

Tracing the Genesis of Conversion: The Role of Sufi Missionaries in the Islamization of Kashmir

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Abstract- This paper is an endeavour to decipher the roots of conversion to Islam in Kashmir with an emphasis on the regressive state policies and Brahmanical Social domination, which pushed masses at times to the extremes of hunger, desperation and miseries in a society based on Varna ashram dharma, a scenario which the Sufi missionaries availed both by preaching an ideology wherein differences based on caste hierarchy, purity and pollution and riches mattered least, and by introducing new crafts thereby offering alternative means of production to the people seething under social and economic exploitation. . The second part, the hitherto untreated aspect of conversion attempts to underline the degraded and depraved social and economic condition of women as emerges from the contemporary sources particularly Rajatarangini in the period prior to the arrival of Sufi missionaries in Kashmir and the reformative initiatives undertaken by the Sufis after their arrival for restoring women to their rightful place in the society both by working in unison with the rulers to call for abolition of redundant, demeaning and obsolete social customs and traditions, and by spreading awareness among the womenfolk regarding their position in the society, thereby broadening the horizons of persuasive conversion and social base of Islam. The third part brings to highlight the Islamization by Sufis of neo-converts for whom departing from past legacy was more than difficult.

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam like Christianity is essentially a missionary religion¹ and every Muslim missionary carries with him the message of Islam to the people of the land into which he penetrates. Reflecting upon the missionary attitude of Islam and thereby its spread in The Preaching of Islam, T.W. Arnold writes:

*“The spread of Islam over so vast a portion of the globe is due to various causes, social, political and religious: but among these, one of this stupendous results, has been the unremitted labours of Muslim missionaries, who, with the Prophet himself as their great ensample, have spent themselves for the conversion of unbelievers.”*²

This befits for Kashmir where in third century BC majority of the populace followed Buddhism and in fifth century AD, Brahmanism in varied forms like Shaivism, Vaishnavism and

Shaktism reasserted itself,³ and this assertion continued till fourteenth century. However, from fourteenth century onwards, owing to the social, political and economic reasons, and Sufi intervention, Kashmir witnessed Islam emerging as the dominant religion of the masses. ‘This was not the result of any forcible conquest writes Auriel Stein, but an outcome of gradual conversion, for which the influx of foreign adventurers,⁴ both from the south and from central Asia, had prepared the ground’,⁵ which was carried further by Sufis who subsequently came from Persia and Central Asia, and the local Rishis.⁶ Kalhana acknowledges the fact that the Hindu rulers of Kashmir seem to have been generous and hospitable to these foreign adventurers.⁷ In fact, Islamization of Kashmir had already dawned before the arrival of the Sufis; their presence further stimulated the process. From the travels of Marco Polo, it emerges that by the end of the thirteenth century there was noticeable presence of Muslims in Kashmir, for he says that, ‘its natives, the Kashmiris, do not kill animals nor spill blood but if they are inclined to eat meat they get the Saracens who dwell among them to play the butcher.’⁸ These Saracens were, most probably, non-Muslim Kashmiris of butcher Jati who had embraced Islam. Both contemporary social structure and economic motives demystify their conversion to Islam. By doing so, they could achieve emancipation from the stigma of pollution and meet the demands of Muslim clientele who eat meat prepared as per Sharia and could retain their Hindu (largely Kshatriya) clientele.⁹ Prior to this, during the 11th and 12th centuries we find Kashmiri rulers, Harsha (1089-1101), Bhiksachara (1120-21) and Jayasimha (1128-49) employing mercenary Muslim soldiers of fortune in their army.¹⁰

³ Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, Eng. Tr. M.A. Stein (London, 1900), I, book I, vv. 290-3

⁴ The first Muslim Sultanat in Kashmir, Shahmir Sultanat (1339-1561) was established by one such adventurer from Swat (Swadgir), Shah Mir. See *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, Eng. Tr. K. N. Pandit (Calcutta, 1991), 16, 28-29; Haider Malik Chadurah, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, Eng. Tr. Razia Bano (Delhi, 1991), 37-38, 51.

