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The Cultural Mosaic of Sultanate Kashmir Language, Literature and Arts

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Abstract
This article examines the Literary and Cultural development in Kashmir during the Sultanate Period, Spanning from the 14th to the early 16th century. The establishment of Muslim rule under the Shah Mir dynasty marked a transformative era in Kashmiri history, Characterized by a remarkable synthesis of Persian, Sanskrit, and indigenous Kashmiri traditions. This paper argues that Sultanate Kashmir emerged as a distinctive cultural mosaic, where diverse Linguistic, religious and artistic streams converged to produce a unique regional identity.

Keywords: Sultanate Kashmir, cultured history, Persian literature, Kashmiri language, Sufi Tradition.

KASHMIR, where it is said that the world ends and paradise begins is a land of natural beauty. It has a rich history spread over a period of more than five thousand years preserved in written form. It was ruled under Hindus, Buddhists, Muslim Shahmiri Sultans, Mughal emperors, Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rulers for at least five thousand years. Its geographical location made this territory hard to conquer. The modern state of Jammu and Kashmir is landlocked. Situated in the extreme north of India and surrounded by three atomic powers China, India and Pakistan, the total "area of the State is about 84, 258 Square miles. (1)

Kashmir was ruled by Hindu and Buddhist rulers for about four thousand years. Different religions like Nagmat, Shuimat,(2) Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Christianity flourished in Kashmir, at different times. These religions could not maintain their hold in the valley for long, Islam made its ways into Kashmir, not by force/conquest but by gradual conversion, for which the influx of foreign adventurers both from South and Central Asia had prepared the ground.(3) Islam was introduced in Kashmir by Syed Sharif al Din Abd al-Rehman Bilal, commonly known as Bulbul Shah, whose simplicity and piety impressed the reigning sovereign, probably Rinchana, a Buddhist ruler. 720/1320.(4)

When Sahadeva ruled Kashmir, (718-719/1319-1320), Zulchu, the commander of the army of great king Karmasena(5) invaded Kashmir, instead of facing him manfully, the raja fled to Kishtwar. Then the king of Laddakh, Rinchana,(6) come to the scene. Rinchana fell out with Ramachandra a scion of the previous dynasty, and killed Zulchu. He married Kota Rani, Ramachandra's daughter and proclaimed himself king of Kashmir in 720/1320. (7)

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Rinchana died in 723/1323, after his death Udyanadeva, brother of Sahadeva, succeeded him and married his widow. Like his brother he also fled before the next invader. Shah Mir, (8) his wazir, defended the kingdom successfully in his absence. The raja returned and reigned in Kashmir but as a puppet, Shah Mir, being all powerful. On Udyanadeva's death (728/1328), Kota Rani, The queen assumed power only for about five months. The wazir, Shah Mir deposed Kota Rani and ascended the throne in 740/1319. He assumed the title Sultan Shams al-Din.(9) His accession is particularly notable for the institution of Muslim authority in both religious and secular aspects.

Sultan Shams al-Din regularized tax structures, made collection efficient; abolished oppressive and extra taxes and paid attention to the irrigation system. He withdrew all laws and regulations which were despotic in nature and created irritations to the masses irrespective of their faith. He created deterrents to check the greed of the revenue officials and brought them under his direct control. Land tax was fixed at 1/6th of the yield with a margin for relief during a bad season.

Shah Mir reorganized state machinery and defended it from the onslaughts of opportunists. He raised the defences of Kashmir, it was due to this foundation, that Kashmir could not be subjugated by any foreign or neighbouring power for nearly two and a half century till the Mughals successfully conspired to put an end to its sovereign status in 1586. (10)

Shah Mir understood the functional difficulties of Hijri era, introduced by Rinchana. Hijra was a lunar calendar and so a wandering one, hence incapable to fix agriculture activities. Peasants need an agriculture oriented calendar. He devised the Kashmir era based on Persian months. It was a solar calendar of 360 days, needing the occasional adjustment of a five day deficit. After six years a month is added to account for the lapse. Kashmiri peasants use this era even today. (11)

Shah Mir's rule was most peaceful and development oriented. Although a foreigner to Kashmir, it must be set down to his credit, that he saved Kashmir from foreign aggression. He also saved it from becoming a province in the time of the Tughluqs. Shah Mir was able to survive the early attempts of Muhammad Tughluq, consequently, his descendants ruled for over two centuries. (12) He died in 743/1342. His tomb is at Andar Kot. (13)

Shah Mir left behind him two sons Jamshid and Ali Sher. (14) His eldest son Jamshid, succeeded him in 743/1342. He ruled for nearly two years. (15) Soon quarrels arose between him and his younger brother that lingered on for some time and eventually Jamshid was defeated at Avanti Pura. (16) Ali Sher assumed the title of Sultan 'Ala al-Din in 745/1344-

