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57

Establishment of Muslim Rule in Kashmir

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Abstract:

The transformation of Kashmir society from Hinduism to Islam was a complex and multifaceted process that involved a variety of factors, including political, social, and cultural changes. It was not a sudden or abrupt shift, but rather a gradual process that took place over several centuries. As Islam gradually spread into the region, it encountered a rich and vibrant culture that had been shaped by centuries of Hindu rule. Over time, the Islamic faith and the culture of the Kashmiri people became intertwined; giving rise to a unique synthesis that reflected the diverse cultural and religious traditions of the region.

Keywords: Society, Transformation, Intertwined, Foundation, Dynasty, Khanqah

Introduction: Kashmir is the northernmost geographical region of the Indian subcontinent. It is bounded by the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang to the northeast and the Tibet Autonomous Region to the east (both parts of China), by the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to the south, by Pakistan to the west, and by Afghanistan to the northwest. The region, with a total area of some 85,800 miles (222200 square km) has been the subject of dispute between India and Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.



Three major faiths are clearly dominant in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir. However, in terms of total population, Islam clearly dominates the Kashmir valley. In addition to that Hinduism and Buddhism also constitute a part of the religions in Kashmir. The followers of Buddhism inhabit the Ladakh area of Jammu and Kashmir State.

Islam

The predominant religion of Kashmir valley is Islam. Muslims constitute more than 90% of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir. Even in Jammu, Kargil and some other districts, Islam forms a substantial part of the population.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the second most dominant faith in Kashmir. The majority of Hindus consist of Kashmiri Pandits and Gujjars. Majority of the Kashmiri Pandits migrated from the Kashmir valley because of the political instability and are now present in a minority.

Buddhism

Buddhist population is mainly found in the Ladakh region of Kashmir, where it predominates. In the main Kashmir valley, however, Buddhists are present in a negligible number.

About 300 BCE, Buddhism arrived in Kashmir. Before this, Hinduism had been predominant religion in Kashmir. An important feature of Hinduism, particularly in Kashmir was the caste system.

Certain castes were associated with certain skin complexions and occupations, for example, if you belonged to lower caste, chances were that you had darker skin and worked some menial job. The highest caste was the Brahmins, a relatively light skinned, privileged minority. Because Kashmir is further away from the equator than the rest of India. Kashmiri people are naturally lighter skinned. It did not take long for Kashmir, then to become a symbolic white house of brahmanical rule in northern India.



Buddhism proposed a much less structured and more egalitarian society. This is probably why it spread so quickly in Kashmir once it was introduced there. For Almost a thousand years, Kashmir's ruling Brahmins had tolerated Buddhist efforts to spread their way of life in the region. However, by now Buddhism had become popular enough to be deemed a threat by the Brahmins power. The rulers thus started to oppress the Buddhist population, ushering in a period of Kashmir's history that has been described as a time of Brahmanical orthodoxy and revivalism.

In an atmosphere of such intolerance and oppression, many downtrodden lower caste Hindus as well as Buddhists were ready for any relief that the arrival of a new religion Islam might offer them. It is not very surprising that, when the first Muslim preachers (missionaries) arrived in Kashmir, the Kashmiri people "converted to Islam in a flood.

It is also conspicuous to note that the conversion was not under the influence of any external aggression, but because of the efforts of the Sufis like Bulbul shah and Sayyid Ali Hamdani.

Emergence of Islam in Kashmir changed the whole social order and was a turning point in the Kashmir History. The social system of Kashmir under the Hindus varied in so many ways from the social system of India.

Hindu society in Kashmir was divided into two strong groups, i.e., the Shivites and Non-Shivites, while the majority of the populations were Buddhists.

The dominating factor was always the Shiva philosophy and as such whenever in power in power, not only forced the non- Shivites to toe their line. But also demolished their places of worship.

Similarly, the Non-Shivites destroyed the Viharas (Buddhist place of worship) and built their own places of worship. While coming into contact with the Muslims the Shivites preferred Islam and as such there was very speedy mass conversion. It is interesting to note that the conversion was very smooth and the elite lead the way. The commoner also found it easy to enter into the fold of Islam, thus the only factions; non- Shivites upheld the scepter of their traditional religion.



There is some evidence to suggest that Muslims were influential even in the Brahmanical royal courts and that many lower caste Hindus and Buddhists embraced Islam. However, there is not much evidence of the steady growth of the Muslim community in Kashmir. It is only in the Late 13th century that we find the first recorded Muslim preacher in Kashmir, a Sufi named Bulbul Shah.

He arrived in Kashmir in 1295, during the reign of the last Hindu king of Kashmir, Raja Suhadev after a brief stay in Kashmir he left but returned almost 30 years later. This time possibly with some of his disciples.

