
The Mysticism and Glory of Sufism and Kashmiriyat: Origins, History and the Politics behind it

Introduction

“Insaniyat, Jamhuriyat, Kashmiriyat”, or “Humanism, Democracy and Kashmiriness”, with these words the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee described his doctrine towards preserving and fostering the peace, progress and prosperity of the people of Jammu & Kashmir (FirstPost, 2018). Twenty years later, this paper will aim to untangle the origins and meanings behind this statement, taking the reader few centuries back, when the mystical current of Islam, called Sufism, was setting foot on the Indian subcontinent, preaching the teachings of love, compassion, humanity and promoting an ideology where caste hierarchy or an individual’s financial standing did not matter. It will explore in-depth the construct and design of this spiritual Islamic philosophy and theology, which has exercised significant influence over the development of Islamic politics and society, and the diverse expression of religious devotion via shrines (Elias, 1998). On that basis, it will discuss the evolution of the so-perceived sacred collective identity in the Kashmir Valley of Jammu & Kashmir, called *‘Kashmiriyat’*, which manifested a tradition of syncretism, which flourished in the region owing to the mutual efforts of both Muslims and Hindus towards coexistence, communal harmony, hospitality, non-violence and mutual accommodation. It will follow the evolution of this notion and its subsequent demise through observing the unholy alliance of organized fundamental interpretations of religion and gun culture, which have led to the weeding out of the remnants of this humanistic culture of Kashmir with its roots deeply embedded in the hitherto secular and glorious ancient past.

For the purposes of illuminating the latter, the paper will rely on comprehensive content analysis and linguistic theories, illustrating how the term *‘Kashmiriyat’* has been oftentimes inconsistently utilised, in accordance with the certain agenda of relevant actors, including political leaders, news reporters and human rights activists, who incorporate it in their discourse. By adopting such approach, the paper will conclude that the appeal of *‘Kashmiriyat’* has become an *‘empty signifier’*, which manifests the failure of those actors to live up to its original idea, turning it at present into *“a truth beyond representation and falsification which reflects an imaginary rather than actual phenomenon”* (Aggarwal, 2008, p.231).

Sufism

Sufism is a mode of life in Islam, which promotes a path of spiritual advancements, an expansion of consciousness and purification of one’s inner self for the purposes of attaining an eternal bliss (Dar, 2019). The substance of Sufism is selfless experiencing and actualization of the truth. The practice of Sufism leads to the development of innate spiritual and intuitive

abilities. As the great Sufi Saint, Shaykh Shihab al-din Suhrawardi explains it, Sufism "*is neither austerity (faqr) nor asceticism (zuhd), but a term which comprehends the ideas of both together with something besides*" (ibid, p.16). Generally recognizing that the term was derived from the word *ṣūf* (wool) and was given to Muslim holy men who wore woolen garments and dedicated their lives to relinquishment of all earthly delights and prayer and meditation (Rafiqi, 2009), the mystic traditions of Sufism reached the Delhi Sultanate and after that, the rest of the India, during the 10th and 11th centuries (Schimmel, 1975). With the advent of Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent, Sufism also entered the region of Jammu & Kashmir (Yousuf, 2019).

Since there is no single approach to the teachings of Sufism, Sufis tend to be divided into different orders of mystical brotherhood, while sharing certain core beliefs. Some Sufis believe in '*wahdat-al-wujud*' (*unity of all existence*), finding God in everything, while some Shariah-centric, believe in '*wahdat-al-shuhud*' (*unity of all witness*), all creatures observing one faith and God being transcendent. Some Sufis preach an extreme passivity to the point of renouncing the world, while some stress on worldly-involvement. In Kashmir, the major orders are the Naqshbandi, the Qadris, the Suhrawardi, the Kubrawi and the Rishis. All except for the Rishis, are said to have their origins in Persia and Central Asia. The people of Kashmir refer to their land as '*Pir Vaer*' or '*Rishi Vaer*', meaning, *The Valley of Saints*.

