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## Islam, Reshiyyat and the Religious Other in Kashmir

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M. Maroof Shah\*



### Introduction

Many scholarly and journalistic writings on Islam, Sufism and religious identity in Kashmir employ the much loaded term syncretism and attempt to foreground it as the defining feature of Kashmir culture. The present paper seeks to clarify the fundamental issues involved in understanding Kashmir's complex religious identity and question the simplistic deployment of the notion of syncretism in this connection. The present paper tries to argue that it is the perennialist mystico-metaphysical approach to the study of religion that alone provides viable orthodox perspective on diversity of religions by positing the "transcendent unity of religions" which follows from the idea of Unity of Revelation and rejects exoteric dogmatist, and exclusivist theological claims which are behind

fundamentalism and theological imperialism. However importance of religious forms and exclusivity at a certain plane associated with religions are maintained. Communalist appropriation of religion in Kashmir can be best tackled by resorting to perennialist approach to the issue. I start by clarifying the notion of religion as appropriated in fundamentalist exclusivist and equally problematic syncretist response to it while arguing for a more pronounced metaphysical view of it and then approach the familiar story of Islam and its encounter with the religious other from this perspective.

### The Problem of Religious Diversity

The phenomenon of diversity of religions has been a problem for modern scholarship because of its lack of principal knowledge which is

\* M. Maroof Shah, a scholar on Religions with a focus on Islam is working in Department of Sheep Husbandry, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar.

the domain of traditional religion and metaphysics. Fundamentalism with its attributes of exoteric theological exclusivism, religious bigotry and theological imperialism – is the unfortunate consequence of misunderstanding the significance of diversity of religions due to lack of comprehensive approach to the issue. Eclecticisms, sentimental ecumenism, secularist indifference, relativism and most version of religious pluralism and uniformitarianism and certain versions of libertine-spirituality – all fail to do justice to the phenomenon of religious diversity. In absence of adequate metaphysical knowledge, the very diversity of religious and sacred forms poses a challenge to modern scholarship concerned with interfaith issue. There is a great deal of study of diverse religions in the interest of finding mutual harmony between them in academic and more popular circles in the West, but there is little understanding of “religious realities as religion and sacred forms as sacred realities.” What is missing in most scholarly and academic circles is that science which can do justice to the study of religion by drawing from that perennial wisdom or *philosophia perennis*, *sophia perennis*, *sanatana dharma*, primordial *din*, *hikmat al-khalidah* or *javidan khirad* which is at the heart of all religious traditions as the perennialists argue.

### **Traditionalist View**

Against anti-traditional relativist modern worldview the traditionalists believe that there is a Primordial Tradition which constituted original or archetypal man’s primal spiritual and intellectual heritage received through direct revelation when Heaven and earth were still ‘united.’ This Primordial Tradition is reflected in all later traditions, but the later traditions aren’t simply its historical and horizontal continuation. The anonymous tradition reflects a remarkable unanimity of views concerning the meaning of life and the fundamental dimensions of human thought in worlds as far apart as those of the Eskimos and the Australian Aborigines, the Taoists and the Muslims (Nasr,1993:57).

Against that sentimentalism that sees all religions as being the same or that brand of Neo-Vedantism which became popular after the second world war, perennialists stress importance of orthodoxy which they don’t limit to the exoteric level but also apply to the esoteric. Exoteric theologies are duly respected at their own level (and this differentiates them from syncretists and shows their respect for exclusive character of theologies) and at the higher level their exclusivism is transcended also at a plane on which theological

approach by its very definition can't reach or encroach being influenced by individual and sentimental elements. Distinguishing between the Principle and manifestation, Essence and form, inward and the outward, it places absoluteness at the level of the Absolute and this means transcendence of purely theological plane. Contradictory claims of different religions have a warrant only at the theological plane. But what is needed is to transcend the theological plane and be at the plane of pure truth that is accessible only at the metaphysical plane. It asserts categorically that only the Absolute is absolute. It refuses to commit the cardinal error of attributing absoluteness to the non-absolute, the error which Hinduism and Buddhism consider as the origin and root of all ignorance. Every determination of the Absolute (theism's personal God is also a determination of the Absolute) is already in the realm of relativity. True unity is to be sought only in the One, the nondual Absolute:

The unity of religion is to be found first and foremost in this Absolute which is at once Truth and Reality and the origin of all revelations and of all truth. When the Sufis exclaim that the doctrine of Unity is unique (*al-tawhid wahid*), they are asserting this fundamental but often forgotten

principle. Only at the level of the Absolute are the teachings of the religions the same. Below that level there are correspondences of the most profound order but not identity. The different religions are so many languages speaking of that unique Truth as it manifests itself in different worlds according to its inner archetypal possibilities, but the syntax of these languages isn't the same. Yet because each religion comes from the Truth, everything in the religion in question which is revealed by the Logos, is sacred and must be respected and cherished while being elucidated rather than being discarded and reduced to insignificance in the name of some kind of abstract universality (Nasr,1988:293).

This shows difference between sentimental ecumenism, syncretist "unity of religions" movement that emanated mostly out of India during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and what Abul Kalam Azad calls *whhdad-ud-din*, the unity of Religion or the unity of Tradition in perennialist terms. It is simple fallacy to assert that all religions say the same thing, the remarkable unanimity of principles notwithstanding.

Syncretism holds that we can freely juxtapose religious rituals and forms

as these are not absolute. It implies transcendence of integral formal universe that each religion is itself. It takes religious identity to be a coat that one can change as the season changes and religious forms to be culturally influenced rather than having any heavenly sanction. Syncretists would have us believe that we should not make it a point to keep forms intact as other forms are equally valid. Nasr, explicating perennialist position by employing the notion of "relatively absolute" with an analogy to solar system, defends traditional attachment to a particular religious form and guarding against alien influences or graftings.

Within our solar system our sun is the Sun, while seen in the perspective of galactic space, it is one among many suns. The awareness of other suns made possible by means as abnormal to the natural and normal human state as the 'existential' awareness of several religious universes, doesn't make our sun cease to be our sun, the center of our solar system, the giver of life to our world and the direct symbol of the Divine Intellect for us who are revived by its heat and illuminated by its light" (Nasr,1993:61).

Perennialists criticize most of current ecumenisms for leading to

lessening of religious fervor and the diluting of the Divine Message, making "worldly peace the goal of religion rather than the Divine Peace which surpasseth all understanding."

The followers of *philosophia perennis* insist that one can practice only one religion and stand opposed to all forms of eclecticism and syncretism of religious rites. According to the perennialists if one has lived one religion fully one has lived all religions. Guenon converted to Islam and practiced it in all its details but said that "I thereby follow all religions." One can carry a meaningful interfaith dialogue only if one practices one's own religion, if one really sees the source from which all religions proceed, if one realizes in the depth of the Self God and everything for which religion stands. Those who have only political reasons for talking about religion and tolerance and approach it phenomenologically or from outside can't appreciate what commitment to religion means, what self sufficient integral tradition demands from its adherents and what an insult it is to a religion to take it as a creedal system that its adherents can take or leave coolly, detachedly.

The perennialists critique misappropriation of mysticism by

many a scholar and even mystic in so-called religious synthesis for limiting their perspective to that kind associated with love. This oversentimentalized approach studies religions on the basis of so-called universal spirituality related to mysticism but devoid of its intellectual content. As Nasr notes that justifiably a reaction has set in against this approach by many a scholar who point out the differences rather than the similarities between religions and various sacred forms. But these scholars have also usually been unable to distinguish between "a unity which transcends forms and a supposed unity which disregards forms or rather seeks to melt them into a solution whose coagulation can't but result in those conglomerates of religious ideas which characterize the so-called religious syntheses of the modern world" (Nasr, 1988: 288). Authentic mysticism, as perennialists argue, isn't formless and duly respects particularity of a religion and its sacred scripture e.g., one can't speak about Sufism without referring to the Quran or Kabbala without Torah. It considers crucial significance of the sacred form as necessary means for the attainment of the formless. One must oppose the sentimentalism of the syncretists but must be on guard against idolizing the forms also. Perennialists value total integrity of

a tradition above everything and are critical of those who place mutual understanding between religions above it. So such pleas as that of John Hick that Christians should stop believing in incarnation in order to understand Muslims and have Muslims understand them are inadmissible. Modern syncretists feel uncomfortable with what they call trivial obsessions of the religious people with ritual purity or legal commandments or other symbols of religious identity. For them it hardly matters if a Muslim eats pork or a Hindu dispenses with traditional practices followed at the time of marriage.

