

## **Multi Cultural Traditions in Kashmir: Central Asian Linkages\***

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### **Abstract**

Kashmir experienced an unprecedented political turmoil during the last two decades. Besides affecting the South Asian peace, security and development, it created the impression as if Kashmir was always a violent zone and its people were devoid of essentials of harmony and mutual coexistence. However, the present article holds to the contrary. It argues that Kashmir symbolized not only a “paradise on earth”,<sup>1</sup> but also a celebrated space of “multiculturalism”. Its people were accordingly imbued with symbiotic traditions embodying innumerable values and customs. Among them, few were associated with the individual and group faith in different spiritual beings or objects for sacred and mundane ends: these are precisely termed as the “religio-cultural traditions”. What exactly were these traditions? Where did they emanate from? How and when did they find a space in Kashmir? What was the role of the state to this effect? To what extent did they influence the mindset of the people? These and similar other issues are outlined for discussion in this article.

Several customs and traditions owe their origin to religion which has been always a dynamic social institution in all global communities. It generally represented the peoples’ “belief in several living and non-living things for attaining salvation and blessings and expressing extreme devotion there unto them”.<sup>2</sup> The given belief is usually formalized through a set of commonly shared rituals and ceremonies about which the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, maintains: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite together all those who adhere to them.”<sup>3</sup> Talcot Parsons (1907–79), another prominent functionalist, argues that beliefs, rituals, practices and other social norms are quite useful for the functioning of a certain system<sup>4</sup> though conflict theorists like Robert K. Merton holds otherwise: “these may not always contribute to the society. Many of them may turn dysfunctional, at a certain time, due to their inbuilt weakness to resist to or adopt themselves in a given social system.”<sup>5</sup> The conflict sociologists further maintain that racial, occupational, social and religious conflicts always dilute the unified spirit of the societies across the globe.<sup>6</sup> The two groups of sociologists evenly lock horns on the nuances of the word culture. The ethno-centrists believe that some cultures are essentially dominant and superior to others<sup>7</sup> which, however, the relativist group of sociologists negates by arguing that a “certain culture can be inherently good or bad in relation to its own system than the systems from outside”.<sup>8</sup>

Applying the views of functionalists vis-à-vis Kashmir society and culture, one can assume that different religio-cultural rituals and practices formed the core of human activity in Kashmir society notwithstanding dynastic changes, internecine wars and ethnic conflicts. Such rituals and practices evolved in the wake of the mutual intelligibility of the peoples of Kashmir and South and Central Asia to share their ideas, thought, faith and culture during their onward march to civilization. True subscribing to extraneous influences must not have been initially without "cultural shock" to the ethnocentric people of Kashmir. Gradually, however, they appreciated them for mutual benefits, social sustainability and human togetherness. Naturally, the given optimism was bound to forge marked cultural affinities between the two geographical spaces, broaden the peoples' world view and develop among Kashmiris a sense of religious tolerance and progressive thought.

Such a mutual understanding antedating prehistoric times,<sup>9</sup> actually emanated from constant human interaction along the Grand Silk Route<sup>10</sup> of which several branches traversed Kashmir across the Kun Lun, Karakoram, Pamirs and the Hindukush mountains.<sup>11</sup> Hoards of monks, pilgrims, priests, Sufis, saints, scholars, traders, merchants, artisans and craftsmen, treading these mountain passes for fame, fortune, missionary and philanthropic pursuits.<sup>12</sup> Their relentless efforts were incidentally reinforced by the factors of Kashmir's strategic location, geographical proximity, and political integration of Kashmir with the "Greater Central Asia", Iran, Afghanistan, North India and Xinjiang (China).<sup>13</sup> One may recall that Kashmir was an indispensable part of the centralized power structure of the Indo-Bactrian Greeks (190 BC), Sakas (Scythians) & Parthians (90 BC-64 AD),<sup>14</sup> Kushanas (1st-2nd century AD) and Hunas (5th century AD),<sup>15</sup> Karkotas of Kashmir (8th century),<sup>16</sup> Mughals and the Afghans (16th-19th century).<sup>17</sup> Thus, from early times, Kashmir was hooked to its Central Asian neighbourhood through regional, cultural, economic and political integration.<sup>18</sup>

