Chapter III
Understanding Kashmiriyat

In a symposium on ‘Composite Culture of Jammu and Kashmir’, organised as part of the 35th All India Sociological Conference held at the University of Kashmir, Srinagar in October 2009, T.N. Madan observed that “the composite culture of Kashmir is and was a lived reality of the Kashmir Valley. It was a non-conflictual, integrally shared... and integrally harmonised culture of Kashmir”. According to him, “it is a heritage rather than a construction, and that it is based on an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of difference...” He emphasised that “we [Kashmiris] had strategies of not converting difference into conflict; we had strategies of living together differently, of living together without loosing our individuality, of living together without turning hostile to each other.” In the context of Kashmir, this composite culture is often designated as Kashmiriyat. In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the concept of Kashmiriyat and the nature of the composite culture subsumed under it.

Kashmiriyat as Composite Culture

Composite culture is known as shared culture, popular culture. It is symbiotic in that people who share it have co-operative and mutually dependent relationship. It involves the amalgamation of different world-views, thoughts, beliefs, food habits, dress patterns, languages and so on and so forth. It is a culture which transcends the boundaries of religion, but it does not mean it is the unification of religions.\(^1\) The boundaries of a composite culture are fuzzy and are not clearly demarcated. Plural societies are embedded with cultural diversities and these kinds of fluid identities. Composite culture is an acknowledgment of heterogeneous identities, rather than an imposition of a homogeneous culture and identity (Hassan 2008b).

In South Asia, the prevalence of composite culture is often explained by the conversion of people from one religion to another. Generally, the converted people continue with cultural practices related to the religion that they belonged to earlier (ibid.).

As Yoginder Sikand notes:

A remarkable feature of popular religion in South Asia is a widespread popularity of shared religious traditions which bring together Hindus and Muslims, and in some cases Sikhs as well as Christians in common worship and ritual participation. These traditions are, by nature, ambiguous in terms of clearly defined communal categories, defying the logic of neatly separated and

\(^1\) In the Indian context, the term composite culture is used by some, in a restricted sense, to mean the coming together of the Hindu and Muslim cultures (Roy 2005: 1-25)
demarcated communities defined on the basis of a reified, scripturalist and essentialised understanding of religious identity (2004: 166).

In India, the growth of composite culture reflects the shared experiences of her people: the Hindus and the Muslims worship in common shrines and revere common saints².

The emergence of composite culture requires constant interaction between communities. Composite culture endorses common sense of belonging and it is endowed with a shared body of beliefs and practices through which its members define and conduct their relations. Different cultures contribute to the making of a composite culture, which in turn provides a wide range of common sources of enjoyment, shared interests, collective achievement and collective pride. It is a collective creation because every cultural community can see something of itself in it (Parekh 2007).

As Madan (2009) has said, composite culture has been a lived reality of Kashmir and that this lived reality came into existence through the interaction between people belonging to different faiths. In Kashmir, for centuries, people affiliated to different faiths have lived together, and their religious affiliations never affected their sense of belongingness to each other as a Kashmiri. In Kashmir, conversion from one faith to another also did not obliterate all the practices of previous faith that was their earlier way of life. The close and constant interaction between the people of different faiths in Kashmir developed a culture that became an important component of the Kashmiri ethnic identity irrespective of their religious affiliations. It is to characterise the harmonised living together of the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, with difference but without conflict, that the term Kashmiriyat has been used.