At the time of Bulbul Shah's first visit, the Brahmins' rule over Kashmir was seriously in trouble. By the time he came back, it had completely collapsed, for the first time in history. Jonaraja, a 15th-century Hindu historian, wrote that Raja Suha Dev was "a demon of a king" who devoured Kashmir for nineteen years, three months and twenty-five days. During his reign, Raja Suha Dev had given refuge and some land to the son of the Buddhist king of nearby Ladakh, after Rinchan's father had been killed in a battle.

Meanwhile, Shah Mir had also arrived in Kashmir for unknown reasons. He may have been seeking a better job; he served in the administration of Raja Suha Dev. Rinchan and Shah Mir were to play key roles in the impending rise of Muslim rule in Kashmir.

But they were not the ones to jumpstart that process. In 1319, the Mongol warlord Zulchu invaded Kashmir and spent eight long months making a bloody mess in Kashmir. He massacred thousands of Kashmiri men, enslaved the women and children, and razed entire towns to the ground. Zulchu was, after all, a direct descendant of Genghis Khan and the grandson of Hulugu Khan, who in 1258 had similarly destroyed Baghdad and brought the Abbasid Empire to an end. As this devastation unfolded, Raja Suha Dev packed up and fled to Kishtwar, leaving his military commander-in-chief, Ramachandra, in charge. This proved to be a fatal mistake, as Raja Suha Dev lost all respect and legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects. Many Kashmiris fought valiantly against the Mongols, including Rinchan and Shah Mir. Once the Mongols eventually retreated and the smoke cleared, Rinchan emerged as a leader with strong public support in Kashmir.



Rinchan recognized that he was in a position to take control, and in 1320 he deposed Ramachandra and became the first Buddhist king of Kashmir after centuries of Brahmin rule. He then made his comrade Shah Mir his chief minister.

Rinchan has been described by historians as an “inquisitive and alert” young man, “fond of the company of learned men.” He would spend hours with Buddhist and Hindu priests discussing religious matters, but he rarely found their opinions satisfying. Though he was a Buddhist, he felt that Buddhism had been polluted by foreign influences; he disliked Hinduism for the discriminatory caste system and for the Brahmins’ arrogance. He apparently did a lot of soul-searching in the early part of his rule, spending sleepless nights praying for guidance and weeping profusely. At the same time, he was deeply troubled by the constant infighting between his Hindu and Buddhist subjects.

A sudden encounter proved to be a transformation experience both for him and his kingdom. As the story goes, one morning he looked out of a window in his palace and saw Bulbul Shah performing the fajr (dawn) prayer on the banks of the river Jhelum. He went out to meet this man and eventually started to learn about Islam from him. He was so impressed by the teachings of Islam, “which were simple, free from useless ceremonies, caste and priesthood” that in 1323 he accepted Islam and changed his name to Malik Sadr ad-Din (history records him more often as Lha or Rinchen Shah, after his original Buddhist name). The first-ever Buddhist ruler of Kashmir now became the first-ever Muslim ruler of Kashmir.

Malik’s family converted to Islam after him, and many other Kashmiri leaders, notably Ramachandra, soon followed. More low-caste Hindus and Buddhists started to embrace Islam during this time as well, convinced that it would free them of the remaining shackles of the Brahminical system. It is said that Bulbul Shah was thus ultimately responsible for the conversion of 10,000 Kashmiris to Islam, though this figure is almost certainly a wild exaggeration. Nevertheless, the impact he had on the history of Islam in Kashmir is undeniable.

Bulbul Shah found a home on the banks of the river Jhelum and spent the rest of his life in Kashmir. Malik (Lha) set up for him a khanqah (a Sufi center where Sufi clerics and their students could retreat for traditional education) in the heart of Srinagar, and also built two



mosques nearby. From this khanqah, Bulbul Shah delivered lectures for many years, and many of his students played a role in spreading Islam further in Kashmir and beyond. Malik also established a community kitchen where the poor were fed for free, twice a day. Malik's rule, however, does not seem to have lasted very long, as he faced a rebellion and died within a year of embracing Islam. In 1327, Bulbul Shah passed away as well, and was buried in Srinagar, where his shrine is still visited today. But before he passed away, Bulbul Shah made one of his outstanding disciples, Mullah Ahmad, responsible for continuing preaching activity in Kashmir. Ahmad was soon to become Kashmir's first Islamic scholar.

Rinchana subsequently usurping the power from Ramchandra (the commander-in-chief of Hindu king Suhadeva) entered into the fold of Islam at the hands of Bulbul Shah. He under the name of Sadruddin was coronated as the king of Kashmir in the year 1320 A.D but his life was cut short. However, the credit of the foundation of the sultanate went to Shah Mir.

He captured power in 1339 AD while pursuing the course of events, the establishment of the Muslim rule was based on the mutual trust generated under socio political fusion.

Conclusion:

The establishment of the Muslim rule in Kashmir had significant consequences for the Kashmiri people, both in terms of their social and cultural practices and their political affiliations. It led to the emergence of a new identity that was based on a shared Islamic faith and cultural heritage, and it helped to forge stronger bonds of solidarity among the people of Kashmir.



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