity. That approach made them the ideal in the society among oppressed people irrespective of their caste, creed and religion? It is true that Kashmiriyat was founded by Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-Ud-din and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin. Historically there is another perspective worth to evaluate, undoubtedly the tolerance occupies the central place in Kashmiriyat, in fact being intolerant towards the evils of religion and social setup created by the bogus elite class and religious heads in the ancient and medieval period was the initial step forwarded by founders of Kashmiriyat. They opposed peacefully against every act, traditions, custom and beliefs, which were creating obstacles in building peace and prosperity in Kashmir. They tried their best to establish a unique culture, aimed at purifying social and religious set-up. In modern times, it is named as Kashmiriyat.

Aims and Objectives

1. This paper is aimed at exploring the hidden or ignored the relevance of Kashmiriyat. In such a terrible and insecure atmosphere the understanding of Kashmiriyat will lead the society of Kashmir towards peace and prosperity.

2. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the role of founders of the Kashmiriyat.

Genesis of Kashmiriyat

Due to the lack of any authentic historical reference in the history of Kashmir about the genesis of the term, it seems difficult to bind it in a particular time regarding its conceptual development. However, some assumptions about the origin of the term are convergent on an unhistorical point that it was a brainchild of the national conference. Some have tried their best to interpret the term while painting it in the color of religion. The religious affiliations of the term were challenged by other orate scholars of Kashmir history such as Mohammad Ashraf and T.N Madan. According to M. Ashraf, "Kashmiriyat in true sense has nothing to do with religion. Kashmiri culture and traditions have been survived for thousands of years regardless of the fact whether Kashmiris have professed Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam." In fact, in Kashmir from centuries, people belonging to different faiths had lived together and their religious affiliations never affected their sense of belongingness to each other as a Kashmiri. However, M. Ishaq Khan regards Kashmiriyat as a vibrant experience of living together of Pandits and Muslims in a symbiotic relationship. He traced the genesis of Kashmiriyat in the Sufi-Rishi movement of medieval Kashmir. The history of medieval Kashmir is very divergent in the cultural and religious aspects. On the one hand, medieval Kashmir witnessed the dark age during the time of Sultan Sikander and his prime minister Suhabhat. On the other hand, it witnessed the major cultural transformation and the emergence of philosophical syncretism by Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-Ud-din Wali and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin. The philosophy of Shaivism and the Sufi-Rishi movement acts as a backbone in Kashmiriyat. The ignored critical attitude of the founders of Kashmiriyat was solely responsible for the emergence of a culture that transcended the barriers in establishing a synthetic culture. Therefore, the current disturbing and terrible situation of Kashmir should be backed by implying both types of approaches of the founders of Kashmiriyat (tolerant and (critical)).

Major Contributors; Their Values and Principles

It is unanimously accepted that Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-ud-din and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin laid down the foundations of Kashmiriyat in the medieval period. These legendary personalities contributed a lot in establishing a unique identity of Kashmir; they established a culture, which was free from social evils, orthodox religiosity and intolerance. They tried their best to set an example of revolt against the evils of society and religion. They worked as torchbearers for Kashmiris irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.

The contributions of Lal Ded, Sheikh Noor-Ud-din and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin in founding Kashmiriyat were dual facets. One pursued tolerance towards the good deeds of other communities and another reflects severe critique and intolerant towards the evils of society and religion. The notion of tolerance that acts as a backbone of Kashmiriyat has been used by writers but the part of the intolerant and

critical attitude of contributors to Kashmiriyat has ignored yet. There are numerous references to prove that the three main contributors in Kashmiriyat were intolerant and critical towards every obstacle coming in the way of peace and prosperity.

Lal Ded, the wondering shaivite woman mystic of the fourteenth century was born and married in the Brahmin family of Kashmir. Legends speak that her mother-in-law was tyrant, her husband also ill-treated her. She suffered silently and tolerated for some time, and at last, decided to renounce her home¹ instead to tolerate the ill-treatment of her in-laws. The perspective of revolt and intolerant approach of Lal Ded occupies an important role in the eradication of evils in society. It gradually leads Kashmir to establish a culture of an evil free society. Seconding to it, the social and religious institutions of her time very spurious. The rigid caste system has ruined society. "She denounced the caste system, idol worship and irrelevant rituals."² Instead of tolerating, she revolted against the caste system, idol worship because these were the evils of society and religious bigotry. Another perspective of Kashmiriyat contributed by Lal Ded was tolerance towards the beliefs of other communities. She supported Muslims by respecting their beliefs, customs and traditions.