According to Mohammad Ishaq Khan (2002: 31; 2004), the term Kashmiriyat emerged during the early 1970s, specifically following the developments led by Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah accord of 1975. “It was coined to discover the roots of Kashmir’s ideological ties with the secular Indian nationalism, based on religious co-existence and cultural pluralism” (ibid.). The notion of Kashmiriyat endowed Kashmir with an identity which represents Kashmir as a unique region where people of different religions have lived in peace and harmony for centuries. It has various dimensions: cultural, political, and historical. It includes religions, regions and languages of Kashmir. It symbolises the secular ethnic identity of the region; the sense of regional belonging transcends the religious boundaries. According to Madan, Kashmiriyat refers to:

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² Incidentally, The idea of a composite culture was central to the Indian nationalist thought. It was used to explain what had held the country together over the centuries and to indicate what it needed to do to remain cohesive. Although the term was used in different senses by different writers, it basically referred to the idea that different communities in India had adopted many of each other’s beliefs, practices, rituals, values, etc., evolved a ‘synthetic’ culture, and had developed collective ethos of tolerance, mutual respect and pluralism (Parekh 2007: 17).
Kashmiri identity cutting across the religious divide and defined by, above all, the key elements of the love of the homeland (Kasheer) and of common speech (Koshur). Besides, similar customs and practices (for example, distribution of cooked or uncooked food as a token of goodwill, visit to shrines, and reverence for the relics of holy men), similar culinary and sartorial styles, shared folklore and folk music, etc., had in past contributed to an ineffable sense of mutual recognition and togetherness that was both physical and cultural (Madan 2006: 200).

Mohmmad Ishaq Khan regards Kashmiriyat as a vibrant experience of living together of Pandits and Muslims in a “symbiotic relationship” (2007: 6):

The concept of Kashmiriyat has evolved out of the yearning of the Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims, to situate their motherland (Mouj Kashir) in something unique for Kashmiri Pandits Valley is the land of tirthas or Pilgrimages ... [and] the Kashmiri Muslims’ devotion to the shrines of the Sufis and Rishis is deep-rooted in the local context rather than Islam alone (Khan 2004: 63).

According to Kashmiri historian Chitralekha Zutshi (2003:18), fluidity of religious boundaries and the presence of syncretic religious culture are both integral parts of Kashmiriyat. Islam in Kashmir was also shaped in local context as well as with the great tradition. Sufis played an important role in the spread of Islam in Kashmir and with new faith Islamic Sufis and Rishis also spread the message of religious tolerance. According to T.N Madan (2006), the concept of purity of religion was not emphasised by them. The Kashmiris’ beliefs and practices developed over the centuries under the umbrellas of Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions also have had an impact on the local Islamic practices and beliefs:

The veneration of places of worships (asthapan, ziarat) and the abodes of Sufi masters (khanaqah), common among Kashmiri Muslims, recalls to one’s mind Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries. The observance of anniversaries (urs), veneration of relics singing of songs of praise and thanksgiving addressed to God, the Prophet, and local saints following formal prayers (namaz), while standing with folded hands, also are reminiscent of Hindu and Buddhist devotional styles (Madan 2006: 186-87).

It is only because of the influence of cult of composite nationalism that some of the festivals originated in Hindu mythology had assumed a secular character and both Hindus and Muslims celebrated them. Bud Shah3 used to function as the high priest on such occasions. One of these festivals was the birthday of river Vitasta (Bazaz 2003: 90). Navnita Chada Behera observes,

Often the cultural markers of a collective identity were shared by more than one community. For instance, a marble stone with the imprint of a large footprint, preserved as Asar-i-Sharif, Janab Sahib at Soura in Srinagar, is claimed by all three major religious traditions: by the Muslims as Qadam-i-Rasul (the footprint of Prophet Muhammad), by Hindus as Vishnu-Pada (the footprint of Lord Vishnu) and by Buddhists as Sakyamuni-Pada (Buddha’s footprint) (2000: 35).

3 Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin was famous for his religious tolerance and was much loved in the valley also was fondly known as ‘Bud Shah’ (Great King) or Batta Shah (the Brahmins King or the Kashmiri Pandits’ King).
In short, the various beliefs together produced a collective identity. The system was open to absorb various beliefs. Sufi-Islamic way of life and the Rishi tradition of Kashmiri Pandits evolved into a balanced syncretic culture and ethnic collective consciousness of Kashmiri-ness (Hewitt 2003).