As narrated in-depth in EFSAS Study Paper, "[Kashmir's Composite Culture: Sufism & Communal Harmony – Kashmiriyat](#)", one of the earliest known Sufis in Kashmir is said to have been from Turkistan belonging to Suhrawadi order in the 13th century, Sayyed Sharfuddin Abdur Rahman, fondly remembered as *Hazrat Bulbul Shah*. He is said to have made transformations in the strictly caste-ridden Brahmin dominated society of Kashmir and is believed to have arrived during the reign of King Suhadeva (1301-20) and was the first Saint who sowed the seeds of Islam in Kashmir. Bulbul Shah was instrumental in the conversion of the Buddhist Prince from Ladakh, Lhachan Gualbu Rinchana, who revolted against his uncle, the ruler of Ladakh, and when defeated fled to Kashmir, finding shelter with the King of Kashmir, who appointed Rinchana as a Minister. Raja Suhadev fled to Tibet after he was defeated by Mongols who invaded Kashmir with 70,000 soldiers. His Prime Minister, Ramachandra occupied the throne after the departure of the Mongols and appointed Rinchana as an administrator, who in turn, planned Ramachandra's killing and became the ruler of Kashmir. In order to gain local sympathy, Rinchana married Ramachandra's daughter, Kota Rani and aspired to convert to Hinduism which Brahmin priests did not allow as they were not sure as to which *varna* (caste) he would adopt.

Shah Miri, one of the Ministers of Raja Suhadev, advised him to embrace Islam, after which he took his Muslim name of Sultan Sadruddin. Ten thousand of his subjects, including his brother-in-law, Ravanachandra converted with him. After conversion, he renamed Srinagar as '*Rinchanpora*' and built a mosque known as '*Bud Masheed*', on the site of a Buddhist temple. He built a cloister in honour of his spiritual mentor Bulbul Shah, and attached to the *khanqah* (cloister) was a *langarkhana* (public charity kitchen) known as Bulbul Lankar, where the poor were fed, free-of-cost, twice a day.

Thousands of Hindus embraced the creed of Bulbul Shah with no sense of resentment or animosity of any sort against these conversions (Yousuf, 2019). As explained by Shafi Ahmad Qadri (2002), a prominent Kashmiri writer: “A revolution of far reaching consequences took place silently and imperceptibly not through the instrumentality of Muslim conqueror but a Tibetan refugee who was born a Buddhist.”

The arrival of a number of Sayyids further accelerated the Islamization of Kashmir. Prominent names amongst them included Sayyid Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Sayyid Taj-ud-din, Sayyid Mas’ud and Sayyid Ali Hamdani (Yousuf, 2019). The latter, a fourteenth century Persian Kubrawi Saint, popularly known as *Shah-i-Hamadan*, was a well-travelled scholar who entered Kashmir along with 700 of his disciples, who eventually settled down in various parts of Kashmir, spreading Islam and the principles of the Kubrawi Sufi order. The Muslim ruler Sultan Qutub-ud-Din made comfortable arrangements for Shah-i-Hamadan and his disciples out of his Sultanate. Shah-i-Hamadan was a prodigious scholar, credited with having 37,000 conversions to Islam in Kashmir; owing to his outstanding spiritual charism. He is popularly remembered as ‘*Amir-i Kabir*’ (The great leader) and ‘*Bani-i Musalmani*’ (The founder of Islam [in Kashmir]).

Shah-i-Hamadan’s teachings were based on the pillars of ‘*Tawheed*’ (oneness of God) ‘*Taqwa*’ (God-fearing piety), ‘*Ikhlās*’ (purity) and Unity. After the Mongol invasion, the economy of the Kashmir Valley was on a constant decline and the socio-political equilibrium was profusely disturbed, making survival difficult for the inhabitants. The prevailing socio-, economic and political situation of the Kashmir Valley worked in favour of Shah-i-Hamadan and he filled the existing void with his ideology that he carried from Persia, in the form of Islam.