## (A) Iranian Influence

**(i) Pre-historic Period:** The process of Kashmir's multi-vector amalgamation with outer world commenced with the importation of primitive forms of snake and fire worship from Iran. The former obtained among the anthropoid apes since Paleolithic times: they "worshipped serpents and buried them with a supply of insects in their graves as a provision for their future life."<sup>19</sup> A universal phenomenon though,<sup>20</sup> the serpent cult was brought by the Aryans from Iran to Kashmir across the northern areas in Gilgit, Astor, Dah, Hano, Garkun,<sup>21</sup> Kargil and Darchik Ladakh.<sup>22</sup> With its induction, the existing set of Kashmiri beliefs in natural forces and their allied divines, supplemented. Subsequently, however, the early settlers of Kashmir became the staunch serpent worshippers; hence, styled as the *Nagas* after the name of the snakes. In Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, the *Nagas* are described as the civilized humans, male-female, who unlike their rival group, the *Pisachas*, lived around the home of the snakes, springs and lakes.<sup>23</sup> Like anthropoid apes, the Kashmir *Nagas* buried and revered snakes as semi-divines and thought them containing supernatural powers with which they guarded human "dwellings, treasures and the graves of their progeny".<sup>24</sup> With this belief in mind, the natives (*Nagas*) offered milk to the snakes (*nagas*) to invoke their blessings for a variety of ends.<sup>25</sup> Not surprising, therefore, to notice Kashmir abounding with scores of such sacred springs,

Anantrnag, Sheshnag, Nilanag, Padmanag, as were named after various names of snakes. Indeed the impact of serpent cult was so piercing that the natives carved their images in sculptures: the roughly dated 11<sup>th</sup>-12th century Kadroo stone sculpture retrieved from Pulwama in South Kashmir and the 16th century stone structured *bowlies* from Jammu, the other division of the Jammu & Kashmir state in India, offer the typical examples in this behalf. Even the sparsely distributed religious structures in Kashmir carry the graven images of the serpents. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal chronicler, Abul Fazl, in his monumental work reports about seven hundred such places that possessed graven images of snakes and about which "wonderful legends are told"<sup>26</sup> albeit most of them excepting those of the sixteenth century are without designs and the motifs. In any case, the serpent tradition was and continues to be a common practice among Kashmiri Pandits<sup>27</sup> as well as the Muslims for the attainment of variegated desires.<sup>28</sup> That it was practiced by the Kashmiri Muslims during the medieval period is forthright vindicated by Mirza Haidar Dughlat, Abul Fazl and Haidar Malik Chadoora.<sup>29</sup> Even its influence on them is amply certified by their belief in considering the killing of a snake next to a sin. In addition, they splashed grains at shrines and graves to express regard unto snakes and other animals, besides earning blessing there against for their ancestors. The Kashmiri Pandit community also remembers the snakes on the eve of *puja* and other religious ceremonies.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, the primitive cult of fire worship was central to Iran though it emanated in the 6th century BC at Balkh in the neighbourhood of Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> Founded by one Ahur Mazda, the Zoroastrian<sup>32</sup> ideology emphasised on the veneration of several Iranian gods and among them, the fire god was perceived to be powerful enough to purify the human body from all evils and allow it attain peace and salvation.<sup>33</sup> Much like the serpent cult, it travelled in the train of Aryan migration to Kashmir around the 8th century BC.,<sup>34</sup> and in due course of time, it got embedded into the innate religio-cultural texture of Kashmir through several practices about Shali maintains: "In the performance of Shradha rites, the Vedic deities receive worship through the fire, Shaivite through the phallic emblem of cooked rice and Shakta through a lamp".<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the Kashmiri Pandits subscribed to fire worship in diverse forms. They circumambulated a fire to formalize *yajna*, *hawan* and other religio-marital rituals perhaps under the *Parsi* or Zoroastrian influence.<sup>36</sup> Under the same influence, the Kashmiri Muslims celebrated *Frove*, an extant local festival of lights and bonfires<sup>37</sup> after the name of a revered Kashmiri saint, Zain Rishi, at Ash Muqam in South Kashmir. On a certain day, the devotees burn a chip of pinewood, tie it to a strong willow stick, and carry it up to a hill housing the cave of the saint and chanted slogans: 'This is the fire of Zain Rishi" meant to kill the demon and register victory of good over wicked forces.<sup>38</sup> The local ceremony of *Vayuk* is again near to the Iranian style of *Farvardin*.<sup>39</sup> On a specific day of a month, the Kashmiri Muslims remember their dead, visit their graves and distribute loaves of rice, the *Rohan Posh*, among the needy.<sup>40</sup>

## **(B) Central Asian Influences**

**(ii) Ancient Period:** In addition to Iran, Kashmir borrowed multiple influences from the Tajik land as is vividly vindicated by the common Tajik-Kashmir heritage. The Paleolithic and

Neolithic sites of Sarazam, Penjikent and Kuldara in Tajikistan and Burzahoma and Gufkral in Kashmir dating around the same period, 5000-3000 BC, reveal the coexistence of an irrevocable Tajik-Kashmir bond in terms of the common human habitat along the river beds and forest slopes, settlement pattern and the material finds comprising charcoal, hearths, grains, chisels, bone and stone made celts, grinders, querns, needles, awls, arrow heads, spears, beads, combs, bodkins, harvesters, scrapers, choppers, cores, flakes, pits and pit chambers.<sup>41</sup> The mode and form of ancestral, animal, sun, river, tree and the worship of like natural forces,<sup>42</sup> also suggest a shared history of mutual influences and cultural affinities between Tajikistan and Kashmir.<sup>43</sup>