⁵ Stein, Auriel, Introduction to *Rajatarangini*, 130

⁶ M. I. Khan, Making a sweeping generalization contends that there is no reason to believe that the religious role of Sufis led to the Islamization of Kashmir, “*Islam in Kashmir: Historical Analysis of its Distinct Features*”, in *Islam in India*, ed. C. W. Troll, (Delhi, 1984), II, 86-97

⁷ Cf. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, I, 357

⁸ H. Yule, *Travels of Sir Marco Polo* (London, 1903), I, 167

⁹ Aziz Ahmad, “Conversion to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir”, *Central Asiatic Journal*, XXIII (1979), 7

¹⁰ *Rajatarangini* (Stein), IV, v. 397, VII, v. 1149, VIII, vs. 885-86

¹ The following Quranic verses reflect the missionary attitude of Islam, 3:19, 99-100; 16:126; 9:6,11; 22:66-67

² T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (London 1912), reprt. 1990, 3

‘Though these conversions from Brahmanism to Islam in Kashmir did primarily serve the purpose of the medieval state, it would be inaccurate to attribute it entirely to the states initiative alone.’¹¹ Thus it is not the Sultans, observes Mohibbul Hassan, but the Sufis who were mainly responsible for introducing and spreading Islam in Kashmir. But for this they did not use compulsion, because they were neither capable of employing it, nor did they have the sanction of the State behind them¹². Their methods were persuasion, discussion, and discourse. And they won over the hearts of the people on account of their simplicity, sincerity, piety, and devotion.¹³ This observation emphasizes consequences rather than causes. Concerned over successful Sufi endeavours of Islamization of kings and commoners, Jonaraja remarks: “As the wind destroys the trees, and the locusts the shali crop, so did the Yavanas destroy the usages of Kashmira.” This statement draws attention towards the subtle socio-cultural and religious changes characterizing the Kashmiri society with the gradual spread of Islam during this period through Sufi intervention.

The advent of Sufis indirectly induced the non-Muslims to embrace Islam. Prior to the arrival of the Sufis the Brahmins were the main beneficiaries of royal patronage, but the presence of Sufis and their missionary activities led to the gradual decline of their authority in the political, social and economic fields. The newly arrived Muslim saints and neo-converts took their place. Thus, many Brahmins and people of other castes gave up their religion in order “to obtain the favour of the king (Sikandar).”¹⁴ Reflecting upon the conversion, its direct impact on the masses, and its immediate impact upon the Brahmins Jonaraja writes that, ‘It was out of his devotion to the religion of the Turushkas (Islam) not out of antipathy towards the twice born, that the ‘low born’ Suhabhata (Malik Saifu’-d-Din) oppressed the Brahmanas, levied fines¹⁵ on them, withheld their allowances and forbade their ceremonies and processions.’¹⁶ Undermining the Brahman hegemony by any monarch of Kashmir prior to the arrival of

Islam and Sufis was impossible to materialize.¹⁷ Their peculiar function as intermediaries between people and gods owing to their monopolization of religious scriptures made them privileged with certain entitlements in terms of patronage, political and economic, by rulers. A critical scrutiny of Jonaraja reveals that Suhabhata’s conversion to Islam and his harsh treatment of Brahmins had many underlying reasons with broader implications. First, it seems a counteraction of his experiences with the caste system with its inherent exploitative tendencies of lower castes towards whom Suhabhata appears somewhat sympathetic, otherwise for winning converts he could have simply diverted his neo-religious zeal towards lower castes, but as Jonaraja says, ‘he often instigated the king to persecute the twice born.’¹⁸ Second, it was a consequence of his political interests, to consolidate and strengthen his position in the nobility of Sultan Sikander (1389-1413)¹⁹ and to utilize his neo-Muslim loyalty for winning confidence of the Sultan to gain power, for Jonaraja writes that, “The ministers attained or lost rank and honour according to the will of the powerful Suhabhata.”²⁰ Mir Mohammad Hamadani, however, emphatically warned Suhabhata for his overzealousness,²¹ quoting the Quranic verse that says, “Let there be no compulsion in religion.”²² Also, Saiyid Ali Hamadani in his treatise *Zakhirat-ul-Muluk* enjoins the king to protect the life and honour of Zimmis.²³ However, facts speak contrary to the pragmatism of these injunctions. Jonaraja astutely conceals the fact that the conversion of the low caste people was in essence the revolt of socially oppressed masses against the domination of high-caste Brahmins. This also explains Lalla’s tirade against Brahmanical supremacy, caste rigidities, religious superstitions etc. and her becoming the chief exponent of Islamic monotheism, thereby serving the cause of Islam in Kashmir.²⁴

