



Modern Education: A Campaign against Clergy in Princely Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Like all other cultures, Kashmiri society is split along caste, class, and religious lines. A certain area of this hierarchy is favoured at the expense of other sections due to the way it is set up. The role of Kashmiri society's highest-ranking religious and spiritual figures, known as pirs and mullahs, will be discussed in this context. Along with the mass exploitation, their negative impact on society as a whole will be examined. Additionally, an attempt will be made to include other societal segments that contributed to the spread of modern education, limiting the influence of this privileged class.





INTRODUCTION

In order to protect itself from the incursions of ardent armies of Muhammadan invaders, Kashmir locked itself behind its mountain defences for more than two centuries after Mahmud Ghazni's conquests to the north and west of India. Though free from invasion, the message of Islam was spreading in some way, and cultural influences and ideas could not be excluded as Islamic missionaries and explorers brought the new religion into the Kashmir valley. Mostly Sufis and Syeds from Persia and Bukhara made up these missionaries.

Kashmiris were mostly drawn to the *Qadiria*, *Suhrawardia*, *Naqshbandi*, *Chisti*, and *Qubwari* schools of Sufism. However, after joining these Sufi silsilas, the Kashmiris became devotees of the Sufi saints and abandoned the brand of Islam that the Prophet Muhammad ^(PBUH) had been preaching. As time went on, Sufism gained prominence in Kashmir and was heavily inspired by Hindu mystic philosophical traditions. Any sect connected directly or indirectly to the missionaries from central Asia who arrived in Kashmir and founded Sayyid's they were superior to the indigenous Muslims. They support this assertion with the claim that they are not new converts and they can even trace their ancestry back to the Prophet Muhammad ^(PBUH). Despite the fact that Islam and its law do not recognize a clerical class, they hold the top clerical positions in society and are well-respected by the general population. Even several upper caste Hindus who converted to Islam took the title of Sheikh, not just Sayyid's. In this way, they just converted from Hinduism to Islam, but their occupation stayed the same; they were previously in charge of maintaining temples, and are now in charge of maintaining shrines. One is led to conclude that polytheism predominates among Kashmiri Muslims based on their affinity for the founders of different schools of Sufism. This blind trust gave rise to a class of *mullahs* and *pirs* who claimed to be the founders of Sufi schools or to have genealogy there, and this idea of *pirmuradi* was as widespread among Kashmiris as the idea of hereditary *Purohits* was among Kashmiri Pandits. The Brahmans were the members of society who were deemed to be of the highest class under Hindu rule since they were knowledgeable about religious texts. Syed, however, assumed the position and appears to be at the top of the Kashmiri social order with the introduction of Islam. People in Kashmir are so influenced by *pirs* that they think the amulets they are giving have the power to cure every sickness. The amulet could be discovered fastened to the ankle or knee if there is foot or leg ailment.

Pirs and Mullahs

A significant element from Persia and Central Asia arrived in Kashmir under the Sultans' control, and the imperial court treated it with respect. They were referred to as *pirs* and *mullahs* in



the neighbourhood. They received *Jagirs* and subsidies, as well as benefits and power. With time, pirs and mullahs assumed the role of guardians of the religion, and to hold onto this position for a very long period in Kashmir, they had a firm hold on all significant religious and political groups. Despite this, the mosques and shrines were under the supervision of these pirs and mullahs. To resolve their conflicts, people would frequently go to these mosques and shrines. As a result, they became the guardians of authority and developed into centres of power, where those in charge also gained political influence. According to Dr. Earnest Neve's book *Things Seen in Kashmir*, the common Kashmiri peasant's life is mostly focused on shrines and mullahs rather than religious literature. They were revered by all Muslims as being experts in Islamic law and authoritative interpreters of religious doctrine. Because of their social dominance, only members of the Clerical family, caste, or pir profession would even consider being married into a Saiyad household because it was believed that doing so would bring ill luck. Zutshi mentions in *Languages of Belongings* that Haji Sayyid Nizamuddin Furahi, a theologian from Kashmir Valley, authored a lengthy thesis in 1883 C.E. denouncing the demise of the institution of "*pirism*" in the valley. His treatise *Mulhemaat*, which is not regarded as an authentic work due to its partiality and acts of omission and commission, lamented the pirs takeover of Islam in the valley and how they had led Kashmiris—both Hindus and Muslims—down a path of decadence, lies, and deceit. Instead of commenting on the nature and purity of Islam in the valley. In the guise of Islam, they changed the social structure so that it became mandatory for other social groups to adhere to their rules, and this so-called upper class began to eat the wages of the working class in the form of offerings. The villagers gave them gifts in kind and cash, such as poultry, rice, ghee, or anything else that was deemed special. The sarcastic lines of Abdul Ahad Nadim, a well-known poet from Kashmir, which claim that the hungry character of mullahs did not spare even prostitutes, are a good reflection of their cruelty:

When a prostitute loses her customers

She holds a prayer at her place

Mullahs flock headlong to eat her feast

The Muslim populace was so devoted to these mullahs and religious leaders that even the leaders of the Kashmiri political movement had to ask Mir Waiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah for his support before making any decisions. It is clear from these facts that the Hanjis, Watals, and Doods who made up the lowest social strata had even worse conditions. The lower classes and the boatmen were required to march in a procession through nearly all of the city's streets and major markets if a grandee or wealthy family, in general, or the Pir class, in particular, was being married. They are



accompanied by a Kashmiri band, whose boisterous music appears to announce the impending marriage of the son of a grandee. The *pirs* and mullahs earned a living by wandering the countryside and offering ritual services to the rural populace. They also play a significant part in mediating conflicts amongst ordinary people, and once a child was born, the mullah or pir would arrive and give the kid its name. Due to the *pirs'* and mullahs' power, the government of the day even excused some families of pirzadas from additional land taxes imposed by the state and from beggar (forced labour), which was then another word for execution for other segments of society. A large portion of the blame for this shocking illiteracy must be placed on the mullahs because these religious preachers do not want Muslims to emerge from the blind world of ignorance and be able to distinguish between right and wrong. In hundreds of villages, not a single Muslim male or female knew how to write his or her name or count two dozen sheep. They were aware that if Muslims had education and the ability to distinguish between good and wrong, it would be challenging to maintain ideological or even physical control over them. The mullahs and interested religious leaders did their bit too in this exercise of exploitation. Even the Government (Dogra Government) of the time was also responsible for the educational backwardness of Muslims in Kashmir as Dogra government thought that education would make the people conscious about the exploitation which they were facing during this period. For nearly hundred years, the Dogra Maharajas did not take any concrete initiative so as to provide education to Muslim masses, rather, they made it a policy to discourage learning among them. No schools were established for this reason in the valley's remote regions, where the bulk of the population was Muslim, and the only interest exhibited by the rulers up until the late seventeenth or the nineteenth century was in sponsoring a few *mudrasas* and *maktabs*. When Maharaja Pratab Singh ordered his education minister to draught a plan for making elementary education free and required across the state in 1909, the minister refused, offering flimsy justifications to discourage the maharaja from championing the cause of free and required education for Muslims. People in the valley were suffering from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and other issues at this time. The majority of people—especially Muslims—were reduced to complete illiteracy as a result of extreme poverty and poor living circumstances. **Superstitions**

As the majority of Kashmiris had the belief that the Saints whose shrines are in Kashmir will assist them if they contact them by real heart, some aspects of superstition had been ingrained in their thoughts since the beginning of time. It is the temple to which they turn for defence against illness and calamity as well as assistance during stressful situations or anytime they are in need. These shrine keepers fostered the myth that if a newly wed couple waits a while to have children,



the bride would immediately see a religious man for a charm (tawez) or travel to a shrine where she will tie a votive rug (desh) on the wall of the shrine in hopes of the birth of the child. Typically, a boy born in the month of the great saint's passing is given his name. Men preferred to go barefoot anytime they passed by a shrine's surroundings rather than riding a horse or wearing sandals. It is appropriate to read from the passage "The Valley of Kashmir" by Walter Lawrence at this point. He claims:

"I once saw a striking example of the danger of neglecting this rule. A marriage party was crossing a stream above which stood the shrine of a saint. All of them dismounted and passed over the bridge, but the father of the bridegroom, with the bridegroom in his arms, rode boldly over. The bridge broke and the horse, father, and son were precipitated into the stream, where they lay struggling. I ran up and rebuked the crowd for not assisting the sufferers, but they looked on gloomily and said the man richly deserved his fate. After some trouble I induced some of my own people to disentangle the men from the horse, and then one of the attendants of the shrine explained to me that within the last ten years four men who had despised the saint and had ridden over the bridge had been killed."

According to Tyndale Biscoe, a close observer of Kashmiri society who lived there for more than 30 years, even simple people were guilty for these beliefs since, in his words, "the people themselves were against any constructive change because,

"Their answer to any change is always the same; namely, our fathers and forefathers were always very happy and contended under the existing order of things, so why should not we be satisfied?"