Shah-i-Hamadan took keen interest in the economy of the Kashmir Valley and introduced the arts and craft technique of Central Asia, and suggested ways and means to improve upon the irrigation system in the Valley. He urged the ruler, Sultan Qutub-ud-Din to start the shawl industry in Kashmir on the pattern of Central Asian *Karkhana* (factory), reorganizing the industry system in Kashmir, thereby improving the economic conditions of the common man and restructuring the Kashmiri society under the influence of Islam. He introduced the concept of ‘*division of labour*’ and apart from employing skilled labour, these *Karkhanas*, imparted training to Kashmiris in various techniques of manufacturing goods, which necessitated the launch of markets further intensifying the process of urbanization and providing the required impetus to trade and commerce. Shah-i-Hamadan introduced the concept of Muslim architecture by constructing *Khanqahs* (monasteries), mosques and tombs on a pattern, which was totally new to Kashmir, enhancing the opportunities for employment. Canals were dug to meet the irrigational requirements which otherwise had made people to quit agriculture. People of Kashmir benefitted from his strategies and involvement in socio-economic activities, which helped the common man to elevate his standard of living and thereby also accepting Islam as his faith. The privileged class of the society including Sultans, Nobles and Brahmins were equally attracted to him and held him with great reverence. It is noteworthy, that he employed no means of supremacy or ferocity to spread the message of Islam. In spite of his following, he rejected the idea of charity for religious men. He was an expert in needle-work and earned his living by cap-making and

encouraged his *mureeds* (followers) to do the same. Some prominent members of his team included Khwaja Ishaq Khatlani, Shaykh Qawam-al-Din, Sayyed Hussain Simnani, Sayyed Kamal and Muhammad Kazim - all intellectuals, technicians or experts in various forms of art.

Rishi order

The local response to Hamadani's teachings came in the form of development of an indigenous religious order, *Rishism* or *Rishi* order. While the rest of the Sufi orders, such as Suharwardi, Kubravi, Naqshbandi and Qadri arrived in Kashmir from Persia, Central Asia and Central and North India, the *Rishi* order grew and developed indigenously in the Kashmir Valley in the beginning of the 15th century (Shaheen, n.d.). As further explained by him, the term is generally recognised to be derived from Sanskrit, though some medieval Muslim scholars have tried to argue that it originates from the Persian word *raish* or *rish*, which stands for the feathers of a bird. According to this explanation, *“a bird whose feathers have been removed has no control over its own movements and depends entirely on the wind. And this is also the case with a Rishi; he is alienated from the world and lives alone, buffeted by fate”*.

The *Rishi* order tends to differ from other Sufi orders in its unique philosophy and worldview, which is particularly manifested in the writings of the prominent chronicler of the period Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak, who was the Grand vizier of the Mughal emperor Akbar, and author of the three volume chronicles of his rule, called *Akbarnama*. As per his writings, *“The most respected class of people in this country (Kashmir) are the Rishis. Although they have not abandoned the traditional and customary forms of worship (taqlid), but they are true in their worship. They do not denounce men belonging to different faiths. They do not have the tongue of desire, and do not seek to obtain worldly objects. They plant fruit-bearing trees in order that people may obtain benefit from these. They abstain from meat and do not marry”* (ibid, n.p.).

The movement in the region was started by, Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani (1377-1440). The Hindu followers commonly remember him as *Nund-Rishi* or *Sahazanand* (The blissful one). Nund Rishi's teachings can be described as thoughtful critiquing the society and his loyalty was with the Kashmiri peasantry, the poor lot and his *Shruks* (taken from the Sanskrit word slokas) consistently attacked the caste system. He attached importance to yogic practice and breath control for communion with God. He preached a disciplined life like:

“Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest. It cannot be made into planks, beams or into cradles; He who cut and tilled it, will burn it into ashes”.