In this context of vast masses deserting the religion into which they were born and opting for another, the phenomenon surely assumes social and economic dimensions of some significance. The lot of the masses before the spread of Islam in Kashmir was miserable.²⁵ Not only the desire to do away with

¹¹ Harbans Mukhia, “Communalism: A Study in its Socio-Historical Perspective”, *Social Scientist*, no. 1 (August, 1972), 49

¹² The author of *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, P. 36 says, “When Sultan Qutub’-d-Din did not glorify Islam and implement the Sharia as Saiyid Ali Hamadani wished, he therefore decided not to stay any more in the country, and left via Baramulla, with the intention of performing the Hajj.”; *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, 54; this refutes Parmu’s argument that “the movement (Islamization) received increasing official encouragement and support from Qutub’-d-Din...” *History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir* (Delhi, 1969), 113; Similarly Zainu’l-Abidin had special regard for Sufis, but he tolerated every faith and patronized none, Cf. *Baharistan*, 66, 72-74

¹³ Hassan, Mohibbul, *Haider, Tipu, Kashmir* (Khuda Baksh Library: Patna, 1992), 19

¹⁴ Cf. Rajatarangini (Dutt), III, 67

¹⁵ Jonaraja (60, 65) says that Suha levied fines on the twice born, which could mean *Jiziya*, Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir* (Delhi, n.d.), 100 (footnote); Malik Haider writes that, ‘Sultan levied *Jiziya* on those infidels who were persistent in infidelity and ignorance.’ *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, 55

¹⁶ Jonaraja, *Rajatarangini*, Eng. Tr. J. C. Dutt (Calcutta, 1898), Repr. 1990, III, 65-7

¹⁷ Utpala king Jayapida (AD 753-82) once issued orders to confiscate the agraharas, but had to retreat after 99 Brahmins committed suicide by drowning themselves in Chandrabhaga (Chenab). Kalhana (Dutt), I, 98; Samkarvarman (AD 883-902), in order to rob Brahmins of their wealth claimed from temples and endowments, plundered the temples thereby devaluing the religious domination of Brahmins. Kalhana, (Dutt), I, 117-18; Lalitapida (AD 782-94) forcibly took back from Brahmins many agraharas, *Ibid.* 100-2. This clearly reflects attempts by rulers to undo the Brahmanic hegemony.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65

¹⁹ Aziz Ahmad, 13

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68

²¹ G. M. D. Sufi, *The Islamic Culture in Kashmir* (Delhi, 1979), 44

²² Quran, 2:156

²³ Saiyid Ali Hamadani, *Zakhirat-ul-Muluk*, vide Aziz Ahmad, 13

²⁴ M. Ishaq Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir* (Srinagar, 1983), 12

²⁵ See R. L. Hangloo, *The State in Medieval Kashmir* (Manohar, 2000), 48-74

the shackles of caste rigidities, which impaired their social mobility, the common masses were seething under constant economic repression, which necessitated a recourse to alternative political, economic and social set up, one in which Brahmans in particular and other landed groups like Dammaras, Tantrins, Ekangas and Lavanyas in general would not be the only beneficiaries. In an economy based on agriculture where Shudras, as well as perhaps other jatis, hierarchically higher or lower, formed the agrarian base,²⁶ a series of rulers unleashed regime after regime of economic extortions, leaving the peasants sometimes not even with bare minimum survival. Tarapida (AD 721-25) derived pleasure in oppressing his subjects. His rapacious behaviour forced vulnerable inhabitants to run for life towards forests.²⁷ Jayapida's (AD 753-82) display of cruelty was unparalleled. He employed every means to sequester people of their wealth and plundered the cultivators share of the harvest through tyrannical exactions.²⁸ His successor Lalitapida, full of vices, licentious, ignored the state affairs, provided unrestricted freedom to his officials to fleece the hapless peasants.²⁹ Samkarvarman (883-902 AD), a cause of peasant indigence, introduced thirteen sorts of punitive and impoverishing imposts in villages.³⁰ For exorbitant extractions over and above the regular land tax from his subjects he created two new offices named Attapatibhaga (the department of the lord of the market) and *Grihakritya* (domestic affairs), and introduced two new cesses for village kayasthas (*gramakayasthas*) and lambardars (*skandas*).³¹ He cunningly appropriated money, which was meant to purchase incense and oil for use in temples.³² He introduced kalbegar, the forced carrying of loads, and those who resisted to render this forced labor were subjected to economic extortions.³³ His son Gopalvarman is said to have advised him to desist from such avarice, as it is the cause of disgrace and downfall for kings.³⁴ During Partha's (AD 906-21) reign when famine and acute scarcity of food took a heavy toll of the life of the common masses so much so that according to Kalhana, bones of deceased lay scattered on every side and corpses of dead were floating every where on the waters of Vitasta (Jhelum), the officials were busy in amassing wealth by selling grains at the rate of 1000 dinars for one khari to the pauperized people.³⁵ Kalhana calls him wicked Partha.³⁶ Unmattavant (AD 937-9) was worse than his predecessors. Kalhana gives a heartrending account of his tyrannies. Not only were his subjects glad of his death, but also