The concept of Tradition is central to the perennialist point of view. That is why the perennialists are critical of that type of *bhakti* spirituality practiced and advocated by some modernists which is based on "vague and emotional universalism," sentimentalism "which opposes intellectual discernment," and "supposed universalism which opposes the particularity of each tradition on the level of that particularity," thus fails to understand distinctive character and genius of each form being unable to penetrate into the meaning of each form (Nasr, 1988: 287). Spiritual libertines and syncretists have misappropriated *bhakti* and what is

loosely called as spirituality. Those who advocate liberalism, or libertine spirituality and open mindedness in observance of rituals, do's and don'ts of religion, mixed gatherings for worship or doing away with doctrines and dogmas and law (e.g., personal law); and idolize time or progress in historicist terms are expectedly scorned by the perennialists.

Thus, from the perennialist perspective we see that the question of interfaith dialogue is the question of proper understanding of one's own faith, of practically realizing the higher or inner reality of one's own tradition. Religions unite at the apex and it is only the chosen few who undertake the necessary discipline and cultivate the necessary virtues who reach this apex. Great sages and metaphysicians have demonstrated this unity and integrity of primordial *Din*. The question of interfaith dialogue is the question of taking seriously one's God, of being loyal to one's own Self. One must cease to be a disputant or rhetorician and be at home in silence that was before the Word to realize what religion or God is. Ultimately religion is not about Truth but truth itself and it is the truth rather than any discourse about it or any representation of it that saves.

Religion is not an ideology; metaphysics is not a system of

propositions. Pure consciousness, objectless consciousness or what the Sufis would call God consciousness transcends all talk, all thought, all argumentation. It is an experience and those who have had their experience alone are entitled to share its fragrance or talk about it. Only a sage can carry an interfaith dialogue. To the pure in heart only is given the kingdom of God and those who are there don't indulge in vain talk.

### **Advent of Islam in Kashmir**

Now, in the second part of this paper, I come to the historical debate of advent of Islam, the problem of conversions, catholicity of Sufis, dialogue between Sufism and indigenous faith and consolidation and revivification of the timeless tradition of *Reshi* philosophy called *Reshiyat* vis-à-vis Muslim saints and point out bearing of the debate on the contested question of Kashmiri identity. All these issues are dealt with from a perennialist perspective which has unique but often ignored and little known view of theological, mystical, metaphysical dimensions of Islam or religion and how Islam faces the religious and cultural other. Most of the vexed issues that have generated lot of heat in scholarly circles and have been misappropriated by communalists and fundamentalists get dissolved in the

light of perennialist perspective.

The story of Islam in Kashmir is one of the most interesting stories in the history of civilizational dialogue. There is hardly any similar example in history of peaceful takeover of one religion and culture by the other. It is a unique story exemplifying Islam's resilience and potential to appropriate alien traditions. It shows contours of interfaith dialogue in action. It refutes the dominant perception of Islam as monolithic exclusivist legalistic tradition. The story of Islam in Kashmir is an interesting case of larger story of cultural transformation brought about by mysticism. How mysticism approaches and solves certain important problems is illustrated in Kashmir.

The story of Islam in Kashmir could be traced as far back as the first century after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) when Muhammad bin Qasim invaded India and Muslim traders were attracted to Kashmir. The early presence of Muslims as tradesmen in the Valley has lately been documented by a host of scholars. Mansur al-Hallaj, the famous mystic-martyr is said to have visited Kashmir. It took many centuries, until the advent of Sufis from Central Asia and Persia, for the process of conversion to significantly transform religious and cultural

landscape of Kashmir. Islam won mass conversion in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and from then on it has been the dominant tradition displacing both the already enfeebled Buddhism and the decadent Saivism. It is one of the great stories of transformation of culture that history has witnessed. The coup of Islam was virtually bloodless. Muslim rulers have, by and large, displayed exemplary tolerance towards the once dominant traditions. The underlying factors for mass conversion have been mundane sociopolitical and economic rather than purely spiritual as M A Wani has made clear in his comprehensive study of the problem of mass conversion in his *Islam in Kashmir* (2005). Masses followed leaders or kings in this process of conversion. The new religion enjoyed the position of reference group culture. It has also to be noted that the nature of conversion here has been group conversion. Internal weaknesses in the preceding religious institutions naturally paved way for Islam. The stereotypes perpetrated by some Pandit historians regarding the use of force in conversion process have come under strong attack from the insider's camp recently. Prof Rattan Lal Hangloo has, for instance, argued in his *The State in Medieval Kashmir* that the mass conversion to Islam was facilitated by the then "Hindu society and polity" which produced