Aware of the existing tensions between Muslims and Hindus, triggered during the reign of Sultan Sikandar, Sheikh Nuruddin professed:

*“We belong to the same parents.
Then why this difference?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together)
Worship God alone.
We came to this world like partners.*

*We should have shared our joys
and sorrows together” (Khan, 2018).*

Therefore, unlike the Saints of mainland India, instead of criticizing Hinduism or Islam he affirmed his relations with both, the Quran and Hindu-Buddhist thoughts, promoting the universal language of love and thought of how people of different faiths could live together without any faith-based conflict.

Nund Rishi was particularly influenced by a female revolutionary Hindu mystic of 14th century Kashmir, Lal Ded, often referred as Mother Lalla, Lalla Aarifa, Lal Diddi, Laleshwari, Lalla Yogishwari and Lalishri, who was known through her poetic verses, called ‘*Lal-Vaakh*’ that were inspired by the teachings of Sufism. Importantly, her verses are the earliest compositions written in the Kashmiri language, thus constituting a vital part of the history of modern Kashmiri literature. Similarly to Nund Rishi, she has proved to be a significant spiritual bridge that connected the two religious communities. As explained in one of her *Vaakhs*, one should not distinguish between Hindu and Muslim, as there is only one God:

*“Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere...
Then do not discriminate between
A Hindu or a Musalman,
If thou art wise, know thyself,
That is true knowledge of the Lord” (Bhatt, 2020).*

Lal Ded introduced an atmosphere of communal harmony and peace in the Kashmir Valley, which till present day has been praised as priceless cultural heritage and legacy by all Kashmir people, and thus has made a tremendous impact on the collective psyche of the two religious communities (Dhar, 2007). She further instigated a critical mindset amongst the people, by revolting against all the oppressive edifices, right from secondary dependent status allotted to women to the educated elite of Sanskrit academia who were the custodians of knowledge and tradition and instead articulated the spiritual path and message in Kashmiri, the language of a common man irrespective of caste, creed or individual belief system.

*“Oh! fool, right action does not lie in fasting and other ceremonial rites.
Oh! fool, right action does not lie in providing for bodily comfort and ease.
In contemplation of the self alone is the right action and right council for you”*

In a similar manner, her disciple, Nund Rishi, criticized the oppression of the Mullahs and the Priests, promoting the practice of true worship:

He considered rosary as a snake and favoured true worship: “Do not go to Sheikh and Priest and Mullah; Do not feed the cattle or Arkh or leaves; Do not shut thyself up in mosques or forests; Enter thine own body with breath controlled in communion with God” (Najar, 2018, p.102).

Kashmiriyat

As a result of the *Rishi* tradition, the notion of '*Kashmiriyat*' or Kashmiri-ness, which refers to the ethno-national and psycho-social consciousness and values of the people from the Kashmir Valley, was born. The name Kashmir in itself is believed to be derived from the name of one of the most ancient *Rishis*, Kashyapa Rishi (Snedden, 2015). According to Snedden, Kashmir is shortened from "*Kashyapa Mir*" or the "*lake of the sage Kashyapa*", or alternatively extracted from "*Kashyapa Meru*", meaning "*the sacred mountains of Kashyapa*".

The idea of *Kashmiriyat* refers to feelings of communal harmony, hospitality, peace, equilibrium, tolerance and understanding, embraced by adherents of both Hinduism and Islam in the Kashmir Valley. Despite the difference in religious beliefs, members of the two religious communities manifested similar customs, practices and traditions, which portrayed their common ethnic and cultural ties. For example, although the official language in Jammu & Kashmir is Urdu, the Kashmiri people rejoice and relish their own language called *Koshur*, which is currently estimated to be spoken by up to 5 million people (UCLA, n.d.). Although the language originates in Sanskrit, it is believed to have been later on influenced by Persian, and it is by far the only Dardic language (sub-group of the Indo-Aryan languages), which enjoys its own written literature dating back to the 13th century (Munshi, 2010).