The Tarana of the University of Kashmir, also reflects on the multiplex culture of Kashmir that is enriched by the people of Kashmir irrespective of their religious affiliations. The verses of the Tarana represent the cultural heritage of Kashmir, which has played an important role in the making of the composite culture:

O Mother Kasheer  
All founts of Knowledge have ever  
Been at your bidding command  
O. Mother Kasheer  
O you who flows like Vitasta of gnosis,  
Through our bosoms.  
O. Mother Kasheer  
You willed, and this seat of learning  
Came into being  
In this paradise on Earth  
This foundation of knowledge made a leap at your will;  
And yours was the intent which bodied forth into what we behold  
Around us here  
You are wisdom of our past  
Which bodied forth into what we behold  
Around us here.  
You are wisdom of our past  
Which kindly leads us on today  
O Mother Kasheer  
This is land that harbours Khamendras Poignant tale,  
And treasuras Bilhana’s fond memories.  
Isn’t it here that Kalhana’s Vitasta  
Sprawls far and wide,  
And abhinava Gupta’s oceans of Knowledge surges high?  
You are the, refulgent frame of Lalla’s verse;  
You are the solemnity of the Shiekh’s Sacred hymns  
O Mother Kasheer  
On this campus dawns the benediction of Hazratbal,  
And the moon and the Dal gift  
The dusk’s tranquility.
Each Sunny moment here is the beetle’s dance,
Each dusky moment the quite narcissus.
When aspiring souls take their wing,
Budshaw comes forth to greet them
When devotion stirs our souls,
We raise a song of Praise to Iqbal.
O Mother Kasheer
Ghani who tore his Skirt
To shreds,
Spoke for the conscience aroused.
The Fresh and bold imagination of Nehru wrung milk
Out of perspiring rocks
It is here that the Harmukh peaks cool the Scorching summer,
And the Lion’s eyes burn bright
In the caves of snow
O Mother Kasheer
Under the glory of this light house
We turn into various little suns
Playing ecstatically about this vernal bush,
We have the heightened sense of beauty and realize the dream of love
This soil shall blossom into diverse hues of the rainbow
And the firmament shall feel restless as mercury
O Mother Kasheer
(Rehman Rahi 2007)

At the symposium on ‘Composite Culture of Jammu and Kashmir’ held as part of the 35th All India Sociological Conference at the University of Kashmir in October 2009, Khan expressed his views on the composite culture of Kashmir as follows:

Culture is the end-product of several hundred or over thousand years of history during which many factors have not only influenced but also reacted against one another and thus helped to shape the formation and development of culture... cultural synthesis is possible but the synthesis of religions or, for that matter, even religious synthesis is a mirage [emphasis original]. What is unique about the composite culture of Kashmir has been the concern on the part of both communities over long centuries of interaction to preserve their religious identities. A Kashmiri Pandit may be poles apart from a Kashmiri Muslim with regard to the observance of his religious practices and rituals. But, culturally, both have developed a somewhat exaggerated notion of their watan and Kashmiri-ness in religious symbiosis (Khan 2009; emphasis added).

In brief, both history and geography have worked together to give the Kashmiris uniqueness and a sense of identity. The cultural phenomenon of Kashmiriyat evolved as a representation of religious tolerance. Sufi saints and Rishis have also played a major role in the emergence of Kashmiriyat. The saints like Lal Ded/Lalla Arifa and Shiekh Nooru-ud-Din/Nund Rishi inspired
the people of the Valley to live harmoniously and do not let their religion come in between them but move together towards the destination of peace, love and spirituality through the cult of “Religious Humanism”. Both have played a significant role in the world-view of Kashmiris. We may here describe the contribution of the most revered poetess of Kashmir, Lal Ded/Lalla Arifa, and Saint Sheikh Nooru-ud-Din/Nund Rishi to the making of Kashmiri ethnic identity, Kashmiriyat. Their centuries-old humanistic philosophy has played important role in the building of Kashmiri ethnic identity.