“deteriorating social system, the broadening crisis in economy or political insecurity” (Hangloo, 2000). According to him the spread of Islam appeared as an answer and solution to the “problem of injustice, disharmony and the people’s misery.” Shah Mir Sultanate during which Islam became the mass religion was founded by a Muslim Immigrant rather than was a result of some invasion from outside. Shah Mir was a popular hero at the time of his ascendancy to throne for even die hard *brahmanas*. Early rulers of Shah Muir dynasty were supported by non-Muslim feudal lords. The first convert to Islam was a king named Rinchana. It was a local Sufi Bulbul Shah who became instrumental in his conversion. Though one may not exclude political motivation for this conversion the fact remains that Islam succeeded in targeting the ruling class from its inception in the Valley which made its further development only a matter of time though in the process it itself appropriated local influences. The thousands of years long heritage of *Reshiyyat* easily adapted to the Sufistic face of Islam. *Reshiyyat* got Islamized at the hands of Shaikh Nuruddin and his followers. Native thought currents thus got assimilated` in the new “synthesis” of the Shaikh, popularly called Shaikhul Alam or *Jagat Guru*. Masses didn’t feel alienated from

their tradition in embracing Islam at the hands of Sufis and Reshis as Islam’s spiritual dimension converged significantly with the Hindu-Buddhist Unitarian outlook. Ibn Arabi’s *wajudi* Unitarian version of Islam that Syed Ali Hamdani, the great leader of about 700 Sufis that constituted organized mission for Islamizing Kashmir, advocated could easily get acceptability in already monistically oriented mind of Kashmir. It has been amply demonstrated that conversion to Islam was either by Reshis or Sufis rather than state sponsored enterprise. Masses had been alienated from Hindu leadership both in matters temporal and spiritual. There hardly seems to be any warrant for the thesis that Islam made itself dominant through force. Some scholars who have propounded this thesis have ignored the fact that Zainal-Abideen had given all converts an option of reverting to their original religion. By and large Muslim rule has been a tolerant one. Certain interference in religious life of Hindus during the reign of Sultan Sikandar has been documented by historians but the significance and motivations for this have been misread by communal historians and bloated out of all proportion. Interestingly it was his newly converted minister Suhabhata who was instrumental in his ostensibly

harsh policy vis-à-vis Hindus. People often confuse essentially political decisions with ostensibly religious garb adopted by the rulers for effecting them.

After the entry of missionary Sufi groups a gradual process of conversion started and in due time indigenous *Reshis* too joined hands in the process of Islamization. It took Islam three centuries (13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>) to replace Hinduism in the Valley without any significant use of violence or suppression. There were numerous factors responsible for mass conversion. Most importantly Saivism and Buddhism had lost their distinct individuality, vigour and social relevance and suffered degeneration and corruption. Masses had been alienated from both secular and religious powers. Caste strictures had been misappropriated for exploitation of most of population.

### ***Reshiyyat* in Kashmir**

*Reshiyyat* has been the Great Tradition of Kashmir from pre-Islamic times. The origins of the *Reshi* movement go back to pre-Islamic times. In the Vedic period, The founder of the Muslim *Reshi* movement in Kashmir, Nuruddin Nurani, also known as Nund Rishi (1377-1440), moulded the pre-existing *Reshi* tradition, transforming

it into a vehicle for the spread of Islam, using local institutions and methods to make Islam more comprehensible to the Kashmiris. After Nuruddin, *Reshi* movement made deep inroads in Kashmir. Mystical ethos found newer expressions and continues vigorously in the form of Sufis and their shrines. Most Kashmiris are followers or admirers of some local Sufi.