The syncretism of the two religious communities is further demonstrated through the frequenting of Sufi shrines by members of the groups. Sufis settled on various hills across the region of Jammu & Kashmir, where they sought solitude in their pursuit of meditation, prayer and ascetic way of life (KashmirTravels, n.d.). The local people, out of high respect and esteem for them, built beautiful shrines, which commemorated the existence of those saints (ibid). As a result, hundreds of such Holy Places could be found throughout the State, welcoming devotees from any faith.

Another important aspect of the Kashmiri culture is its cuisine. Kashmiri food maintains a special position among its members, with both religious communities respecting the established religious diet of their counterpart. Salted tea or *Noon Chai* is an essential part of the Kashmiri breakfast or lunch, while the *Wazwan*, a multi-course intricate meal, the preparation of which is deemed a form of art, is an integral part of every wedding celebration.

The Kashmiri people are also famous for their detailed embroidery, high-quality woolen garments and exquisite hand-made shawls, which reflect the richness of their culture. Part of the traditional clothing for women of both religions include the so-called *Pheran*, which usually includes a *Zari* that is an embroidery on the hem line, around the pockets and the collar area (KashmirTour, n.d.). For Hindu women, the *Pherans* are longer, stretching up to their feet, sometimes having a piece of creased cloth, wrapped tightly on the waist (ibid). Alongside with that, Kashmiri Hindu women wear a headdress called *Taranga*, which is an essential element of any wedding attire. In comparison, the *Pherans* worn by Kashmiri Muslim women reach up to the knees, having elaborate *Zari* embroideries or floral patterns around the neck and the pockets. The headdress they wear tend to be different from the *Taranga*, called *Kasaba*, being in red colour, tied around the forehead like a turban and pinned tightly with trinkets and silver pins (ibid). For both Hindu and Muslim men, the traditional clothing is

also *Pheran*, with the former wearing it together with *Churidar Pyjama* and the latter - close-fitting *Shalwar*. For Muslim men, traditional skull caps are also common.

Kashmir is the only place in the Indian subcontinent where it is hard to differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim, by only looking at their last name, since even after conversions, people have retained their original surnames (*kram*), which signified the original profession or craftsmanship of their forefathers.

In essence, as explained by some scholars, the idea of *Kashmiriyat* could be described not as an ideology, but rather a behavioural pattern, as a pluralistic culture of tolerance and sharing of common practices, instead of simply an amalgamation of religions (Remes, 2017).

Politicisation and Loss of Kashmiriyat

The ethos and spirit of the *Kashmiriyat* were largely destroyed with the onset of the Kashmir conflict in 1947. With the beginning of Islamic militancy in 1989, and thereof the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus (*Pandits*) and violent attacks against remaining religious minorities, the term completely lost its remaining substance and actuality. What was earlier known as a higher power, which bound together individuals with different beliefs, casts or creeds, was long gone.

The politicisation of the term *Kashmiriyat* already started in the early 20th century, when the excessive oppression and abuse of the Dogra rulers was deemed alien and illegitimate to the common people, triggering nationalistic sentiments (Arakotaram, 2010). As explained in-depth by Arakotaram, in its initial stages, between 1931 and 1939, Kashmiri nationalism constituted primarily Muslim political movement, which was designed to address and challenge the perceived injustices on behalf of the Dogra government, yet later on, it was expanded to include all religions and thus gave it a secular flavour resulting subsequently into the transformation of the All Jammu & Kashmir Muslim Conference into All Jammu & Kashmir National Conference. Its leader, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, recognising the need of establishing a framed and structured political narrative, which will unite his followers, evoked the tale of *Kashmiriyat*, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of the National Conference as a representative of all Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus (ibid). Through the dissemination of newspaper articles, political slogans, rallies, and religious sermons, Sheikh Abdullah and the other members of the party spread the idea of *Kashmiriyat* among the population. The politicisation of the term is particularly visible from the fact that the established narrative purposefully excluded other ethnicities such as the Jammu and Poonch Muslims and the Dogra Rajputs (ibid).