were his fourteen queens.³⁷ Harsha (1089-1101), writes Kalhana in indignation, 'Oh Shame, he possessed his grandfather's treasures and those which wicked Utkarsha had brought from Lohara and those he had confiscated from the temples, the riches bestowed by former kings. Yet he endeavoured to secure more and more wealth by oppressing the peasants.'³⁸ In these circumstances, the Brahmans enjoyed economic privileges through aghararas, which provided them economic strength and social stability. They were offered not only complete immunity from punishments, taxation and forced labour,³⁹ but enjoyed the state privilege of non-escheatment of their property even after dying heirless, while people at the lowest wrung of the society like Kiratas, Nisadas, Dombas, Chandalas etc. were not only denied all these amenities,⁴⁰ but also looked down upon by the Brahmanas. Thus while the people labored hard, the rulers, their officials and Brahmans reaped the benefits, throwing all obligations and responsibilities to the winds. Naturally in this atmosphere of discriminations and exploitation, the Brahmans were unlikely to promote their religious cause for a long time. As a result, the state's dependence on them as a legitimizing source dwindled, because the effectiveness of their authority over the society faded off gradually as a living social force and consequently religious guarantees weakened changing the balance of power in favour of the majority masses who had by now become familiar with the new religion brought to Kashmir from time to time by traders, soldiers, and craftsmen. This led to the decline of agharara-based economy and changed the nature of agrarian economy and its relationship to the expanding craft production. The result was long-term decline of agriculture and greater emphasis on craft production due to the inflow of new crafts and technology brought in by Sufis and their followers. These developments offered fertile ground for Islam in building unity and power at the social level, where Sufis took pains to introduce it into the hearts and minds of the helpless people⁴¹, who in order to achieve occupational mobility, economic and social stability were attracted by its revolutionary social ideology, its championing of equality and concept of brotherhood.⁴²

The state of affairs during post Avantivarman (AD 883) period was marked by frequent internecine conflicts, revolts and uprisings by dominant groups like Dammaras, Tantrins, Ekangas and Lavanyas, a situation very well summed up by Youngusband;

"We may accept, then, as authentic that the normal state of Kashmir for many centuries, except in the intervals when a strong, firm ruler came to the front, was a state of perpetual intrigue and assassination, of struggle with brothers, cousins, uncles, before a chief even came to the throne; of fights for power with ministers, with the military, with the nobles when he was on it; of constant fear; of poisoning and assassination; of

²⁶ Aziz Ahmad, 6

²⁷ Kalhana (Dutt), I, 67; Haider Malik, 19

²⁸ Kalhana (Dutt), I, 98

²⁹ Ibid.100-2

³⁰ Ibid. 117

³¹ Ibid. 118

³² Ibid. 117

³³ Kalhana (Stein), I, vv. 167-8, 208, vv. 175, 271-4, p. 221; K.S. Saxena, *Political History of Kashmir: BC 768-771 AD* (Lucknow, 1974), 126; D.D. Kosambi, "Origins of Feudalism in Kashmir" in Introduction to the Study of Indian History (Bombay, 1956), 109-20

³⁴ Kalhana (Dutt), 119

³⁵ Ibid. 129-30

³⁶ Ibid. 135

³⁷ Ibid. 137

³⁸ Kalhana (Stein), Vol. II, Book, VIII, 353-54

³⁹ Krishna Mohan, *Early Medieval History of Kashmir*, AD 1003-1171 (Delhi, 1981), 221