However, these mutual ties strengthened with the advent of Buddhism, an ethico-moral philosophy founded by Lord Buddha in Bodhgaya Bihar, India, in the 5th century BC. The said philosophy demanded the humans to undergo self-introspection, shun malice and other evil designs and subscribe to right thinking, right approach, right action etc. so as to become perfect and immaculate, the *Sakya Mani*. Given its popularity especially after the death of its founder, Buddhism transformed into a formal faith, which reached Kashmir during the reign of Mauryan King Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. He popularized it through various measures which included engaging Kashmiri monks in the religious congregations at Pataliputra<sup>44</sup> and constructing large number of religious structures, the *stupas* and *chaityas*, in the Valley with symbolic representation of Buddha's footprints, tree and *chakra*.<sup>45</sup> On the fall of the Mauryas, the Indo-Bactrian Greeks (190 BC.) under their famous kings, Demetrius and Menandra (Milinda), pronounced Buddhism by building numerous *viharas* and *stupas* in Kashmir. It is either from Kashmir<sup>46</sup> or their Gandhara capital in Taxila that they transported Buddha's symbols and images to China and Central Asia.<sup>47</sup> Personally King Menandra held discussions with an eminent Buddhist monk, Nagasena, and built *Milindavihara* after his own name in Kashmir implicitly to allow free intellectual debate on faith and its existential realities and develop a sense of inclusiveness among the Kashmiris.<sup>48</sup> Besides, the Indo-Greeks promoted Kashmir's trade with Central Asia<sup>49</sup> and introduced Gandharan art in Kashmir<sup>50</sup> which is candidly evidenced by material finds from Semthan (modern Bijbehara) in South Kashmir.

The Indo-Greeks were succeeded by the Sakas (Scythians), Parthians and the Kushanas (*Yue-Chiehs*) [1st. century BC- 3rd century AD]. All the three dynasties especially the Kushanas under their veteran kings, Kanishka, Hushka and Jushka (1<sup>st</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) legitimised Buddhism by declaring it the state faith. They designed Buddha's images and symbols in sculptures, constructed and granted rent free land grants to *viharas*, *stupas* and their keepers and permitted complete freedom of religion. King Kanishka personally held religious dialogue with many people<sup>51</sup> including the then Buddhist scholar and saint, Nagarjuna at Sadarhadvana (modern Harvan) in proper Srinagar.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, he organized the fourth (some say the third) Buddhist conference in Kashmir which was undeniably a landmark in the history of Kashmir for it assembled hoards of Buddhist monks from South, Central and South East Asia on the one platform for exploring the hidden secrets and existential realities of Buddhism.<sup>53</sup> Its findings were inscribed on the copper plates. While few of them were spotted from the North Kashmir, many others are known to one Kashmiri scholar Yusuf Teng. Hiuen Tsang does not identify the exact venue of the conference though,<sup>54</sup> yet the event established Kashmir as one of

the peaceful and suitable place for dialogue on the religio-cultural matters.<sup>55</sup> That way, Kashmir was strategically logged on to the greater Buddhist world.<sup>56</sup>

No doubt, the Buddhist kings extended every possible support to Buddhism in Kashmir. They juxtapose accorded adequate, if not equal, patronage to other ideologies to uphold the innate Kashmiri tradition of human coexistence, mutual forbearance and religious toleration<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps with the same consideration, Mauryan King Ashoka revered Vedic<sup>58</sup> and *Shaivite* deities and semi-deities,<sup>59</sup> built two *Shaivite* temples at Bijbehara, [named Ashokeshvara], and replaced the stucco building material [specific to Buddhist *Viharas*] by stone [specific to *Shaivite* Temples].<sup>60</sup> His purported son, Jaluka,<sup>61</sup> a staunch follower of Hinduism though, is also reported to have shown liberality unto Buddhism by constructing a Buddhist *vihara* at Kitsahom (modern Baramulla) in North Kashmir.<sup>62</sup>