Arakotaram continues on analysing how in order for Abdullah and the other Kashmiri nationalist leaders to secure the membership of their party, they had to redefine the basis of their political loyalty. Thus, rather than focusing on factors such as religion, which would inevitably brew a discord, they decided to push forward the notion of *Kashmiriyat*, emphasising on the harmonious co-existence of the Kashmiri people and syncretism of various religions in the Valley, contributing to the establishment of a common identity. In

order to further feed their narrative, the National Conference highlighted the recent discovery of long lost historical texts, such as the *Rajatarangini* (“River of Kings”), which was written by the Kashmiri historian Kalhana in 1149 and was considered the earliest historical source, which provided chronicles of the past, emphasising on the unity and history of the Kashmiri people in the last thousands of years (ibid). Interestingly, it has been widely proven that the *Rajatarangini* has provided some inaccurate accounts and political overtones in its chronology, thus substantiating the argument that the idea of *Kashmiriyat* was more or less an artificial construct advanced by the nationalist elites (ibid).

Other scholars such as Hangloo (2012), also argue that the term *Kashmiriyat* has become a powerful socio-political tool, which assisted in singling out and shaping certain groups in the region of Kashmir. As a result, the term has been associated with a lot of vagueness and thereof controversy, highlighting the conflicting political agendas of different actors who resort to it (Aggarwal, 2008); “...a closer inspection of media reports reveals a paradox: frequent usage of the term demonstrates its centrality in conversations about Jammu and Kashmir, but the wielders of the term freely adjust its definition for their own purposes” (ibid. p.227).

In 1947, post partition of British India, tribal forces and Pakistani regulars from its Army invaded the State of Jammu & Kashmir and the Maharaja of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, Hari Singh, agreed to sign a legal document called the Instrument of Accession, accepting to accede to the Union of India in lieu of military assistance and protection against the invaders. With the onset of the Kashmir conflict between India, Pakistan and later China, the idea of *Kashmiriyat* as an appraisal of common ethnic identity was soon off-track since religious sentiments started playing a huge role in the bids of certain actors to propagate their stance. For instance, as it was the case of Pakistan, the country was emphasising on the Muslim identity of the majority of Kashmiris living in the Valley in order to brew sectarian beliefs, by fostering a pan-Islamic and anti-Hindu agenda, ultimately aiming at their merger with the Islamic republic.

And indeed, violence in the Valley began in the late 1980s, following the launch of the so-called *Operation Topac*, the brain-child of Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq, which intended to “liberate” the Muslim majority in the Kashmir Valley and establish an independent Islamic State. In 1988, several secessionist leaders and Kashmiri youth crossed the Line of Control (LoC) into Pakistan-Administered Jammu & Kashmir, received weapon training and returned to the Valley, well prepared for an armed insurgency. Pakistani and Kashmiri religious parties and their militant squads were used as a front to escalate armed attacks in Jammu & Kashmir and succeeded in injecting the ideology of communalism in the Valley of Kashmir. A malicious campaign against the minority Hindu community, Kashmiri Pandits, was launched by extremist Islamic terrorist groups using periodic write-ups in local newspapers, sermons through mosques, shouting slogans and referring to the minority community as non-believers (*kafirs*). A final ultimatum was given to this community through a press release on 14 April 1990, asking them to leave the Valley within two days or face death as reprisal. The entire community of about 350,000 Pandits was ethnically cleansed and forced to flee their ancestral homeland. In this phase, the local Muslims who resisted, also bore the brunt of

atrocities by Islamist terrorists and mercenaries as there was a massive propaganda drive against Sufi Islam and the composite Kashmiri culture, both dubbed as anti-Islamic.