⁴⁰ Brij Narayan, *Social Life of North India* (Delhi, 1966), 35

⁴¹ Hangloo, 69

⁴² Ahmad Hassan, *The Doctrine of Ijmah in Islam* (Pakistan, 1976), 11-18

wearing, petty internecine wars and of general discomfort, uncertainty, and unrest."⁴³

In such a scenario any change or alternative that had the prospect of emancipating common masses from the shackles of outdated social customs, political setup and economic exploitation was, therefore, sure to be welcomed by them. At the same time, incessant conflicts among dominant groups, plundering of temples, and undermining of Brahman religious authority could perhaps have continued unabated without much popular reaction, if only an alternative had not presented itself to Kashmiri society. The alternative observes Rattan Lal Hangloo was Islam, which presented a new worldview comprehending social, political and ideological-cultural aspects. Popular reaction, indeed popular protest, against the unjust acts of those in power, took the non violent form of mass conversion to this new world view, i.e. Islam.⁴⁴ Thus, Islam's triumph in Kashmir in the Sultanat period was not a miracle performed by Sayyid Ali Hamadani or a mere demonstration of force displayed by Sultan Sikander or the Sayyids. It was, in essence, a natural revolt of the human heart against cold formalism of ritualistic Brahman priests, untold economic repression by rulers in concomitance with their officials and chaotic political setup,⁴⁵ and the Sufis further ignited this revolt through their persuasive preaching. When all is said and done, says R.K. Parmu, it has to be admitted that Islam came to Kashmir as a great riddance.⁴⁶ Thus, the fundamental change brought about by Islam in Kashmir was that it replaced a religion, which had been reduced to an irrational, highly hypocritical, and primitive set of liturgy instructions and established the social basis for the Shahmir Sultanat,⁴⁷ the first Muslim Sultanat of Kashmir. As a result, Kashmiri society was restructured by a new social order and a belief system, which demolished the age-old divisive and disintegrating social forces, stabilized, unified and integrated the hitherto fragmented society, with Islam as a unifying ideology.

II.

Women in pre-Islamic Kashmir were subjected to inhuman practices. They were considered commodities, and followed superstitions blindly. It was Mir Shamsu'd-Din who for the first time undertook to work among women both for restoring them to their deserving place in the society, and for strengthening the social base of Islam.

Although women like Sugandha (904-6),⁴⁸ Didda (980-1003),⁴⁹ and Kota Devi⁵⁰ played an active and important role in

the political life of Kashmir. However, the Pre-Islamic Kashmir was bereft with many social evils, which resulted in the degraded condition of women. The contemporary sources particularly mention the wide prevalence of the custom of sati, polyandry, polygamy, prostitution, and the devadasi system. The condition of widows was miserable for they were not allowed to remarry. Although, as an exception Rinchan's widow Kota Devi remarried Udayanadeva. But, this was a royal affair, which in no terms can be interpreted as a prevailing phenomenon. The widows were expected to live a pure and isolated life, devoid of luxury or comforts of life. The ornaments or gorgeous dress was forbidden to them.⁵¹ Kalhana says, 'the women which Salhana enjoyed today, Losthana enjoyed the next day.' This clearly reflects the existence of polyandry. Sati was widely prevalent among the ruling class. In fact, this inhuman custom was so deep rooted in the society that even mothers, sisters, other near relatives and even servants burned themselves with their beloved deceased. On the death of king Samkarvarman, writes Kalhana, 'Surendravati and two other queens perished on the funeral pyre as also the grateful Valavitu and able Jayasimha, and two other servants, Lada and Vajrasara. Thus perished seven persons in the flame.'⁵² At the death of Yasaskara, his wife Trailokyadevi followed him on the funeral pyre.⁵³ Rajatarangini is replete with instances where this practice was imitated by the aristocratic class, well-off people and continued to exist even after the introduction of Islam in Kashmir for a long time.⁵⁴ Along with these social evils, prostitution was also widespread as was the system of Devadasis. Kshemagupta's court, we are told, was always filled with prostitutes.⁵⁵ Kalhana says that, 'King Jaluka gave hundred women of his seraglio, who were well versed in dancing and singing, to serve in the temple of Jyestharuda.'⁵⁶ In the course of a hunting expedition, king Lalitaditya came across two dancing girls who were dedicated to the temples. Kalhana was himself an eyewitness of superannuated dancing women in the temples of the valley.⁵⁷ These degrading social practices created the conditions where majority of the people who voluntarily accepted Islam expected the new rulers to overhaul the entire socio-economic and political system, and timely respond to the immediate problems of the people. It was this spirit of change and reform that encouraged both Sufis and Kings to work in unison to rid people of obsolete and un-Islamic