Besides religious structures, the numismatic evidence also certifies to the Kashmir's tradition of religio-cultural pluralism under extraneous influences. That Kushanas considerably patronized Buddhism but regard unto other religions especially Shaivism, is not far to seek in their coins and material remains. Kanishka's coins depict Buddha's images<sup>63</sup> as well as a four-armed standing Shiva with a drum, gourd, goat and a trident in his hands, indeed a living example of Kashmir's rich heritage of "inclusiveness". His successors too demonstrated optimum liberality towards the non-Buddhist or *Shaivite* faith as is borne by different types of coins: Hushka's coins, for instance, bear the impressions of Vedic or Hindu gods (the sun with a halo of rays)<sup>64</sup>; Vasudeva's coins carry the image of the Greek legends<sup>65</sup> and the coins of the Kidara depict the impressions of a Hindu goddess.<sup>66</sup> In addition to Buddhist, Brahmanical or *Shaivite* influences, their coins exhibit the images of Greek and Zoroastrian deities: the latter was characteristic of the Scythian and Parthians before them.<sup>67</sup> The Semthan finds and the 7th century Chinese account of Hiuen Tsang,<sup>68</sup> authenticate the confluence of Buddhist, Hindu, Vedic, Greek and the like influences during the Buddhist rule.<sup>69</sup> This presupposes that the Buddhist kings preferred "inclusion" and "tolerance" to "exclusion" and "intolerance" notwithstanding degeneration in the rank and file of the monks due to excessive absorption in wine, fish, meat, gambling, and *Tantric* practices of sorcery, magic and sexual or physical union with the Shakti<sup>70</sup>: the Hindu priests too were later absorbed by the *Tantric* forms of faith.<sup>71</sup>

During the course of religious transition, Kashmir formally experienced the introduction of Shaivism or Hinduism. It started with Jaluka, the son of Ashoka, and went down to the nomadic tribes of Hepthalites or White Hunas (410–569 AD)<sup>72</sup> from North China. In reality, the rule of Hunas was a breakthrough for it elevated Hinduism to the pinnacle of the state faith. Being ardent devotees of Shiva, Toraman in general and Mihirkula in particular constructed *Shaivite* temples in every nook and corner of the Valley,<sup>73</sup> and settled a huge number of Gandharan Brahmins in Kashmir. The local ruling dynasties, the Karkotas (600–855),<sup>74</sup> Utapalas (AD 855–939)<sup>75</sup> and the Loharas (1003–1101)<sup>76</sup> also nurtured the *Shaivite* and *Vaishnavi* ideologies by building and carving out Brahmanical images of Indrani, Vishnu and Shiva on the religious structures and providing rent free land grants to temples and the Brahmins for their maintenance.<sup>77</sup> Only the Hindu King Harsha was an exception to this general pro-Brahmanical policy. He ruthlessly destroyed temples and siphoned off their

centuries old wealth partly under economic compulsions and partly under the influence of Abhinavgupta's Trika Saivism (11th century) which signified a strong social reaction against the Brahmanical rituals.<sup>78</sup>

Simultaneously, however, the Hindu kings demonstrated toleration unto Buddhism by building monasteries,<sup>79</sup> granting rent free land grants to them and the monks for maintenance,<sup>80</sup> allowing representation of Buddha's images in sculptures at Pravarsenpura and Ushkur and celebrating Buddha's anniversary along with the anniversary of the Brahmanical gods.<sup>81</sup> The Semthan finds, Harwan tiles and rubble structures,<sup>82</sup> and the 8th century Martand and Avantiswamin stone temples certify the union of Tokharian (Buddhist) and *Shaivite* influences on Kashmir culture and architecture. To this effect, the Karkota rule is rightly remembered as a golden period in Kashmir history for it saw the convergence of Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Shaivism into one religio-cultural basket.<sup>83</sup> All the three religious ideologies assimilated, excreted and shared mutual influences with each other. Whereas Hinduism exported polytheistic and Tantric<sup>84</sup> beliefs to Buddhism, it instead borrowed scriptural form of art from Buddhism. Such a triangular confluence sufficed to the co-existence of diverse faiths, ideologies and arts in Kashmir<sup>85</sup> under her age-long experience in multiculturalism.

**(iii) Medieval Period:** The ancient legacy of religious toleration and cultural pluralism was also upheld by the early Muslim rulers in medieval Kashmir. No doubt Islam incorporates a monotheistic ideology based on the belief in "No god but God, the Supreme Creator of the Universe" and denunciation of all sorts of polytheistic forms of stone, idol, image and shrine worship.<sup>86</sup> However, it could retain its egalitarian character only in Arabia whereas in Iran and Central Asia, it was constrained to make a kind of compromise with pagan, nomadic and tribal traditions. Consequently, Central Asian Islam combined together the essentials of actual faith and the age-old un-Islamic customs and traditions. However, for the given support from both the nomadic and sedentary peoples,<sup>87</sup> it developed into the "folk Islam"<sup>88</sup> with strong social appeal, which even the Wahabi *Movement* of Sayyid Sharie Muhammad of Madina could not tear apart in 1912 AD.