In Kashmir different traditions have been living and displacing one another and in a way continue to live in different forms today. In fact one may remark here that traditions hardly ever die in the course of history. They get transformed and their spirit gets adapted in new forms. They continue to influence even after their supposed death substituting traditions. This point is illustrated in the fate of Buddhism in Kashmir. Buddhism penetrated into the heart of Hinduism and transformed it from within so much so that the greatest Vedantic philosopher Shankara is accused to be a cryptobuddhist. Buddhism changed its guise and continued to flourish in Saivism of Kashmir. Similar remarks could be made and applied in case of Islam. Neither Buddhism nor Saivism died here. Their essential spirit and many peripheral practices continued to be, in one or the other form, in *Rishiyyat*

or post-Nuruudin Islam in Kashmir. Buddhist metaphysics of Void, its eightfold path, its four noble truths, its silence towards speculative metaphysical theological issues, its emphasis on orthopraxy rather than any particular view of Ultimate Reality, its pragmatism, its monkish culture, its ahimsa and vegetarianism all could be traced in *Risshiyat* of Kashmir in the Muslim period. Kashmiris continue to use, both consciously and unconsciously key Buddhist concepts and formulations in their discourse. Kashmiris blame their karma rather than any external factor or force for their suffering. Whenever any thing untoward happens he cries *panien gunah, aamali baden hienz shamat* (My bad karma, bitter fruit of bad actions). Many proverbs and folk stories have possible connection with Buddhism. A Kashmiri seeks refuge in God and in *Pir* which seems to echo Buddhist practice of talking refuge in the Buddha. The world is described as a place of suffering by common Kashmiri (*dunya chu tawan*). Impermanence of everything is asserted by such common sayings as *dunya chu napayidar, yaet kya chu rozwun* (nothing stays long in the world). "Permanence" is attributed to Spirit or Absolute only, to Void in Buddhist terms. "*Rozuwun chu bas tamsund naw*" (God's name or Essence alone is permanent) is a

common saying in Kashmir. One can cite many more similar expressions used in different contexts of which we can find equivalent in Buddhism.

### **Kashmir's Religious Identity**

It is the question of identity of Kashmiris that has been hotly debated in recent times. In the light of perennialist insights this vexed issue could be resolved in a satisfactory way. We can't write off any period of history or any of the major traditions of Kashmir has been hosting in determining its present identity. Here we may turn to *Reshiyyat* and its revivalist Nuruddin who is acknowledged as the patron saint of the valley both by Hindus as well as Muslims. He is remembered as Sheikhul Alam or Jagat Guru (World Teacher) by Muslims and as Shehjanand (The Blessed One) by the Hindus. *Reshiyyat* that can't be identified with or subsumed under any one historical movement or religious tradition and thus provides a transcendently grounded identity. Nationalistic and religious appropriations of *Kashmiriyat* (lately introduced term for Kashmiri consciousness and identity) are not quite warranted have been increasingly questioned in recent times. We must note that Kashmir's

identity can't be defined in isolation from the distinct mystical and metaphysical ethos that has traditionally defined Kashmir. Kashmir has housed or appropriated most of the major world traditions. It has been argued that to its sacred ambience most of great religions and civilizations – Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim – have contributed. *Reshiyyat* seeks to transcend all local, regional and divisive identities perpetrated by various groups and to be grounded in the universal or cosmic or divine Reshi identity that duly encompasses and appropriates other identities as well. Shiekh Nuruddin and Lalla, the patron saints of Kashmir, have emphasized transcendence of all identities of self, caste, race, nationality and even religion taken in its exclusivist sense. In the Sheikh's universalistic inclusivist humanitarian transcendental cosmopolitan vision, *Reshiyyat* could alone be true *Kashmiriyat*. Kashmir has been hosting some of the most important world religions and has been largely unfamiliar with sectarian strife. Its values of tolerance and non-violence are attributable to its mystical (Reshi) identity. *Reshiyyat* should be taken note in the narrow historical sense as a cult of Sheikh Nuruddin but in the wider sense as mystical dimension of Kashmir and that alone safeguards

its universalism.

The Reshi manifests the image of the Primordial Man and thus couldn't be circumscribed by historical coordinates. Reshi consciousness transcends history. Sheikh Nuruddin only resurrected and revitalized the Reshi way of life that had been current in Kashmir from prehistorical times. Great rajas and great names in literature and philosophy (Vedantic or Shavite or Buddhist) have been described as Reshis. *Reshiyyat* has always been the creed of Kashmir, in fact the creed of all traditional civilizations if we see its metaphysical kernel in the perspective of perennialists. There is no particular time in history or in prehistory to which we could point as the time when *Reshiyyat* originated. Its evolution starts from the very inception of Kashmir and Shiekh Nurrudin's Islamization of it is landmark in its revitalization or adaptation to post-Muslim Kashmir.