Abhimanyu (958-72) and Nandigupta (972-73), and ruled as a sovereign for 23 years from 980-1003. Parmu, 63-64

⁵⁰ She was the daughter of Ram Chand (PM of Suhadeva 1301-20) and married Rinchan, the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir (1320-23), *Rajatarangini* (Dutt), III, 18. After Rinchan's death in 1323, she married Udayanadeva (1324-39 AD) and acted his regent. After his death she reigned for 5 months (*Baharistan*, 29). When Shah Mir usurped the throne in 1339 by coup d'état, he married to her. Abul Fazl writes that Shah Mir, by specious flattery and intrigue married her, *Ain-i-Akbari* (Jarrett), II, 386

⁵¹ *Rajatarangini* (Stein), Book VII, 250

⁵² Kalhana (Dutt), I, 122

⁵³ *Rajatarangini* (Stein), p. 107

⁵⁴ G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashir*, I, 146

⁵⁵ Kalhana (Dutt), 153

⁵⁶ *Rajatarangini* (Stein), I, 151

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* VIII, 107

⁴³ Sir Francis Younghusband, *Kashmir* (Delhi, 1970), 155

⁴⁴ Hangloo, 53

⁴⁵ Khan, M. I., "*Islam in Kashmir*", 95

⁴⁶ R. K. Parmu, 432

⁴⁷ Hangloo, 60

⁴⁸ Sugandha was queen of Samkarvarman (883-902), acted as regent of her son Gopalvarman for two years after which she reigned herself for next two years. Tantrins finally murdered her. *Rajatarangini* (Dutt), I, 121-25

⁴⁹ Didda was the daughter of Simharaja of Punch and queen of Kshemagupta (950-58). She acted as regent to her sons

customs and practices. Thus, working as social reformers, it were the Sufis like Mir Muhammad Hamadani who persuaded Sultan Sikander to prohibit the use of wine and all intoxicants, gambling, dancing of women and observance of the practice of Sati.⁵⁸ To implement these measures, Sultan Sikander also established the office of Shaikh-ul Islam.⁵⁹ Mir Muhammad's influence on the state policy may be measured by the fact that he had any person whom he thought dangerous to his missionary and reformative activities arrested.⁶⁰ In fact, at times Sufis constituted a powerful reaction against injustice and impressed upon the rulers to protect their subjects through strict administration of justice. They strongly advocated that a ruler is a "Shadow of God and God's mercy embraces all including the non-Muslims."⁶¹ This interest for social welfare in general also offered Sufis with immense opportunities to convert the non-Muslims to Islam.⁶² Scholars, who attribute conversion to the persecutions of Sultan Sikander and Sultan Ali Shah alone, ignore the contemporary depraved social conditions, which the Sufis as missionaries availed by providing remedies to prevailing social issues through persuading rulers to take steps towards their eradication, concomitantly spreading awareness among the masses, both by dispatching their disciples and by travelling themselves to every nook and corner of the valley, living among the people to spread their faith by precept and example, and by introducing new indoor crafts and techniques, like shawl and carpet weaving, which women enthusiastically adapted, gradually enhancing their economic importance and social status.⁶³

III.

The non-Muslims of Kashmir came into contact with the Muslims as early as the beginning of the 8th century,⁶⁴ yet Islam

⁵⁸ M. L. Kapur, *A History Of Medieval Kashmir: 1320-1586 AD* (Delhi, 1971), 37, 213

⁵⁹ Hassan, Mohibbul, *Kashmir Under The Sultans* (Calcutta, 1959), Reprt. Srinagar, 2002, 64-65

⁶⁰ "The Brahmanas, the supporters of the world," writes Jonaraja, "had taken refuge of Ratnakara in order to preserve their party, and this little Brahmana, became the favourite of Suhabhata. But Malanoddina (Muhammad Hamadani), the great guru of the Yavanas, feared that Ratnakara would rise in rebellion and caused him to be arrested." *Rajatarangini* (Dutt), III, 67-68

⁶¹ Sayyid Ali, *Zakhirat ul Muluk*, 111 vide Rafiqi, "Impact of Sufism in Kashmir", in *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Society and Politics in India*, ed. Jafri and Reifeld (Rainbow Publishers, 2006) 154

⁶² Rafiqi, 212

⁶³ Scholars like Sir Wolsley Haig, *The Cambridge History of India*, III; Fergusson, *Kashmir*; Younghusband, *Kashmir*, subscribe to the Forced Conversion Theory.