Since Islam did not arrive directly from Arabia to Kashmir, it naturally carried with it mixed Iranian and Central Asian influences, which were gradually absorbed in the innate Kashmiri traditions. Initially, therefore, the neo-converts to Islam continued visiting temples, performing Hindu ritual *yajna*, dressing in Hindu attire and invoking stones, idols, images and deities for blessings. They did not perform the Islamic practice of circumcision and instead perpetrated acts of un-Islamic innovations. Even for expediency, their Islamic preachers did not object to these fundamental violations lest they enter into conflict with the neo-converts; hence, render their whole mission abortive. More so, they delivered religious sermons not in Arabic but in local language/s and used local Hindu religious idioms of *Avtar*, *Deva*, *Nirguna*, *Pran*, *P'aap*, *Punya*, *Surag*, *Ahankar* and *Krodh* in their speeches. Likewise, they made the *Rishi* cult<sup>89</sup> identifiable with Hinduism by subscribing to celibacy, vegetarianism, non-violence and non-injury to animals and abstaining from the use of garlic and onion etc. in food.<sup>90</sup> The most popular missionary saint, Sayyid Ali, from Hamadan in Iran, permitted group *dhikr* or collective chanting of religious literature in chorus to undercut the loud recitation of *mantras* in

Hindu temples.<sup>91</sup> Neither *pardah* nor Islamic education was made mandatory for Muslim women.<sup>92</sup> Law of succession<sup>93</sup> and the adoption of a son were not objected to despite being un-Islamic in character: this practice is still in vogue in Kashmir.<sup>94</sup> Under the circumstances, the age-long traditions featuring a mixed brand of pagan, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Hindu practices continued to have a space in the existing religio-cultural basket of Kashmir.

Over the years, however, the Kashmiri Muslims learnt to differentiate between monotheism and polytheism and, as such, stopped visiting Hindu temples. They denounced the Hindu deities and Brahmanical forms as these ran across the belief in infallible, inalienable and indivisible reality of God. In fact, the rejection of the Brahmanical ritualistic forms was not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of the reaction articulated by an eminent scholar, Abhinavgupta, and the most able King Harsha, in the early and late 11th century. It was later upheld by Lalla, a *Saiva Yogini*, and Sheikh Noor-ud Din Rishi or Nund Rishi, a revered Kashmiri saint, in the 14th century. Lalla was fearless enough to recognize the 'oneness of God',<sup>95</sup> and condemn (like her Indian *Bhakts*) stone worship in all its forms and manifestations:

*"He is here, there and everywhere. The idol is but a stone. The temple is but a stone. From top to bottom all is stone."*<sup>96</sup>

In the same century, Sayyid Ali Hamadani adopted Lalla and Nund Rishi's philosophy as the local base for advocating Islamic monotheism. The scores of his accompanying Central Asian missionaries, artisans, craftsmen, scholars and scientists, toured villages and towns and sensitized the Kashmiris to the essentials of Islam. Many of them permanently settled and formed their Diaspora in Kashmir, and were thus termed as the *Kashanis*, *Badakhshanis*, *Bukharis*, *Geelanis*, *Andrabis*, *Sayyids*, etc.<sup>97</sup> However, despite their mass awareness<sup>98</sup> about what is often termed as the "high Islam or puritan Islam", the Kashmiri Muslims took recourse to the "folk Islam" embodying, besides all else, the innate customs and traditions. No doubt, their mindset changed from temple to mosque but their association with the pre-Islamic values and customs continued there with them. It was rather re-energised by the Sufistic philosophy and the cult of shrine and saint worship for being above ethno-national and religio-sectarian considerations as was the case elsewhere in Iran, central Asia and Afghanistan. The devotees dedicated shrines, tombs and the mausoleums to the eminent Sufis, *imams*, *sayyids* and ascribed great miracles to their supernatural powers to animate the dead and inspire people with a "feeling of reverential awe and mysterious influence". Consequently, whole Valley and its Central Asian borderlands were replete with such shrines<sup>99</sup> which the devotees invariably thronged, tied tags and lit candles on<sup>100</sup> to invoke blessings for curing ailments, bearing children, auguring bumper harvests, to name only a few ends. They comprised all social and gender groups, men, women, and children especially among the peasantry who, more often than not, donated cattle, slaughtered animals etc. at the shrines.<sup>101</sup>

Undeniably, their attitude was reflective of a cardinal contradiction in their belief and practice. While, they practiced *kalima*, *nima'z*, *hajj*, *zakat*, *rouza*, circumcision, marriage and other Islamic rituals and rites, they simultaneously visited and esteemed tombs and shrines in total disregard of the *Qur'anic* injunction: "And they set up (idols) as equal to *Allah*, to mislead

(men) from His path. Into hell, they will burn; therein, an evil place to stay in...There is no god but God, the Eternal and Absolute. Those who believe not are arrogant. You should worship none but *Allah*."<sup>102</sup> The given dichotomy was probably the outcome of the constantly pouring in religio-cultural influences from across the borders in Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, China and India.