Contributions in the Making of Kashmiriyat

Lal Ded/Lalla Arifa: A Mystic Poetess

Lalleshvari, popularly known in Kashmir as Lal Ded, was born into a Brahmin family in 1335 CE. In her early life she vehemently refused to accept the established traditions and dogmas, and condemned the Brahminical supremacy and ritualistic practices. She was married to an orthodox Brahmin household, in which she was ill-treated by her mother-in-law and husband. Her personal pain in life led her to think about the problems deep-rooted in the society. She came under the influence of a Shaivite Sidh Bayu and became a wandering mystic. She used to roam from one village to another and connected more to common masses, who treasured her verses. Her verses express opposition to the social and spiritual pretensions of the Brahminical tradition. Her verses were orally transmitted for centuries and have survived religious upheavals and wars. Her thoughts and teaching became popular through oral tradition (Bazaz 2003; Kak 2008; Khan 2008; Wango 2008).

According to the historian Mohammad Ishaq Khan (1994), Lalleshvari was influenced by the Islamic notion of unity (wahdat, tauhid). She sought that human being should get out of the whirl of darkness into light. For her, fundamentals of all the religions were basically same. A missionary from Persia, Shah-i-Hamadan came to Kashmir; Lalleshvari met him and discussed with him on philosophy, religion and spiritualism. This proved to be a turning point in her life. She combined Islamic and Shaivite thoughts. Both Hindu and Muslims revered her as a spiritual preceptor, philosopher and guide and as the prophet of new Kashmir: Kashmiri Pandits call her Lal Ded and Kashmiri Muslims fondly remember her as Lalla Maji/Lalla Arifa (Bazaz 2003; Kak 2008; Khan 2008; Wango 2008). “She is credited with having introduced and given substance to the idea of Kashmiriyat through her verses, which have formed the cultural repertoire of generations of Kashmiris” (Zutshi 2003: 19). Addressing both Hindus and Muslims, in her verses, she expressed her thought as follows:
Lalleshvari always emphasised on social equality and religious tolerance. She was secular in her outlook and that is also reflected in her verses. Her secularist outlook made her popular among both Hindus and Muslims. She advocated tolerance towards all the religious practices, and eschewed from categorizing herself within any sect or religion. “Lalla’s emphasis on religious tolerance is in agreement with the monist Shaiva philosophy which is secular in its orientation” (Kak 2008: 182). Her verses are also construed as expression of Kashmiri ethos of tolerance. In these verses, Lalla emphasises on tolerance and pleads for forgetting all the worldly differences and hate, to know Shiva:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Rangas manaz chuy byon byon labhun} & \quad \text{The world is full of differences} \\
\text{Soruy tsalahk barakh svakh} & \quad \text{If you are tolerant, you will be happy} \\
\text{Tsakh roosh ta vair ay galakh} & \quad \text{you will end anger, hate, and animosity} \\
\text{Ada deshakh shiva sund mvakh} & \quad \text{Then only you will see Shiva’s face}
\end{align*}
\]

(see Kak 2008: 183)

“[Lalleshvari] knew that the dynamic philosophy she was preaching and the composite culture that she was founding were bound to open an era of human brotherhood in Kashmir in which the differences of caste and creed, birth and position would be meaningless” (Bazaz 2003: 82-83). She teaches the people of Kashmir values of Humanism that emerged from the assimilation of two philosophies of Shaivism and Islam (ibid.; Kak 2008)