Following this atrocious episode of the history of Kashmir, the narrative on *Kashmiriyat* drastically changed. Many Kashmiri leaders later on appealed to the Pandits to return, arguing that Kashmir and *Kashmiriyat* are incomplete without them (TOI, 2003), yet the response has almost always been negative (Misri, 2019). For many Pandits the notion of *Kashmiriyat* completely disappeared after their forced exodus, remaining only as a romanticised memory of a '*brokered bliss*' (OpIndia, 2017). According to the author (ibid), that is further visible from the institutionalised efforts to erase signs of their existence, such as through the Islamisation of centuries old Hindu names of places of cultural heritage like Hari Parbhat hill, which has become now Koh-i-Maran, Shankaracharya hill that is currently Takht-e-Sulaiman and the city of Anantnag – Islamabad.

With the advent of terrorism in the Valley, not only the term *Kashmiriyat* lost its intangible meaning, but the tangible cultural elements it was associated with, also started slowly to erode. For example, in recent years the traditional Kashmiri attire has been highly influenced by Arab trends, particularly for the purposes of administering a strong Islamist stance. As explained in a Report by the Kashmir Observer (2015):

“Since the beginning of militancy in Kashmir, in the early 90s, there was a concerted effort by various organisations to impose a certain kind of dress code on women. This effort was carried out in the guise of introducing Islamic dressing among women in which women were asked to wear Abaya as a modest Islamic dress. This influence is becoming so deep that many people genuinely think Abaya to be an Islamic dress rather than consider it as overarching imported attire. A feeling has been created as if it is the only modest Islamic dress that a woman can wear. It is a subtle attempt to Arabise Kashmir” (n.p).

The reinforcement of *Hijab* for women on behalf of militant groups have often been accompanied with extreme levels of violence against those opposing the order, including acid attacks in the face and shootings in the legs (CNN, 2001).

Similarly to women, Kashmiri men have also started wearing their traditional attire in correspondence with extremist Islamist instructions. Alike the Afghan Taliban who wear their *Shalwars* above the ankle, as the practice of having below-ankle clothing is deemed “sinful” owing to some readings of the *Hadith*, Kashmiri youngsters have also started copying this practice. The traditional *Pheran* finds itself oftentimes replaced by the Arabic *Kaftan*, complimented by a turban instead of the typical skull cap.

The Report further argues that the Kashmiri language, which has been serving as the backbone of the nation for thousands of years, transmitting the history and culture of the people across generations, has also been put under attack (Kashmir Observer, 2015). Three decades ago the Kashmiri language used to be taught at schools, yet the practice was discontinued in the 80s, with the emphasis of teaching Urdu instead. Such drastic move must have inevitably created a sense of detachment among Kashmiris vis-à-vis their origins and identity and despite current efforts of the Government to re-introduce it in the school

curriculum, those who speak *Koshur* are often frowned upon in comparison to those who speak Urdu or English (ibid).

The slow death of the Kashmiri language has also left a permanent imprint on the Kashmiri folk music scene. With the onset of militancy in the 90s, many Kashmiri musicians and poets, particularly Pandits, migrated, further adding to the demise of Kashmir's cultural heritage. Currently, the music industry in the region has been heavily influenced by Bollywood, thus placing a setback on reviving what has been diluted (ibid). In a similar manner, traditional Kashmiri folk dances such as *Roff*, which have been associated with vibrant social gatherings and wedding celebrations, have suffered tremendously. As explained by Wani (2019, n.p.), "*Traumatized players (womenfolk) of Tumbaknaer (the traditional musical instrument of Kashmir) have replaced Roff (Kashmiri Folk Songs) with Azaadi slogans*".