Nonetheless, such extraneous influences germinated fair deal of cultural affinity between Kashmir and its South and Central Asian neighbourhood.. One glaring example is manifest in the practice of preserving and displaying the relics of the revered Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at several shrines in contemporary Kashmir. The said practice was implicitly the continuation of a similar practice of around 1<sup>st</sup> century AD in ancient Eastern Turkistan or Chinese Central Asia or what currently forms Chinese largest province called the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Republic, where people preserved and demonstrated the relics of the Buddha, the begging bowl and the tooth, as a token of reverence unto and seeking blessings from the said great soul [ lord Buddha].<sup>103</sup> Another Kashmiri practice termed *Nafl* was the replica of a 13th century practice in Eastern Turkistan. To ward off famine or other natural calamities, processions were take out while holding up in hands the long wooden poles tied with scraps of cloth. After going through different streets in Srinagar, the processionists terminated at *Eidgah* for prayers and confession of bygone sins.<sup>104</sup> No major difference obtained in these two practices except that the Eastern Turkistanis held out a small meteorite believing that since it had fallen from the sky as a 'stone of heaven', it would, as such, redeem them from the drought severities.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the *Rishi cult* of medieval Kashmir had its counterparts in Eastern Turkistan. According to the medieval accounts, the Rishis resemble the Buddhist, Hindu, Vaishnav and Muslim saints and Sufis for they (i) lead an austere life, (ii) abstain from worldly allurements, (iii) disregard polytheism, Brahmanism and ritualism, (iv) avoid taking meat, (v) plant trees, (vi) speak people's language, (vii) and tread long distances to preach monotheism, peace and non-violence.<sup>106</sup> They were held with great respect by the Kashmiris, who paid obeisance at their shrines and abstained from meat or fish on the eve of their anniversaries to show their association with them.<sup>107</sup> The Kashmiri Rishis were , as such, identifiable with the specific groups of ascetics in the Eastern Turkistan about whom Marco Polo avers: "there is a particular class of devotees, who live in communities, observe strict abstinence in regard to eating, drinking and refrain from any kind of sexual indulgence, in order that they may not give offence to the idols whom they worship"<sup>108</sup> Similar types of affinities were marked in the architectural specimens of Kashmir and Turkistan as a whole. The pagoda type of Chinese building structure together with the mixed use of stone, wood, stuccoes, dab and wattle and earthen roofing in different ancient and medieval structures of Kashmir, attest to the incoming influences from China, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and India; hence, reflective of "continuity within change". In fact, few extant Muslim shrines or mosques in Kashmir were raised on the already existing temple or monastery structures to maintain , *inter alia*, links with the Buddhist and Hindu past. Little wonder to notice some Buddhist *chaityas* transformed into Hindu temples first and subsequently into Muslim mosques, graves or shrines. One such example is offered by the *Shah-i Hamdan* shrine in proper Srinagar. It was esteemed by the Kashmiri Pandits for its premises housed the Kali temple during the medieval Kashmir.

Thus the centuries-old legacy of multiculturalism was legitimized with the arrival of Islam and mystic ideology of Sufism to Kashmir in the 14th century. It brought with it not only a revolutionary social movement but also scores of customs and values related to individual and group behaviour vis-à-vis birth, death, marriage, faith and other social norms. These were, willy nilly, adopted and embedded by the natives in their innate cultural fabric. In any way, the net result of exotic influences culminated in marked compatibilities in the nature, composition and performance of a variegated set of customs and traditions over a vast geographical space spanning Kashmir, Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, India and China. The Common practices and rituals allied, for instance, to the naming of a new-born baby, the wedding of a couple and the performance of rituals and rites of the deceased by a Buddhist monk, Hindu Brahman or a Muslim *Moulvi* or *Imam*, prove the point.<sup>109</sup>

In short, the Kashmir's tradition of religio-cultural pluralism symbolised a conglomerate of customs and values which were an indispensable part of "cultural universals" than any particular group, region, faith, and people or country. They came into being in sequence of constant human interaction on the basis of the reciprocity of give and take relationship. These included the rites and rituals meant, *per se*, to appease the living and non-living beings and objects for variety of ends. Consequently, these customs and traditions had a great social appeal and were least infringed by racial, occupational, social or religious conflicts, negating thereby the above argued views of the conflict theorists on the negative role of religion on culture and society. Instead they marginalised the scope of reactionary and revolutionary movements in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Obviously, the ideological void between Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and even between "puritan Islam" and "folk Islam" did not stretch that much during the ancient and medieval periods.

The reasons were more than obvious. These customs and traditions promoted close-knit relations between individuals and groups, guaranteed them social security against men-made and God-made forces, inculcated in them a sense of peace, harmony and social togetherness, capacitated them to distinguish between sacred and profane values, sensitised them to social changes and challenges, made them immune to complexities of life and consoled them in the event of stress and strain<sup>110</sup> as is rightly argued by Tolman while maintaining that the customs and traditions offered a mental therapy to those isolated individuals who, for their own frustration, were unable to respond to existential and stark realities of life.<sup>111</sup> More so, they crystallised family and community bonds and their ethico-moral foundation, facilitated human mixing and exchange of rural-urban commodities on festive occasions.<sup>112</sup> As a matter of fact, their benefits were too wide to be compressed in simple terms.