Sheikh Noor-Ud-din is also known as the real founder of Kashmiriyat. Kalhana had written about Kashmir as a land of tirthas, in fact, it is completely true. Kashmir has produced a number of Saints and sages from the times immemorial. Most of them have gained fame and immortal respect and honor. However, Sheikh Noor-Ud-din topped the list among them. Because of many reasons but one among them was he had differentiated himself from other saints by undertaking social work instead completely renouncing the world affairs and wandering in forests. In the history of Kashmir, no other saint commands that much respect, which he commands. The coins were issued on his name by Afghan governor Ata Mohammad Khan in 1808-10 AD³. It confirms the respect, popularity and acceptability of Sheikh Noor-Ud-din in Kashmir. Sheikh Noor-Ud-din, the real founder of Kashmiriyat and Rishi order in Kashmir is credited as a devout social worker and pioneer of Kashmiri literature. Lawrence had rightly and perceptively described Sheikh as a 'National saint'⁴ of Kashmir for his respect and popularity among the Kashmiris irrespective of their caste creed and religion.

Sheikh Noor-Ud-din being a pious Muslim tried very much to transform his faith into a vehicle for the Hindu-Muslim cultural space for interaction. He used the local institutions and methods to teach and preach Islam, which made Islam more intelligible for the Kashmiris. His teachings of unorthodox Islam and philosophy of brotherhood among different communities made him Rishi for Hindu and Sufi for Muslims. He became very popular among all sects, classes and communities of people in the valley. Hindus believed that he was nominally a Muslim and in reality a Sanyasi of a high order, so they called him Sahazanand and preserved his sayings in the Kashmiri Sharda script in the book called Rishi nama.

The common people of Kashmir remember Sheikh by the affectionate name of Nund Rishi. He became the flag bearer of Kashmir through his philosophy of humanism, brotherhood, tolerant attitude towards other beliefs.

The intolerant approach of Sheikh towards the orthodox character of people, caste system, hypocrisy and that reason which were subjected as a hindrance in the humanism is also yet ignored. He used poetry in common Kashmiri language to spread his message. One of his verses confirmed his concept of Humanism by preaching for brotherhood as among the brothers of the same parents, why did you create a barrier? Muslims and Hindus are one, when will God be kind to his servants⁵.

The teachings and philosophy of Sheikh lead Kashmir to establish an ideal society. He was very critical and intolerant towards the Hypocrisy, Orthodoxy of religion and evils of the caste system and disrespect for women. Sheikh bitterly criticized the hypocrisy and falsehood of Mullahs and religious elites of his time. Those Mullahs who belittle vegetables as grass and they burp after eating all those by big buffalos. The condemnation continues as they Mullahs treat the sacred mosques as a haunted place, where they desist to enter which otherwise are the place of knowledge and prayers. They were subjected to prayers but their practices made them only a fake Hippocrates.

Sheikh and Lal Ded were a staunch opponent of those elements which leads the society towards communalism and did not want people to be divided into Hindus and Muslims for its sake if even Mullah and Brahmin were not spared by them. One of the verses of Sheikh being critical about the fake religious leaders reflects his theology in which he lashes out at both Mullahs, Pronouncing them as merchants of Mosque as well as Pandits, alleging them of looting idols from the temple. However, the Sheikh has some respect for very few of them who may attain salvation while he calls the rest of them to be followers of Satan.⁷ He was a staunch believer in the institution of equality, love, peace and spirituality and left behind the religious differences.