Some critics are bent on showing that Islam initiated a radical break rather than continuation of the traditional spiritual heritage of Kashmir. This strategy besides being perverse from Islamic Sufistic perspective as well as from the perspective of our present day challenges that necessitate taking seriously the Quranic approach of finding the common points (are not

Hindus *mushaba bi ahali kitab? Or akin to followers of a Book*) and avoiding conflict. None of the religions have historically been radically divergent from their predecessors. In fact religions have been originally advocating the single conception of tawhid (oneness) and one can still unearth tawhid in all scriptures. Tawhid is discernible even in apparently agnostic or transtheistic Buddhism. Tawhid based on the doctrine of the One as Absolute is the unifying current in all prophetic religions and the question is which religion advocates idolatry?

Hinduism/Buddhism and Islam are not as divergent at deeper level as exotericist theological reading of Islam would have us believe. Originally every human collectivity has been blessed by the presence of prophets according to the Quran. Vedanta, Kashmir Shaivism and Buddhism are not dualistic or polytheistic but essentially Unitarian or tawhid centred traditions if one grants Sufistic-metaphysical understanding of tawhid as the correct view of it in place of dualistic theological reading. These are all Absolute-centric tradition and this Absolute is not to be subsumed under the theistic theology. At the level of Absolute (*Zat*) theism is transcended. Islam and other religions are not opposed in fundamentals of faith as

all have originally been recipients of revelation in accordance with the Quranic dictum that all human collectivities have received revelation. Despite distortions and extrapolations in subsequent centuries it is still possible to unearth the core of Tawhid in these religions. Spiritually or mystically one can easily see how all religions are oriented towards God and none allows associating partners with God, the popular "polytheistic" idolatrous interpretation or mask of Hinduism notwithstanding as it is quite heterodox reading of originally monistic/monotheistic traditions. Hinduization, if it is true to original Hindu Spirit, is not against Tawhid though fundamentalist extremist Hindus organizations will not have us believe it. Tawhid, according to the Quran, is the one message of all prophets and if we presently see anything that deviates from pristine conception of Unitarianism or tawhid it is surely a product of misinterpretation.

Inclusivist approach of Sufism has been construed to imply rejection of separatist ideology by some circles. However this is a huge misinterpretation. All political readings of Sufism are suspect. Sufism does imply rejection of exclusivist religious but not political ideologies. If Kashmir issue is a

religion based issue as has been maintained by some then Sufism indeed rejects the separatist claim. But Kashmir is a political issue and this is conceded by even the religious hardliners involved in the movement. Political appropriations of spirituality are at the cost of spirituality itself and always dangerous.

### ***Reshiyyat* as Perennial Philosophy**

One can loosely take *Reshiyyat* as Perennial Philosophy as it developed in India. Islam is simultaneously a religion and a metaphysics. So *Reshiyyat* as traditional metaphysics itself is part of integral Islamic tradition. As Sufism can't be practiced outside the formal religious universe of Islam according to Muslims; so for perennialists *Reshiyyat* after Nuruddin needs the supposing framework of Islam. Esotericism isn't realizable in religious vacuum despite the assertion of libertine mystics to the contrary. One can loosely say that *Reshiyyat* as *tariqat* is the fruit of *sha'ria*. Over and above Islamic *sha'ria*, *Reshiyyat* has no inalienable doctrinal or practical principle. *Reshiyyat* is Kashmiri version of Sufism and if it appropriates and accommodates influence of certain local or indigenous practices it is in keeping