Perhaps no other explanation is apt than the one underscored by Smith in general. To quote him: "by the ritual performance and rehearsal of ceremonies and feasts and sacrifices, by the communal recitation of past deeds and ancient hero's exploits, men and women have been enabled to bury their sense of loneliness and insecurity in the face of natural disasters and human violence by feeling themselves to partake of a collectivity and its historic fate which transcends their individual existences."<sup>113</sup>

### **Endnotes**

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43. *Aspects of Kashmir Saivism*, pp. 118, 160–3; *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, p. 117.

44. E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds.), *Divyavadana* (Cambridge, 1886), p. 399; *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, p. 119.

45. The reflection of Buddha's image in an icon at Baramulla in North Kashmir dates back to 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century (Hunas period) whereas the reflexes of his relics in the *stupas* date around the 7th century AD: Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, (tr.) *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol. I (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 150–1; *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, p. 118.

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47. *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, p. 155.

48. V. Trenckner, ed, *Milindapanha* (London, 1880), pp. 82–83.

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52. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Vol. I, Chapter I, Verse 173, pp. 30-31.

53. Thomas Watters, *On Yuwan Chwang's Travels in India*, vol. I, ed, T. W. R. Davids, London, 1904–5, pp. 270–2; Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Periods)* (Bombay, 1959), p. 34; *Aspects of Kashmir Saivism*, pp. 327–7; *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, p. 122; *Mir'aas: Reflecting the Heritage of Kashmir*, Vol. I, No. I, January–March, 2008, p. 7.

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55. Jean Nauduu, *Buddhists of Kashmir* (Delhi, 1980), p.10.

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57. B. N. Puri, *India under Kushans* (Bombay, 1965), p. 156.

58. Much before Ashoka, the Aryans had come to Kashmir in the eighth century BC with the concept of the Vedic gods after the name of *Rudra* (death), *Vuya* (wind), *Indra* (rain), *Agni* (fire) etc. Before this, the Kashmiris were simply used to worshipping the natural forces without any concept of god as was common to other pre-historic societies.

59. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Vol. I, Chapter I, Verse 173, pp. 19–20.

60 .*Aspects of Kashmir Saivism*, pp. 118, 160-2.

61. After Ashoka's death, Buddhism had a slight decline as his successor Jaluka, preferred Hinduism to Buddhism. That he was the son of Ashoka is nowhere borne by chronological and archaeological evidences. Only *Rajatarangini* mentions one such name Jaluka, an adherent to Hinduism though no exact date of his reign in Kashmir is furnished in the *Rajatarangini*. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Vol. I, Chapter I, Verses 108-28, pp. 21-25.

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63. F. M. Hasnain, *Hindu Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 36.

64. R. C. Kak, *Handbook of the Archaeological and Numismatic Sections of the S. P. S. Museum* (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 131–32.

65. *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, p. 125.

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70. *Mir'aas: Reflecting the Heritage of Kashmir*, Vol. I, No. I, January–March, 2008, p. 8; Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculptures of India* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 103.

71. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Chapter VI, Verses 1–22, pp. 236–37; also see the *Nilamata Purana*, Eng. tr., Ved Kumari Ghai, Vol. II, Jammu and Kashmir Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar, 1994.

72. The Greeks called them the Hepthalites and the Indians White Hunas. They are supposed to have descended somewhere between Siberia and Korea: K. Enoki, "The Liang chih-kung-t'u on the Origin and Migration of the Hua or Epthalites", *The Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 & 2, December 1970, pp. 37–45.

73. B. N. Puri, *Buddhism in Central Asia* (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 42–3.

74. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Chapter IV and allied Verses, pp. 120–85.

75. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Chapter V, Verses 37–38, 47–59, 66, 79, 158–59, 168–70, 397–98, 461–62 and other allied Verses of Chapter VI, pp. 186–266.

76. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Chapter VII, Verses 179–85, 246, 336–43, 357–61, 461–81, 524–27, 1081–99, 1504–08, and Chapter VIII, Verses 323–25, 378, 1586, 1608, 2593, 2060, 2092, 2097, 2376–80, 2396, 3360, pp. 283–500.

77. *Chronicles of the Kings of Kashmir*, Chapter VII, Verses 179–85, p. 282; *Buddhism in Central Asia*, pp. 42–43; *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, pp. 163–79.

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81. *Nilamata Purana*, pp. 697-703.

82. *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, pp. 135-6.

83. M. A. Stein, *Notes on the Ou-Kong's Account of Kashmir*, Proceedings of the Imperial Academy, Vienna, 1896, Vol. CXXXV, pp. 26; *Archaeological Survey of India: A Review*, 1975-76, New Delhi, India, p. 76.