⁶⁴ The earliest reference to Muslims in Kashmir is found during Lalitaditya Muktapida's reign (725-53 AD). He is said to have requested the Chinese emperor for help against the Arabs; see Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (London, 1871), 90. The next reference to Muslims is that of Kalhana. He says that the Turushkas carried their arms on their

could not make much progress here till the conversion of Rinchin⁶⁵, a Buddhist to Islam, by Bulbul Shah⁶⁶ in the first quarter of the 14th century. The continuous and close interaction between neo-converts and their kith and kin leading to the intermingling of two different cultures during the next six centuries in which Islam gradually attained a firm foothold in the valley must have accelerated the process of acculturation. However, before the intervention of Sufi missionaries, the new converts, the Muslim Sultans and their newly converted Muslim nobility, which had been growing in numbers, were indistinguishable from the largely Hindu nobility in dress, manners, and customs, and often in proper names.⁶⁷ The author of *Baharistan-i-Shahi* writes,

"Although Sultan Qutbu'd-Din had been admitted to the Islamic faith, in those days none of the Ulema and men of learning in Kashmir preached religion without hypocrisy. The Qazis and the theologians of those days paid scant attention to things permitted or prohibited (in Islamic religion) and, because the teachings of Islamic faith had not been enforced fully, Sultan Qutbu'd-Din had married two women who were uterine sisters. When Amir Saiyid Ali Hamadani came to know of it, he forbade him to do so. Sultan divorced one of his two wives of his free will; with the other he entered into a new marriage contract (in conformity with Sharia) and made her wear his dress. Sultan Sikander, was born to her (Subhatta) after this marriage."⁶⁸ He further says that, "In those days the majority of people was that of infidels and polytheists. The inhabitants of this land wore the common and popular dress of the infidels. Sultan Qutbu'd-Din also dressed himself after this fashion. But at the behest of the Saiyid, he abandoned that costume and adopted the Muslim dress."⁶⁹

To Saiyid Ali Hamadani and his devout followers, the social and religious life of the Kashmiri Muslims was an anathema, an abomination, as it militated against the *Sharia*. Therefore, they took upon themselves to liberate the Muslims of Kashmir from Hindu encrustations and thereby transform the socio-religious environment of Kashmir. Here, he first demonstrated true Islam to Sultan and his nobility, which for common masses were 'reference cultural group.' He not only caused the Sultan to adopt Muslim way of life, but also instructed him to introduce it among his Muslim subjects, and appointed his most promising and trustworthy disciple as his religious mentor.⁷⁰ In areas where the

back and shaved their heads half-way up, to illustrate the mark of bondage to Lalitaditya, Kalhana (Stein), I, Book III, v. 179, 138

⁶⁵ The very fact of the conversion of Buddhist Rinchina to Islam shows that Buddhism was no longer available as a power base, possibly not even as the religion of any significant number of households. Aziz Ahmad, 6

⁶⁶ Saiyid Sharafu'd-Din famously known as Bulbul Shah was the first Sufi to introduce Suhrawardi silsila into Kashmir. He came from Turkistan during the reign of Suhadeva. See Muhiu'd-Din Miskin, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, 6; Pir Hassan, *Tarikh-i-Hassan*, III, 4. He is remembered for having converted Rinchina and his brother in law Rawanchandra, to Islam. *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, 21-23