**Legend Shiekh Noor-ud-Din/Nund Rishi:**
*A Champion of Kashmiriyat/Ethnic Identity*

Another Kashmiri legend who contributed to the evolution of religious humanism is fondly called by many names as Shiekh Noor-ud-Din, Nund Rishi, Nunda Riyosh, and Shazanand (one who attained the ultimate truth). He was also designated with the titles of Shiekh-ul-Alam and Alamdar (standard-bearer of Kashmir) by his compatriots. He is another central figure in the memory and meaning of Kashmiriyat and known as Lalleshwari’s spiritual successor. He is the great saint of Kashmir and founder of Rishi order in Kashmir. His verses are also known as Kosher Quran. He gave indigenous flavour to Islam by intermediating between the great tradition of Islam and ancient Kashmiri Brahmanical and Buddhist traditional beliefs and practices. (Ganhar 1995; Madan 2008: 186-87).
Shiekh Noor-ud-Din was born in 1377. His father’s name was Shiekh Salar-ud-Din, who had converted to Islam after coming into contact with Sayyid Hussain Simani. His mother Sadra Shiekh Salar-ud-Din, whose pre-Islamic name was Salar Sanaz, belonged to the family of Rajas of Kashtwar. There is a shrine for Shiekh Noor-ud-Din at Charar Sharif. People from all religions visit this shrine. The people of Kashmir deeply admired the simplicity and purity of his life and have utmost reverence for him. The different stories related to his life are well known to the people throughout the valley (Sufi 1979; Khan 1994; Ganhar 1995; Bazaz 2003; Zutshi 2003).

Shiekh Noor-ud-Din/Nund Rishi was deeply influenced by the spiritual guidance from Lalleshvari and her cult of religious humanism. He described her as a great source of inspiration. He shared mystical experiences with her (Khan 2008). Shiekh Noor-ud-Din lived a saintly life, but he did not ignore societal problems. He was dedicated to the principle of oneness of all religions and universal brotherhood and was popular with all sects, classes and communities of people in the Valley. Kashmiri Pandits called him Sahazanand and have preserved his sayings in the Kashmiri Sharda Script in the book titled Rishi Nama. There was a time in Kashmir when missionaries from Turkistan and Iran were busy preaching the doctrines of Quran in their orthodox form. But Noor-ud-Din and his disciples gave indigenous colour to Islam and popularised the cult of religious humanism that came to be admired by the people throughout the Valley. This is one of the reasons that he is revered by the people of Kashmir till date and his sayings are in their heart. He used the concept of self-realisation to motivate human action for the betterment of society and for eternal, spiritual and moral strength (Khan 1994; Bazaz 2003). It is because of his humanistic philosophy that he became the idol of the people of Kashmir. He always emphasised the need for unity among Hindus and Muslims. “God himself would rejoice, he adds, if this happy consummation came about” (Ganhar 1995: 117). In one of his verses, Shiekh Noor-ud-Din writes:

Among the brothers of the same Parents.
Why did you create a barrier?
Muslims and Hindus are one.
When will God be kind to His Servants?

(see Khan 1994:103)

The mystic Lalleshvari and Nooru-ud-Din were both foundations of Kashmiriyat. Both believed in the institution of equality, peace and love. They took the people of Kashmir on the path of peace, love and spirituality leaving behind the religious differences so that the people of Kashmir can develop symbiotic relationship among themselves. Their verses and their popularity among the people of Kashmir suggest that they are the main contributors to the development of
the composite Kashmiri ethnic identity, which is popularly known as Kashmiriyat. Thus, it seems the foundation of Kashmiriyat is very old, but it may not have always been known by the name Kashmiriyat.