84. Initially a part of Hinduism and Buddhism, during the seventh to twelfth centuries, it emerged as a complete religion in Kashmir: *Erotic Sculptures of India*, p. 103.

85. *Kashmir History and Archaeology through the Ages*, pp. 20-35, 144.

86. *Surat Ibrahim* 14, Ayat 29-30; *Surat 16*, Ayat 22; *Surat Ta-Ha* 20, Ayat 98; *Surat Al-Ikhlas* 112, Ayat 1-4: *The Holy Qur'an*, eng. tr. of the Meanings and Commentary, Revised and Edited by the Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1413 Hijra/1988 AD., Madinah Munawarah.

87. Yaakov Ro'I, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), p. XII.

88. Petra Steinberger, "Fundamentalism in Central Asia: Reasons, Reality and Prospects", in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition* (London, 2003), pp. 223-4.

89. *Rishis* formed a group of ascetics and folk heroes who abstained from meat, planted trees and performed such rituals as were an amalgam of diverse cultures: J. J. Modi, "Religious Ceremonies", *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Hereafter *JBBRAS*), vol. XIX, December, 1895, pp. 236-8; Hassan Shah, *Tarikh-i Hassan*, Urdu tr., Moulvi Ibrahim, *Tarikh-i Kashmir* (Srinagar, 1957).

90. Baba Dawood Khaki, *Rishi Nama*, Per. ms, R & P Deptt., Srinagar, ff. 60-85 ab.

91. *Tarikh-i Sayyid Ali*, ff. 31ab, 39-40ab.

92. Baba Dawood Khaki, *Dastur al- Salikin*, Urdu trans. Muhammad Tayub Kamli as *Hirz al Muhibin*, Vol. I, Srinagar, pp. 426-7.

93. Sant Ram Dogra, *Code of Tribal Customs in Kashmir* (Jammu, 1930).

94. *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 266.

95. Abul Fazl (*Ain-i Akbari*) and Jahangir's (*Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*) accounts contain a detailed accounts of the *Rishi* cult in Kashmir. The modern historians of Kashmir also mention Rishis in diverse respects: A. Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House) and Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam* (New Delhi, 1994).

96. Jayalal Koul, *Lal Ded* (New Delhi, 1973), pp. 129-30; Shashibhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta, 1976), pp. 65-70; *Islam in Kashmir (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)*, p. 91.

97. For details see, Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans* (Srinagar Kashmir, 1959) and *Islam in Kashmir (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)*, pp. 231-73.

98. This followed the contribution of the Sufis, saints and missionaries in conjunction with the state patronage. However, its spread was also due to the psychological impact left by the acceptance of Islam by the turbulent Mongol hoards in Kashmir's extended neighbourhood: Mirza Haider Dughlat, *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, Eng. tr., pp. 417-23.

99. C. P. Skrine, *Chinese Central Asia*, London, 1926, p. 182.

100. H. W. Bellow, *Kashmir and Kashghar: A Narrative of the Journey of the Embassy to Kashghar, 1873-74* (Delhi, reprint, 1989), pp. 302, 310, 324-5, 327; Bayard Taylor, *Travels in Cashmere, Little Thibet and Central Asia, 1876-81* (New York, 1892), p. 228; Robert Shaw, *Visit to High Tartary and Kashghar, 1867-69* (New Delhi, reprint, 1996), p. 460; *Chinese Central Asia*, pp. 177-8, 182-4; P. S. Nazaroff, *Moved on from Kashmir to Kashghar* (London, 1935), p. 26.

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103. *Mir'aas: Reflecting the Heritage of Kashmir*, Vol. I, No. I, January-March, 2008, pp. 5-11.

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105. *Chinese Central Asia*, pp. 70-1; *Moved on from Kashmir to Kashghar*, pp. 18, 34-36.

106. Baba Nasib, *Nur Nama*, Per. ms. R & P Deptt., Srinagar , ff. 142ab; Muhammad Azam, *Waqiat-i Kashmir*, R & P Deptt. Srinagar, pp. 63-64; *Ain-i Akbari*, Vol. II, Eng. Tr., pp. 350-52.

107. Mushtaq A. Kaw, "Chinese Turkistan and Kashmir- A Study in Cultural Affinities", *Hamdard Islamicus*, XXVII (3), (ed.) Sadia Rashid, Karachi, July-September, 2004, pp. 41-50 & *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, LII (3), Karachi, July-September, 2004, pp. 63-80.

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111. Charles Tolman, *Psychology, Society and Subjectivity: An Introduction to German Psychological Critique* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 56-60.

112. Mushtaq A. Kaw, "Popular Islam in Chinese Central Asia", *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 50 (2), 2006, pp. 246-63.

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