with the principle that in every age Sufism needs new formulations and adaptations in consonance with the spirit of that age. Kashmir's collective unconscious, its archetypal inheritance necessarily needs to be taken into consideration when a spiritual genius such as Nuruddin wishes to Islamize it. Reshi version of Islamic Sufism is the best creative adaptation of Islam with the traditional religious universe of Kashmir that had moulded it from centuries. Local context has always affected the expression of the "alien" religious tradition. Such *bidaat-hasanat* (praiseworthy innovations) as the practices of loud recitation of *durood* and *awrad* in Kashmir make smooth assimilation and penetration of "alien" religious universe possible. Arab context itself significantly impacted on the form that Islam was destined to take in history. Islam's conquest of Persia was possible only if Persian context was given due respect. The great poetical and speculative genius of Persians couldn't be ignored if Islam had to make inroads into Persia and it necessitated the flowering of Islam's philosophical and mystical aspects that the practical Arab mentality had not allowed free expression so far. The universality of Islam means its great adaptive power and the history of Islam has been a witness to its assimilating and

adaptive genius. There is no such thing as pure Islam – monolithic, neatly defined creedal system, a sharp edged legalism and scholasticism. Islam encompasses wide variety of theological, juristic, philosophical and mystical schools. It is necessarily received and interpreted through certain conceptual schemes but it can't be exhausted thereby. There can be no finality in its interpretation.

All the great names in Kashmir's religion and mysticism which include such Buddhist sages, philosophers and kings as Nagasen, Mender, Nagarjuna, Kumarajiva, Gautama Sanghadeva, Punyatrata, Vimalaksa, Dharmamitra, Ashogosh, Varsobando etc. and such Kashmiri Saivite sages and philosophers as SriKantha, Vasugupta, Kallata, Prodyumna Bhatta, Prajnarjuna, Somanand, Utpal Dev, Abhinavgupta, Jayaratha are links in the Reshi chain. Lalla connects Saivism with Islamized *Reshiyyat* of Shiekh Nuruddin. Great Khulafa (disciples) of Shiekh Nuruddin and Khulafa of those Khulafa and the Sufi appropriation of Reshi movement by Shiekh Makhdoom and form then on a galaxy of Reshis of 3rd period (1st period is upto Shiekh Nuruddin and from him upto Harda Reshi is 2nd period and from then on may be labeled) as third period when Reshis

modified their socio-economic structure by abandoning strict "monkish" asceticism and began to earn their own livelihood) have been keeping alive the great Reshi tradition. The Sufi poets of Kashmir have been vital in preservation and transmission of Reshi message. Sufi poetry represents the essence of *Reshiyyat*. Thus not only the great Reshis such as Bamuuddin, Zainuddin, Latifuddin, Nasiruddin, Payamuddin, Lacham Reshi, Rupa Reshi, Sangam Dar, Hardi Reshi and later day representatives like Shankar Reshi, Aali Baba Saeb, Rajab Baba Saeb but also great Sufi poets of Kashmir whose names are too well known are links in the great chain of *Reshiyyat*. Intellectual and religious history of Kashmir is the history of *Reshiyyat*. Eco-conscious earthly "matriarchal" socially conscious philosophy of *Reshiyyat* is presently being advocated as a remedy of so many ills that affect not only Kashmir but also the whole globe. The need is to reinterpret Reshi message in contemporary language. This contemporary language that postmodern man can understand is not the language of moralism or theology but the wordless language of mysticism. Only the religion of the heart, whose language is silence, is experiential and existential and is synonymous with selfless service of man could be the religion of

(post)modern man and in the context of Kashmir. What else except *Reshiyyat*, which after Nuruddin is an adaptation of Islamic esoteric kernel, could provide it? Sufism of which *Reshiyyat* now is a tested historical manifestation has the best resources to address post-Nietzschean postmodern age that is ours.

### **Impact and Continuation of *Reshiyyat***

Reshi and Sufi thought have deeply impacted the development of artistic and literary culture of Kashmir. Sufism has become an integral part of Kashmiri artistic sensibility. Most of the great names in the history of Kashmir Sufism have been great poets. There exists a strong oral literary tradition amongst Sufis. Most Sufis and their students remember great number of verses by heart and routinely sing Sufi poetry in *sama* gatherings. There are numerous Sufi poets in Kashmir. Almost every Sufi writes poetry as if the latter is a spontaneous expression of a heart tuned to the divine. Sufism has shaped Kashmiri music and given rise to a distinct brand of classical music in Kashmir called Sufiana music. All great names in Kashmir literature, until recent times, have been either Reshis or influenced by *Reshiyyat*. Poetry in