Modern Education

Because they had served for decades as preachers and mutawalis (managers or custodians) of shrines, holding sizable tracts of tax-free land grants along with access to shrine earnings, the mullahs and pirs had a significant influence over Kashmiri society up until recently, and nobody was willing to oppose them in any area of life. The boys were instructed in religious writings including the Quran, Hadith, and other religious works in the indigenous religious schools known as "madrasas," which were either in mosques or attached to mosques. Even if religious writings were taught there, it wasn't required to make the students understand them, it was because the mullahs and pirs in charge of these madrasas and masjids did not wish to spread religious knowledge among common people since doing so would have threatened their monopoly over religious teaching and preaching. Some Wahhabis tried to spread Wahabi Islam during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule. They



protested peer-muridi, superstitions, rituals, and shrine worship, but local mullahs and pirs were so hostile that Maharaja Ranbirsingh was forced to issue orders against their leader Husain Shah Batku. They were the ones behind the founding of *Anjuman-i-Ahl-e-Hadith*, which was headed by Molvi Nur-ud-din and Ghulam Nabi Mubarki. They also released a newspaper called *Muslim*, whose goal was to eradicate social ills within the Muslim community. The Ahl-e-Hadith movement was crucial in the growth of Muslim religious consciousness in Kashmir. This movement in Kashmir was primarily directed against bogus rituals, superstitions, and ancient traditions. According to G.H. Khan, author of *Freedom movement in Kashmir*, Muslims were heavily influenced by Mullahs and other religious figures who "set great store by the religious education to the exclusion of other fields of education" during the last two decades of the 19th century, which is why they did not react naively when the western system of education was introduced in the valley. According to Khan, the religious authorities "warned the masses that acceptance of the western way of education and lifestyle would convert them into apostates." The religious authorities said that knowing about western education would "corrupt the minds of Muslims." Due to the powerful effects of this propaganda, Muslims were prevented from enrolling their children in contemporary schools for a full two decades. Consequently, until the start of the twentieth century, there were no Muslim boys attending Christian missionary schools. Now as we know that Kashmiris had these false customs and superstitions ingrained in their minds since ancient times, when having long nails was a sign of gentility and it was widely believed that a gentleman is someone who does not work, we can say that modern education alone can bring awareness and upliftment. Modern education was only implemented in the Kashmir valley as a result of British interference. In Kashmir, notably in Srinagar, they were the forerunners of both the educational and reform movements. Rev. J.H. Knowles established the city of Srinagar's first missionary school in the year 1881. In Srinagar, he collected a group of boys and young people who had shown some interest in learning the 3Rs, and it was then that he formed the basis for C.M.S. school. To suggest that it began a new age of science in Kashmir Valley would not be an exaggeration. As a result of the introduction of mission school teaching, Kashmiri society, particularly in Srinagar, changed its behaviour, and a new era in modern education was established. Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam established the first of their own schools in 1905 C.E., and as a result of Christian mission activities and their implications, a number of indigenous socio-religious organizations also took the initiative to educate the Kashmiri Muslims. This school was later elevated to a high school. Although the time's authorities ignored their pleas and memoranda, they persisted in their efforts to get more and more educational facilities. The first



reform Tyndale Biscoe attempted to implement when he arrived in Kashmir in 1891 CE to help J.K. Knowles was regarding the cleanliness of his students, as the parents of these pupils believed that if their children appeared neat and orderly, the devil might become fond of them and run off with them. As time went on, this modern education became responsible for social changes. However, to a casual observer, it could seem as though Biscoe was on a crusade against his students' bad behaviours while, in fact, he was undertaking the mammoth job of altering his students' attitudes and their deeply ingrained societal beliefs and superstitions. A new, previously unheard-of class of individuals with enlightened perspectives on society, culture, and customs and a strong awareness of how society was changing only evolved as a result of modern education. Boys and girls from missionary schools made up the vast bulk of this group of individuals. The impact of European professors and modern education with a western orientation resulted in inescapable changes in young dress and taste. The attire of the educated elite has changed, with waist coats, jackets, and trousers replacing the traditional pheran and pochhh. The opening of the Jhelum Valley cart road at the end of the 19th century, which further hastened this process of positive changes, gave these social developments a boost when Kashmiri people interacted with those on India's plains.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is evident from the aforementioned description that the so-called elite segment of society that served as the Kashmiri people's religious guardians utilized their influence and position to their benefit. They created rituals and institutions that were used to control and take advantage of the gullible yet unsophisticated population. Education can only put a stop to all of these priestly class exploitations with the introduction of modern education following British intervention modern education has advanced greatly. There is still much to be done because superstitious rituals and beliefs still pervade Kashmiri society. The only solution is to strengthen the network of modern educational institutions and to enlist the support of all other socio religious organisations operating in Kashmir for the cause of education and the abolition of superstitious and blind beliefs, rituals, and age-old practises.

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