Another contributor in Kashmiriyat was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin(1420-70 A.D). He was influenced by the teachings of Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din (1377-1420 A.D). It is a well-known fact that during the rule of Sultan Sikander, the father of famous king Zain-ul-Abidin, popularly known as Budshah, the Hindus were persecuted. Idols and temples were demolished. "Sikander continued torture of the Hindu priests under the influence of his Prime Minister 'Suha Bhatta' a Brahmin who was converted to Islam, and is known as 'Butshikan' idol breaker."⁸ Due to the forced conversions, a large number of Kashmiri Hindus migrated from Kashmir. After a long period of unsettlement and internal troubles, the valley witnessed a revolutionary change in the religious, social and political scene immediately after the Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin assumed powers of the state. The influence of Sheikh on the ideology of Budshah resulted in revolutionary changes in the socio-religious atmosphere of the valley. The "Sultan was

aware of the atrocities committed on Hindus as a result of which their population was reduced to only eleven families"⁹Budshah sent messengers to expelled Hindus with the invitations to return back to their homeland. They accepted the offer with pleasure. Hinduism once again flourished in the valley. They were free to celebrate their festivals, which were banned by Sikander. "In some festivals of Hindus like the 'advent of spring' in the month of March-April commonly called 'Chaitra festival' and Durga Puja or the 'Vitasta festival the Sultan himself participated."¹⁰ Many demolished temples were renovated and reconstructed. Both Hindus and Muslims were equally patronized. A separate Langar (charity house) was set up for Yogis and this place is still known as 'Jogilankar' in Rainawari. Havans were performed by him and he studied Hindu *sastras*, some of which like Mahabharata and Dasavataretc were translated into Persian. Jizya was abolished and even the cow-slaughters were banned. Hindus called sultan Zain-ul-Abidin the incarnation of Vishnu 'Narayanavtar'. The generous and revolutionary steps taken by Sultan had a great impact on the communities and reshaped the outlook of the majority of Muslims. He taught the lesson that cultural identity based on human values, diversity and tolerance are not inconsistent with their own faith and religious beliefs. Thus a true believer and follower of Islam; a Muslim could simultaneously express respect for all the religions of the world.

The glorying example of Kashmiriyat in modern time is exemplary communal harmony in 1947 displayed by Kashmiri Muslims when about five lakhs (5 lakhs) of their brothers, sisters and others relatives were being massacred in Jammu by Hindu fanatics¹¹. They didn't react due to the fact that they were believers of a Kashmiriyat as per their rich religious and cultural collectiveness. They could have every right to react against the minority (Kashmiri Pandits) in the valley but they chose tolerance to sustain brotherhood or Kashmiriyat. It was something unknown kind of tolerance exhibited by Kashmiri Muslims for which pundits have had every reason to be apparently thankful to them for coming generations.

Nowadays, due to political complexions the so-called 'paradise on earth' became the 'hell on earth'¹² due to terrorism and border dispute between India and Pakistan. Every inhuman tendency that affect the existence of humanity and development is increasingly making its roots strong in the valley. Since the late 1980s, Kashmir is one of the contemporary world most troubled and dangerous places to which India calls 'terrorist insurgency' and Pakistan a 'freedom movement'.

Since the 1980s Kashmir seems boiling in distrust, intolerance, violent reaction and is reacting on the basis of separatist ideologies. They had chosen the way to overcome or to get rid of these unfortunate conditions by picking guns, pelting stones on security forces. It seems that they had lost every hope in a constitutional solution. Which in turn is proving more drastic for development, security, peace and Kashmiriyat in general. Over fifty thousand

people, mostly Muslims but including Hindus, Sikhs and security personnel are said to have lost their lives in the name of militancy-related operations. According to Ret.Gen. S.K Sinha, the Governor of State, 20,000 militants, 15,000 civilians and 5,000 security personnel are killed in Kashmir till 2010¹⁹. After 2010 the deaths, property loss, insecurity, communal tension, economic disparity, orthodoxy in religion and especially Kashmiriyat grounding in the dust is rapidly catching fire day by day.

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper about the essence of Kashmiriyat and the contemporary worse situation of Kashmir motivates us to think about the solution of those unfortunate conditions. If Kashmiris are true believers of Kashmiriyat, they should follow the approach and principles of icon founders of the Kashmiriyat. They should react critically to every kind of fundamentalism. There seems no way to overcome from the brutalities of army and insecurity due to terrorism, excepting critical behavior while dealing them.

Endnotes

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