Kashmir is either mystic poetry or sort of romantic poetry that we can subsume under the head of mysticism. Many Kashmiris believe that Habba Khatoon wasn't married to Yusuf Shah and that their relationship was spiritual or platonic. Even modern poets such as Mehjoor, Rahi and Kamil couldn't afford to extricate themselves from Sufi influences. We need not to be surprised that a mystic verse occurs all of a sudden in their romantic poems. Legends and myths too have been appropriated in mystical terms e.g., five Kashmiri mystic poets have versified the folk story of *Aka-Nandun* and appropriated mystic themes in it. The same is the case with *Heemal Naagraj*. The *Gulrez* of Maqbool Shah Kralwari, the *Bakawali* of Lassa Khan Fida and such *mathnavis* and narrative poems as *Heemal Nagraj* appear love poems when superficially read but are "essentially a journey from an outer world towards the inner." The poet is called *gwanimath* – a word charged with mystic connotations. Dialecticism and certain artistic lacunae don't generally mar the merit of great mystical poetry of Kashmir.

In its thousands of years of evolution *Reshiyyat* has adapted various guises and it has managed to survive so many travails of history as it has shown remarkable elasticity

and resilience. *Reshiyyat* has not stuck to any set mode of disciplines or behavior system. It has not held rigid attitude vis-à-vis vegetarianism (as evidenced in its encounter with Shiekh Hamza Makhdomi,) asceticism, rejection of material life and the like. Its humanitarian tolerant inclusivist philanthropic value system needs to be emphasized as has been emphasized throughout its history. *Reshiyyat* survived despite its lack of any central organization or propaganda. Social commitment of mystical philosophy is rare in the history of world of mysticism. That mysticism needn't be quietist but could be dynamic, activist and socially committed, rooted in the earth and mould history is to be seen in Kashmir. Kashmir's contribution, through *Reshiyyat*, to the mystical tradition of the world, is stupendous. It hasn't been properly estimated.

The Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits share several customs and beliefs in common, and the numerous Sufi shrines that dot the Valley attract Hindus as well as Muslims in large numbers. While Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims were undoubtedly aware of their differences, popular Sufism served to promote a common way of understanding the world, a sort of a dialogue between Muslims and Pandits.

Sufism in Kashmir embodies one of the most interesting experiments in world of spirituality. Here is a test case for integration of different traditions. *Reshiyyat* appropriates the central insights of four different religions of the world. It expresses the metaphysical core of all religions. Though *Reshiyyat* no longer survives in the form of a movement it continues to live in and impact essentially Sufistic tradition of Kashmir. The shrine of Nuruddin is still the most respected shrine of Kashmir. Nuruddin is called Alamdar or standard bearer of Kashmir. There is hardly any room for any sectarian or fundamentalist outlook in a predominantly Sufistic culture. But the unfortunate political legacy has precipitated certain communal problems which have been misappropriated by political forces.

Walter Lawrence wrote about Kashmir in his famous *The Valley of Kashmir* that no niche is without a shrine here. It may well be said that Sufism is today the most popular tradition in Kashmir. It has resisted all attacks and strong campaigns from legalistic theological schools in recent years. Almost every Kashmiri is a Sufi in making. Sufi gatherings and festivals are spread round the year. Kashmir's prayer food culture, *niyaz* culture and shrine culture all

testify to the deep influence of Sufism. Kashmir is traditionally called as a land of mystics (*pir waer*). Here even many mentally deranged people are respected because suspected to be *majzoob* Sufis. Most families have a family *pir*. Although newer generations are critical of antinomian tendencies in some Sufis and of pseudoSufis for promoting polytheistic interpretation of Sufism, the fact remains that traditional Kashmiri ethos continues to be Sufistic which can only be rejected at the peril of questioning the very identity of Kashmir.

### **Conclusion**

Thus we have seen that while

Kashmir remains a pluralistic culture it has respected the unique identity of different traditions without mechanically juxtaposing them or questioning their exclusivity. It is respectful of difference as much as it takes the transcendent unity of religions for granted. Different religions are so many different languages of the Self which are all valuable. We need to transcend theological plane altogether (where equally problematic notions of exclusivism and syncretism are situated) and understand the complex reality of religion vis-à-vis other religions and cultures at metaphysical plane that respects distinctive religious forms at a certain plane while maintain ultimate relativity of all forms. ■

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