

VOLUME 30, ISSUES 1&2, JANUARY - JUNE, 2023

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

VOLUME 30, ISSUES 1&2, JANUARY - JUNE, 2023



PUBLISHED BY INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

Journal of Peace Studies

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PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY

SHEIKH KHALID JEHANGIR

International Centre for Peace Studies

Office Address:

157/9, Block 4, Second

Floor, "Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj, New
Delhi-1110070

Regd. Address:

C-11 Jangpura Extension

New Delhi - 110 014

Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9810317972

<http://www.icpsnet.org>

Email: cpsndjps@gmail.com;

Printed at:

A.M. Offsetters

Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi

PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

OVERSEAS OFFICES**UNITED STATES**

7541 N.WESTERN AVENUE

CHICAGO,

IL 60645-1510, USA

UNITED KINGDOM

196 CHURCH ROAD

NORTHOLT, MIDDX

UB5 5AE U.K.

PHONE: 0181-845, 8828

SUBSCRIPTION**In India**

Single Copy: Rs. 150.00

Annual

(Individual) Rs. 600.00

(Institutional) Rs. 1200.00

Overseas (Air Mail)

Single Copy: US\$ 7.50

UK£4.50

Annual: US\$ 45.00

Journal of Peace Studies

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Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the footnotes. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, (Ms Word 2003 or above format) also. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

Journal of Peace Studies Research Section

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org

BOOK REVIEW

**SHI'ISM IN
KASHMIR -
A HISTORY OF
SUNNI SHI'IT RIVALRY
AND
RECONCILIATION
BY
HAKIM SAMEER
HAMDANI**

Publisher: I.B. Tauris, UK

Price: INR 1200.00

ISBN: 978-0755643936

Syed Eesar Mehdi



Research on Shi'ism in Kashmir has been limited as most scholarly attention has concentrated on Shi'ism in core regions like West Asia and Awadh region in India. This lack of focus on Kashmir has prompted Hakim Sameer Hamdani to produce this book titled *Shi'ism in Kashmir: A History of Sunni-Shia Rivalry and*

Reconciliation. The book provides a comprehensive examination of Kashmir's Shi'is during the 18th and 19th centuries, shedding light on their sectarian politics, identity formation, and internal divisions. Moreover, it delves into the specific events that contributed to the easing of sectarian tensions in the region. Hamdani's work opens new avenues for future research, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of Shi'ism within Kashmir's unique historical context.

Previous studies, such as John Norman Hollister's *Islam and Shia's Faith in India* (1953) and Andreas Reick's *The Shia's of Pakistan* (2015), attributed the origins of Shi'ism in Kashmir to Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi (d. 1525). However, Athar Abbas Rizvi's *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isn 'Ashar+ Shi'is in India* (1986) connected it to Syed Mahmud of Sabzwar (Iran) and the party of Bayhaqi sayyids. In contrast, Hamdani presents a different perspective, citing the Shi'i Hadith book *Al-Kafi* by Muhammad Yaqub al-Kulayni, which suggests that

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Shi'ism's earliest presence in Kashmir can be traced back to around 877 CE. Earlier studies emphasized Shamsuddin Iraqi as the key figure who introduced Shi'ism to Kashmir, as he held significant influence during the rule of the Shi'i rulers, the Chaks, from 1561 to 1586.

The book is divided into five chapters, and it opens with Hamdani's exploration of the Kashmiri *Dapan* tradition, which heavily relies on oral transmission and holds great significance in the Kashmiri language due to its folklore origins. The author critically examines this tradition, uncovering its sectarian biases primarily coming from Sunni circles. Moreover, he questions how this everyday practice, rooted in folklore, becomes a self-validating instrument for historical accounts, consequently leading to the creation of stereotypes and dehumanization of the Shi'i community. These stereotypes gained such popularity that even European travelers mentioned them in their travelogues.

Hamdani takes on the prevailing narrative of Kashmiri history, exposing how religion has been manipulated for political purposes. He aims to shed light on the biased accounts of historians, with special

focus on Azam Dedhmari, whose work strongly favors the anti-Shi'i Sufi Sheikh Hamza Makhdum and his associates, thereby influencing subsequent scholars. Furthermore, Hamdani's thorough research delves into the origins of sectarian conflicts in Kashmir, revealing how Sufis contributed to promoting factional supremacy through their involvement in the politics of the khanqah and court.