Shiekh Nooru-ud-Din and Lalleshwari have played a great role in the development of composite culture and never opposed amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim customs, practices and beliefs. However, the ideologies that believe in the purity of religion and culture, for instance, ideology of pure Hinduism or pure Islam, would not favour the composite culture. Similarly, the core of Kashmiri ethnic identity also lies in composite culture. But, after jihad and pan-Islamic agenda in assumed the centre stage of the Kashmir’s ethno-nationalist movement, the harmonised and shared culture of Kashmir has been adversely affected. After the turmoil of 1989, the centuries old Kashmiri ethnic identity/Kashmiriyat has also came under attack. There are different perspectives developed on Kashmiriyat following the insurgency in Kashmir; there is even a debate over Kashmiriyat, whether something like Kashmiriyat was there in Kashmir that united people for centuries. In early 1990, beginning of the period of militancy, Kashmir witnessed various killings, and mass rallies chanting slogans that were in Islamic in nature rather than representation of composite culture of Kashmir. Minority Hindu community felt threatened by their Muslim neighbours whom they used to perceive as their brothers and sisters. People of Kashmir became suspicious of each others’ actions because Kashmiri Muslims came to be perceived as supporters of militants and Kashmiri Pandits, as agent of Indian rule in Kashmir. “Hindu” and “Muslim” “They” and “we” began absorbing the Kashmiri identity. The straining of Kashmiriyat led to the debate and development of various perspectives on the notion that would be discussed below.

The Perspectives on Kashmiriyat

Over the years, the concept of Kashmiriyat has come under scrutiny. What Kashmiriyat connotes today depends upon whom you ask: “a votary of the idea or a sceptic” (Madan 2006: 200). In his book My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects of Enduring Peace Wajahat Habibullah (cited in Jaitly 2008) mentions that the term Kashmiriyat was the invention of Kashmiri Pandit intellectuals, like the radical Prem Nath Bazaz, to represent the common cultural heritage of Kashmir. However, most of the people among both the communities viewed this term with skepticism. “The concept eventually succumbed to the pressures of radicalism and political contradiction” (Jaitly 2008: 14). Madan notes that “Kashmiriyat is pluralistic culture of tolerance that was not syncretism” (2006: 201). He further says that there is another perspective on the making of Kashmiriyat, that the adoption of pre-Islamic religious traditions and the great tradition
of Islam played an important role. “The most profound exemplars of this dialectic were the Rishis. The spirit of the dialectic was mystical religious experience and universal love” (ibid.).

Mohammad Ishaq Khan (2002: 31; 2004) argues that the term is not of local origin and it has been used by the official and semi-official media to serve the ideological interests of the Indian state and to discover the roots of Kashmir’s ideological ties with the secular Indian nationalism. He further observes that, during 1975-87, Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims produced literature on Kashmiriyat, that was not only a representation of the rich cultural heritage and ethos of Kashmir but also associated with their perceived threats to their own identity from forces within and outside. According to Khan, the “antagonists of Kashmiriyat ... deliberately drawing herring across the trail either for saffronising Kashmiriyat or for making it appear as the anti-thesis of Islam for their vested monolithic political ideologies” (2007: 7):

Saffronising Kashmiriyat bereft of souz
Still awoke the sleeping rose
Providence won’t give you enough rope
To eternally destroy the fragrant rose.
No longer will be on your toast
Freedom the goal is not a boast (ibid.)

In the present situation, Kashmiriyat is either attributed saffron colour or becoming vague. However, during the Dogra regime, Kashmiriyat worked for Kashmiris to unite the people of Kashmir to get freedom from the Dogras. While the Dogra regime tried hard to divide the people of Kashmir on religious lines, “Kashmiriyat was victorious”; irrespective of the religious affiliations, Kashmiris launched a national movement against the Dogras (Zutshi 2003: 46). Chiterlekha Zutshi (ibid.) argues that, till 1930, there was no evidence of Kashmiriyat. This syncretic character of Kashmiri identity or Kashmiriyat was emphasised by the charismatic leader Sheikh Abdullah in his ‘Naya Kashmir’ Manifesto.

Thus, Kashmiriyat was a construction of past symbols to endorse the secular ethnic identity, as it was also an ideological agenda in the nationalist movement against the Dogra rule and a justification for including Kashmir in the Indian union (Tremblay 1997: 476; Khan 2002). Kashmiriyat, for Sheikh Abdullah, “was a political rather than a religious statement, reflecting the people’s regional fears and aspirations, Muslims and Pandits alike. It connected well – though nobody was prepared to establish that connection – with the regional and linguistic manifestations of Indian nationalism in other parts of India” (Hassan 2008a: 90). “The National Conference leadership sought to vindicate and reinforce its faith in Kashmiriyat also against the background of the emergence of Bangladesh” (Khan 2004: 64).