'Ala al-Din was a just ruler. He continued the work of consolidation and started customs of the time. (17) He rehabilitated towns which had become depopulated due to the invasion of Zulchu.(18) The great and wise king made Jayapidapura his capital and built an edifice named Budhagira. Budhagira had a distinction among the ancient sites being the centre of learning during the Buddhist Period. Budhagira of 'Ala al-Din

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is now a Mohallah near Ali Kadal in Srinagar. This edifice built by 'Ala al-Din was used as a resting place for travellers in his time and thereafter, it seems to have been used by traders from Laddakh and Baltistan. (19) Ala al-Din died in 755/1354-

'Ala al-Din left two sons, Siyamuk, afterwards known as Sultan Shihab al-Din and Hindal, afterwards Sultan Qutb al-Din.(20) Shihab al-Din succeeded his father in 755/1354. (21) His reign represents a glorious period of the sultans of Kashmir. It was the period of military prowess shown by the Kashmiris. He was the first of the Kashmiri Muslim monarchs who marched out with the purpose of making foreign conquests. He too followed the policy of tolerance towards his non-Muslim subjects. Most of the army, its commanders, ministers and high officials were Hindus.

Shihab al-Din crushed all those who tried to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the Kingdom, no matter they were Hindus or Muslims. (22) He got some dilapidated temples repaired. (23) He built a town on a higher level near Hariparbat named it Lakshminagar, after his queen, Lakshmi. Besides Lakshminagar, he als built the town of Shihabuddinpura. He also succeeded in adorning these places with a number of mosques and opened a number of schools to promote learning. (24) This king was the most prominent among all kings, past and future, as the central jewel is prominent in a necklace. He reigned for about nineteen years and died in 775/1373-

On the death of Sultan Shihab al-Din, his brother, Hindal, ascended the throne in 775/1373 under the title of Sultan Qutb al-Din. (25) Hasan Khan, Shihab al-Din's eldest son, along with his younger brother, Ali Khan, had already been exiled by his father. But the new ruler showed his generous-mindedness by inviting Prince Hasan Khan to become heir-apparent.

Sultan Qutb al-Din was a man of culture and learning. He gave attention to the needs of the public. He laid out a town in his name called Qutbuddinpura, a place on the left bank of river in between 4^{th} and 5^{th} bridges of the city. He was a tolerant king. He did not alienate the Hindus who were still a majority. In his reign famines occurred frequently and sultan used to perform yagna and distributed cooked food among the starving people. (26) An event of great importance in this reign was the birth of Shaikh Nur al-Din, the Patron-saint of Kashmir in 779/1377. (27)

The most important event in the reign of Sultan Qutb al-Din was the arrival of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani for the second time in Srinagar in (781/1379). He was received with great fervour. Sultan Qutb al-Din dressed like Hindu kings and had two real sisters in marriage at a time contrary to Islamic law. But on account of Syed's advice that the Sultan divorced one of the two sisters married to him.(28) Under the influence of the great Syed, the Sultan gave more time to meditation and prayer. The Syed bestowed on the Sultan his own cap which he wore in his royal crown. (29) He died after having reigned for a period of fifteen years in 291/1389. The two surviving sons Sikandar and Haibat were both infants. (30)

Sikandar ascended the throne in 791/1380. He was minor when he ascended the throne of Kashmir. His mother Sura acted as a Regent. (31) She took full powers of the state's administration into her hands. She even sacrificed her daughter and son-in-

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law who had conspired against Sikandar. (32) The king's younger brother Haibat, was put to death by his powerful minister, Rai Magarey. When Sikandar came of age, he took the reins of the government into his own hands. His kingdom included the whole of the valley and the adjoining areas of Rajauri, Poonch, Dras, Kargil, Zanskar, Laddakh and Kishtwar.

Sultan Sikandar patronized letters and attracted scholars from all parts of Asia chiefly from Khurasan, Mavara-an-Nahar and Iraq. Besides his sound administration and religious zeal, Sikandar had a passion for buildings. Many mosques and madrasas were built in his time. The first building he erected was the khanqah-i mualla, on the place of retreat and devotion of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani in Srinagar in 798/1395. (33) He died in 816/1413. Mir Khan succeeded his father's dominions in 816/1413. The only event of importance was the loss of little Tibet which was due to the incompetence of Mir Khan.