The history of Kashmir from the 16th to the 19th century was marked by the persecution and oppression of the Shi'i community, infamously known as *Taraj-e-Shi'i* or the 'Ten Major Massacres' discussed in Kuihami's *Tarikh-e-Hasan*. Hamdani argues that the Afghan era (1752-1820) stands out as the most repressive period in Kashmiri Shi'i history, with severe punishment for any visible expression of Shi'iness by the authorities. Commemorations of Imam Husain's martyrdom were held in secrecy in *taikhanas*, and Kashmiri *marsiyas* (elegies/lamentations) depicted individual grief rather than romanticized battles seen in Urdu *marsiyas* of the same era, authored by legends like Meer Anees and Mirza Dabeer.

The book uncovers the significant influence of the Kashmiri Shi'i

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diaspora in the Awadh kingdom. While some Kashmiri Shi'is settled in Awadh early on, a larger influx occurred during the Afghan era, seeking safety from persecution. Awadh, a powerful Shi'i kingdom, supported their scholarly pursuits. After the Sikh empire ended Muslim rule in 1819, the Sunni community felt dispossessed, while the Shi'is openly asserted their identity. The commemoration of Imam Husain's martyrdom became central to their revival, with institutions like Muharram, *marsiya*, and *Marak* playing essential roles. The 19th century was tumultuous for Kashmiri Shi'is, witnessing assertiveness under Afghan rule and later, reclaiming public space under non-Muslim rulership, leading to a breakdown of the once unified identity.

The chapter on *dissension within the mumin* highlights changing dynamics from the 1850s. Disputes over Marak custodianship and Sayyid Ibrahim's initiatives sparked divisions into *Firqa-i-Qadeem* and *Firqa-i-Jadeed*. Disagreements over *Khums* distribution and other issues also surfaced but did not disintegrate the community. *Firqa-i-Qadeem* and *Firqa-i-Jadeed* took differing stances on sectarian relations and modern education. Syed Mahdi's visits to Sunni shrines indicated a different

approach from *Firqa-i-Jadeed* towards Sunni community relations. Kashmiri Shi'is had mixed reactions to modernity and missionary activity, with some embracing and others remaining skeptical. Scholars like Moulvi Haider supported integrating modern education with traditional Muslim values. In the early 20th century, Kashmiri Shi'i also witnessed the formation of new organizations that aspired to work for the social welfare and well-being of the community. These organizations were established by people coming from different backgrounds, like Anjuman-i-Imamia and Hami al Islam, which were established by clerics, while Shi'i Upliftment Association (est. 1930) and *Anjuman-i-Bahbudi Shiyani-i-Kashmir* (est. 1932-4) had a non-clerical background. This reflects the changing dynamics of power within the Shi'i community. Coming to the issue of sectarian relations, when non-Muslim power prevailed, there was a notable pause in polemical discourse, and according to Hamdani, a change in communal sentiments began to emerge. He draws attention to the way that historians refer to Sunni and Shi'i as Muslims, which amplifies the way that Shi'is are included in the Muslim categories. Nevertheless, Hamdani insists that despite these limits to the achievement of an ecumenical

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community in the 20th century, Muslims have presented a unified front against Hindu Dogra rule.

The book's final section discusses the positive development and improved relations between the Sunni and Shi'i communities in early 20th-century Kashmir, indicating a significant detente. One noteworthy event was the joint memorandum to Lord Minto in 1907, signed by leaders from both faiths, presenting them as a unified Muslim community. Another pivotal moment in Shi'i history occurred during Ashura of 1923, when the Ashura procession defied tradition and took place during the day. However, subsequent attempts to continue this practice were banned, leading to the confiscation of the *taziya*. Surprisingly, the Sunni community supported the Shi'is during this act of disobedience. The book is meticulously referenced, drawing from various primary and secondary sources, including historical books in Persian, Urdu, and Kashmiri, as well as archives

and family texts. The author carefully analyzes these sources, including accounts from both Sunni and Shi'i perspectives, non-Muslim viewpoints, and even travelers' descriptions, to draw conclusions. For instance, the 1830 riot is examined through the accounts of Marjanpuri and Kuihami, as well as the observations of European tourist Vigne, who visited Kashmir in 1835.

Hamdani's work provides a comprehensive overview of sectarian conflicts and reconciliations, especially within the realm of community elites. However, the book's limitation lies in not fully exploring caste and class divisions among Shi'is and overlooking the perspectives of Shi'i women. Nonetheless, *Shi'ism in Kashmir* offers valuable insights and lays the groundwork for further research on how sectarian relations shape identities in Kashmir and beyond. The book's epilogue ends on an optimistic note, not only for Kashmir but for the broader context of South Asia in particular. ■