⁶⁷ Aziz Ahmad, 10

⁶⁸ *Baharistan*, 35

⁶⁹ *Baharistan*, 35

⁷⁰ *Baharistan*, 35; See also Parmu, 106

Sufis could not reach due to certain circumstances, there it was difficult to distinguish the Muslims from the non-Muslims. Even tolerant Jahangir was shocked at the results of such leniency on the part of the Muslims of the Rajauri valley. He mentions in *Tuzuk*, "They all ally themselves with Hindus, and both (Hindus and Muslims) give and take girls. Taking them is good, but giving them, God forbid. I gave an order that hereafter they should not do such things, and whoever was guilty of them, should be capitally punished."⁷¹ The persistent endeavours of Sufis towards Islamization of Kashmir did impact the society in the long run. It was this impact, which Srivara, writing during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah⁷², complains about when he observes that, 'men belonging to the four castes had of late adopted objectionable practices and had ceased to perform ceremonies prescribed by their religion.' It was because of the enthusiastic efforts of Sufis like Shamsu'd-Din Araqi, writes the author of *Tohfah-ul-Ahbab*, 'that the banner of faith was raised high in the sky, idol houses were effaced, mosques were constructed.'⁷³ He further says that, 'Today instead of each fire temple, there is either a garden or a paradise.'⁷⁴ The spirit of truth in the heart of the missionary cannot rest till it manifests itself in the thought, word, and deed. It is with this spirit that Shamsu'd-Din Araqi entered the valley of Kashmir at a time when people were Muslims only for namesake and worked enthusiastically to infuse the fundamentals of Islam in the heart and mind of every convert, so that they can practice it in letter and in spirit.

IV. CONCLUSION

The people of Kashmir were predominantly non-Muslims before the turn of the fourteenth century. It was a society whose foundation rested on four fold Varna ashram dharma. The Brahmans as a norm occupied important administrative offices and received privileges from rulers in the form of revenue free grants, while the masses were constantly exploited, economically and socially by rulers and Brahmans, a factor which in the long run offered potential opportunity for Islam to act as a great riddance. But Islam came not as a result of conquest or invasion, but through traders, soldiers, and most importantly Sufis. In fact, the presence of Muslims in Kashmir goes back to the 8th century AD. However, it was only after the arrival of Sufi missionaries in the 14th century from Persia and Central Asia that Islam gradually emerged as a dominant religion. The political patronage extended by rulers especially from Sultan Qutbu'd-Din onwards attracted saints and scholars, which further strengthened the culture of Islam in Kashmir.⁷⁵ The Sufis did not apply force

as has been argued by some scholars, instead they worked as reformers, recommending rulers to initiate welfare measures for common people, introduced new crafts which created new avenues of employment, converted through persuasion influential political personages, who in turn acted as 'reference cultural group' for their followers thereby helping Islam to achieve firm foothold in Kashmir. However, the legacy of un-Islamic past was more difficult to part with, than adopting fundamentals of the new faith. Even, Muslim rulers unintentional disregard of *Sharia* was manifested through their following of un-Islamic customs and traditions. This was more challenging for Sufis who worked enthusiastically to rid Muslim society of non-Muslims practices. Although, Mir Muhammad Hamadani had through his influence persuaded the then reigning Sultan to prohibit practices demeaning the existence of women, it was Mir Shamsu'd-Din Araqi, a Sufi missionary from Persia, who enthusiastically worked in this regard. He emphatically instructed his disciples to create awareness among women regarding their rightful place in the society viz-a-viz Islam. Thus, conversion was a process that gradually sprouted from the exploitative policies of the rulers and the apathetic attitude of the Brahmans towards the masses at lower strata of the four-fold caste system. The Shahmir Sultanat in order to strengthen its social foundation patronized the Sufis to exploit this rebellious atmosphere where masses were looking for an alternative, which they confronted in the form of Islam, an ideology devoid of hierarchy based on birth, occupation and ethnicity, at least in its beginning.

(Dedicated to Baba, Abba, dearest Mother and dear uncle Malik Mehjoor, Amujaan, my brother, Malik Sarfaraz and my worthy friends Sama Lavoni, Shahid Jamal and Gulzar Hussain, the wellspring of my inspiration)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this paper is original and in that sense if any instance of plagiarism is found, it must be discarded. This paper has not been submitted for publication elsewhere but to "International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications" only. I assure to abide by the rules of your esteemed journal.
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⁷¹ *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Rodger and Beveridge), II, 181

⁷² The reign of Muhammad Shah is interesting for he ascended the throne as many as five times from 1484-86, 1493-1505, 1514-15, 1517-28, 1530-37. During this period Fateh Shah dethroned him four times and Ibrahim Shah in 1528-29. See Kapur, 93-103

⁷³ *Tohfah-ul-Ahbab*, 249

⁷⁴ *Tohfah-ul-Ahbab*, 249

⁷⁵ "Many Yavanas," Jonaraja writes, "left other sovereigns, and took shelter under this king (Sikander) who was renowned for his

charity, even as bees leave the flowers and settle on the elephant. *Rajatarangini* (Dutt), III, 57