According to Madan, “The ideological foundation of ethnic nationalism is nowadays referred to as Kashmiriyat the state of being a Kashmiri. It is not a Kashmiri word and has become current usage only in the last twenty years or so” (2006: 200). Madan bemoans the declining inter-
community harmonious relationship since the political awakening of the 1930 combined with the restructuring of the feudal economy and further developments since the 1980s. He is of the view point that the concept of *Kashmiriyat* is rather vague and it has uncertain future following the 1989 insurgency. “The traditional pluralist and tolerant character of the Kashmir Valley has been irreparably damaged” (Madan 2009).

Mirza Arif, who translated Quran into Kashmiri language, says that:

*Kashmiriyat* is dead. This he views as a personal as well as collective tragedy, having devoted his life to saving it. *Kashmiriyat* means that you are for Kashmir, that you live for Kashmir, do good for Kashmir, loving everything of Kashmir. I do not think *Kashmiriyat* can be found anywhere now. The love that existed among us, both Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) and Muslims, has gone. Even in literate people this love exists no more. People were more religious in the past. Now they are murderers and looters who will do anything for money. It pains me as a man of literature that we have lost *Kashmiriyat* (cited in Thomas 2000: 127).

According to Khan, *Kashmiriyat*, after 1989, has entered into the phase which is very significant in its “chequered evolution”. “*Kashmiriyat* now remains to be sole concern of such Kashmiri Muslims who continued to remain wedded to the shrines of the Sufis and the Rishis, in spite of euphoric drive ... called militant Islamisation.” (2004: 65). Khan is concerned about the danger to Kashmiri identity in the present situation:

I had always been secure to think of my Kashmiri identity as something unique yet dynamic, something though exposed to grave dangers and bruised, yet not cut off from my sense of a glorious past or rich cultural heritage... today the past ... seems to be lost. Contemporary Kashmir ... knows only gun-wielding masters all around. Doesn’t the Valley of Sufis and Rishis today look anarchic, shallower and frightfully vulnerable? (2002: 49).

Madan writes,

The maturation of *Kashmiriyat* was, however, impeded and even distorted, it is argued, by the fabrication in the mid-nineteenth century of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, a Hindu polity, and its intrusion into the cultural life of the peoples of the Valley. Their identities were redefined in exclusive in place of inclusive terms. The heightened communal consciousness came to ahead in the 1930s. This alienation provided the basis for the events of the two decades. Kashmiri Muslims may still talk about *Kashmiriyat*, and so may the Pandits, but the prospect a merger of cultural horizons, while it produces nostalgia, seems unrealizable, particularly following the Pandits exodus (2006: 201).

The ideology of *Kashmiriyat* adopted by the people of Kashmir refers to the religious, regional, cultural, historical, political and other features of the Kashmiri society. However, there are different insurgent groups and separatist political organisations that are involved in the ongoing separatist movement in Kashmir having different view points about *Kashmiriyat*. Some insurgent groups, who have a pan-Islamic perspective, feel that *Kashmiriyat* has disposed the primacy of Islam and its ideals. On the other hand, there are other groups who hold the view that Kashmir has a distinctive past and that it possess a distinctive political, social, cultural, religious,
regional and other features. They give equal consideration to religious as well as to non-religious factors. They defend the ideology *Kashmiriyat* and also believe that in no sense is it irreligious (Dabla 2010).