Shahi Khan or Sultan Zain al-Abidin, ascended the throne in 823/1420 and ruled for nearly half a century. His accession to the throne, proved to be the return of bright and warm days after a cold and a chilly night. He was undoubtedly the greatest of all the sultans who sat on the throne of Kashmir. He introduced many arts and crafts for which Kashmir has become famous ever since. He promoted learning, music and painting and made Kashmir the centre of great culture. He won the loyalty and affection of his subjects who called him Bud Shah or the great king, his period was the golden period of Kashmir.

Sultan Zain al-Abidin is credited with everything that is good in Kashmir. He sent the scholars to Turkistan, Persia, Iraq and India to purchase Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit books and established a rich library.(34) He started a translation department where competent scholars proficient in Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri language, translated popular Sanskrit works into Persian and popular Sanskrit and Persian works were translated into Kashmiri. (35) He was interested in the spread of education outside his dominion also; he donated six lakh and his queen donated her valuable necklace for the Madrasah al-'Ulum at Sialkot(36).

In the field of art and crafts Sultan Zain/al-Abidin extended marvellous patronage to foreign arts and crafts. His justice and magnificence, peace and tranquillity that prevailed in the country attracted some master artisans from Persia, Samarqand and Bukhara. He provided them all the amenities of life and they popularized their arts and crafts among the Kashmiri artisans. (37) He sent two persons to Samarqand at government expense to receive training in different arts. One of them learnt the art of manufacturing paper, the other learnt the art of book binding.(38).

On their return to Srinagar they taught these arts to the locals, Zain al-Abidin showed keen interest in the art of calligraphy. He invited calligraphists from Samarqand and Bukhara and granted them lands in the Pargana of Phag for their maintenance (39). One of the scribes was sent to Makkah to transcribe a copy of the original manuscript of Kashshaf, a well-known commentary on the Holy Quran, written by Allama Jarullah Zamakhsheri. He was paid adequate travel expenses and

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during his absence his family was duly maintained at state expenses (40). Zain al Abidin was a great lover of music and other fine arts. He always made generous allowances to musicians. His own beloved courtier and historian, Shri Srivara was a fine composer of music and used to entertain the king with his singing and performance. Hearing of the Sultan's generosity and love for music, many masters in this art flocked to Kashmir from all directions (41).

Zain al-Abidin constructed some important canals to carry water to the higher plateaus and Kundi regions. Shah Kul in Islamabad irrigates the Plateau of Martand. He is also credited with the construction of Lal-Kul and Zaina-Kul. There were canals and over-head canals for every quarter of the city (42). During the Shah Miri period, the art of binding was taken to new heights. Impressed by the art of books, especially the Timuri art of book binding, Sultan Zain al-Abidin deputed a few artisans of Kashmir to go to Central Asia to learn it from experts. Consequently the art got diffused in Kashmir and there came into existence a colony of book binders which has survived in the name of jiladagar Mohallah located in Srinagar (43).

During the period of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, the Shawl industry received tremendous development owing to the introduction of new technology in the wake of immigration of Persian and Central Asian artisans in the valley who were attracted by the generous patronage extended to them by the Sultan who was zealous enough to bring Kashmir in the map of the industrially advanced countries of the world (44). The carpet industry was also introduced in the valley by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin. He invited expert carpet weavers from Samarqand and settled them in the valley with full State patronage (45).

In his reign, Habib also came to Kashmir who was well versed in fireworks and it was he who showed the people the skill of procuring it (46). The widespread use of gun powder in the valley can be visualized by the fact that books were written on the technique of its procurement both under the patronage of the Sultan and independently by the people. The Sultanate period was a period of overall development and relative peace in Kashmir. Despite small, limited skirmishes, the period helped to establish a number of well meaning, purpose oriented institutions.

Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin passed away in (874/1470) after a reign of fifty two years. His death sounded the death knell of Shah Miri dynasty. The only important event that took place before the establishment of Chak dynasty was the invasion of Mirza Haider Dughlat who attacked Kashmir from Zogila [or Zoji pass] in 947/1540(47)

Soon he was able to establish his ascendancy in the valley. Sultan Nazuk Shah, became almost a puppet in his hands. For more than a decade Mirza was the virtual ruler of the valley and he gave peace and orderly government to the country. The last Shah Miri ruler, Sultan Habib Shah, a weakling was deposed by his commander and nobles raised on throne Gazi Chak, a prominent military general of the time. He was a direct descendant of Lankar Chak who had come to Kashmir towards the close of Hindu rule.

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The Chak dynasty ruled over Kashmir for thirty one years. This period is notable for religious fanaticism. Wanton barbarity, insecurity and ruthlessness, the victims mostly being the Sunni Muslims(48). Except Hussain Shali Chak all the kings of this dynasty were heartless men who simply loved to inflict pain and torture. Chak rule began in Kashmir in 962/1555. It lasted till 994/1586, when the Mughal emperor Akbar, conquered Kashmir.

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