Nathalene Reynolds also observes that Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) militant Movement of 1989 was based on the element of “*Kashmiriyat* which appeared wholly Muslim.” (2008: 596). However, it has always argued for an independent, multi-religious Kashmir, which should have *Kashmiriyat* as its foundation. However, Reynolds further questions the JKLF activities, whether the violent means was a conscious endeavour to wipe away “the idea of *Kashmiriyat* in the minds of the population of the Valley” (ibid.). Its intention was to punish all those who supported the Indian state, and the Hindu community was alarmed by the activities of Liberation Front (ibid.). The fundamentalists, according to Jonah Blank, generally negate “a unique cultural sensibility shared by the region’s Muslims practice Sufi Islam, a mystical, undogmatic form of faith ... [and] dismisses as barely distinguishable from Hinduism” (1999: 41). “The pull of *Kashmiriyat*, an attitude seeped in Sufism, was stronger before civil strife drove a bloody wedge between the communities” (ibid.).

The secular credentials of *Kashmiriyat* cannot be revived unless Kashmiri Pandit community returns to Kashmir. However, there are various policies at government level such as providing special employment packages announced by Prime Mister to migrated Kashmiri Pandits. And at the level of civil society in Kashmir positive reports are coming that first time in the history of panchayat elections, Aisha Krishan, a Kashmiri Pandit, won the elections from Wusan village, around 20 km from Srinagar; only four Kashmiri Pandits families lives in that village (*The Times of India*, Mumbai, 11 May 2011: 16). After twenty years of migration estranged communities of Kashmiri Muslims and migrated Kashmiri Pandits also searching the ways of communications with each other to talk about conflict, lost identities and shared cultural bond. But it seems it is difficult for them to look into each others’ eyes at present, so the face book and the other social networking sites are serving the purpose (Puri 2011).

**Summary**

The tolerant nature of people of the Kashmir Valley, their culture and centuries old tradition gave birth to *Kashmiriyat* – a living together in a harmonious relationship with accepting and respecting each others specificities. The Kashmiriris together celebrated various festivals and the anniversaries of Sufi saints, who taught them to live collectively and to leave out the religious differences. These Sufis saints and Rishis introduced the Islam in Kashmir which included the ancient or pre-Islamic culture and practices. So, the Islam practised by the people of Kashmir has been predominantly Sufi in nature and this led to the development of the composite culture and more a kind of society in which people are very well aware of their religiosity but never let it
come in between their relationships with each other and their belongingness to each other as a Kashmiri. As a result, Kashmiriyat became the ethnic identity to which all the Kashmiris irrespective of religious affiliation felt as belonging to – the belongingness to Kashmir as a region, Kashmiri language, Kashmiri culture, which includes more or less same dress pattern, food habits, and folklore and folk music. The collective consciousness of Kashmiri-ness till late the 1980s closely tied the people in a bond of Kashmiriyat.

The discourse on Kashmiriyat has conceptualised it as an enriching contribution of both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. After the exodus of Pandits, as a result of the self-determination movement, Kashmiriyat came under strain. Post 1989, there is a constant debate on Kashmiriyat. The secular Kashmiriyat became the political tool for some to propagate political ideologies furthering their own vested political interests. It has become an issue of confrontation. It was associated with religious tolerance, but is now questioned by the people and intelligentsia as well. At present there is a question mark as to who are included in and excluded from the Kashmiriyat in terms of “us” and “they”.

The relationship between the two communities in the past three decades has been transformed and their thinking and brethren kind of feeling for each other has changed. The new generation of Muslims grew in conflict situation and religious singularity in Kashmir, and the new generation of Kashmir Pandits is not able to grasp the pluralistic heritage in their new setting that is very different from Kashmir.

In the review of literature it has been realised that there is no in-depth study which has brought out the shared narratives on Kashmiriyat, of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits across the generations in the course of time from the past to present. The present study would try to fill this gap in our knowledge. The study would focus on how the people associated with the concept of Kashmiriyat in the past and do so in the present. The present study tries to understand Kashmiriyat and its various components through the eyes and understanding of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of older and younger generations.

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