The previously deeply respected and protected Sufi shrines, have also not been spared from the ongoing Islamic militancy in the region. Numerous shrines have been completely burnt and destroyed by militants, arguing they have been "anti-Islamic" for not following the radical Wahhabi or Salafi tradition. Yet, cunningly, the very same terrorist groups, which have been vandalising these Holy Places, have also been often taking refuge in such shrines in order to avoid capture from security forces.

A prominent example of such cases is the heavy damages incurred upon the dedicated to Nund Rishi 15th century Charar-e-Sharief shrine, during a siege between terrorists and Indian Security Forces in May 1995 (Burns, 1995). In an armed battle, which took several hours, the holy building was eventually put on fire. In a similar manner, in 2012, the Peer Dastgeer Sahib shrine, dedicated to the 11th century Sufi mystic, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Geelani, was destroyed by fire, allegedly caused by terrorists, causing a wave of violent protests.

Entertainment facilities such as cinemas have followed the same fate, with terrorist groups branding them as "anti-Islamic" (Roshangar, 2018). In August 1989, a militant outfit called the Allah Tigers started terrorizing the city of Srinagar, ordering liquor shops and bars to close, telling vendors of videotapes what to sell and women what to wear (Crossette, 1989). Their first diktat was on the immediate shut down of cinemas, which was announced through newspapers and pamphlets, and those who did not obey were threatened with death (Roshangar, 2018). By 1990, all 15 operational cinemas in Kashmir were closed and violent militancy was in its heyday (ibid). As explained by Roshangar (2018, n.p.), "*Though people thought that this was a temporary situation and normalcy would soon return, the hustle-bustle of cinema halls never came back*". Many of those halls were later on transformed into camps by security forces, portraying the grim reality, where what once people identified with avenues for escapism of their daily issues and mundane life, being able to immerse in an alternative world, which brings them joy, has now only become a manifestation of the painful reality of conflict and war. Similarly, the Tagore Hall, the so-called "nerve-centre" of cultural activities, such as concerts and theatre plays, in the region was bombed by militants in 1990 (Parvaiz, 2012).

As a result, life for many Kashmiri people has become bleak and joyless, finding themselves confined to the four walls of their homes, owing to the ongoing skirmishes, *hartals* and harsh

winters. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that when basic means of entertainment are denied to the common people, their identity and culture is progressively erased and pan-Islamised, and the decades-long conflict has overshadowed the region's heritage, the new generation of Kashmiris is ignorant and unaware of the unique history of their people and land (ibid). As per a survey conducted by the Indian Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), 98% of the interviewed youngsters experienced significant cultural disconnection (ibid, n.p.).

“This cultural isolation was evident in the number of youth engaged in any kind of community service (only two percent of respondents), the number of residents seeking to leave their homes in the historic ‘old city’ due to a lack of civic infrastructure (30 percent) and ignorance about the many world-renowned religious and architectural sites in the region – a group of school children who were taken on a ‘heritage tour’ as part of INTACH’s research could only name, at most, two of Kashmir’s heritage sites and were unable to identify places like the Jamia Masjid and the Hazratbal shrine”, the report continues.

Hence, it becomes visible how for young people, who have witnessed nothing but conflict and violence, have become increasingly difficult to participate in cultural life, and more importantly, to be able to preserve the idea of *Kashmiriyat* in order to pass it onto the future generations.

Conclusion

Following the origins of Sufism in the region of Jammu & Kashmir and subsequently the genesis of the concept of *Kashmiriyat*, associated with the Kashmiri collective identity which transcends any religious boundaries, this paper particularly focused on the politics behind the term, illustrating how after the onset of extremism and gun culture in the Valley, and in the pursuit of certain agenda, political actors, which have opportunistically and thus, inconsistently, deployed it, the term has ultimately become devoid of its original meaning.

With the rise of Pan-Islamism and almost three decades of violence, religious extremism, uncertainty and instability, the national ethos of Kashmir has been altered and one wonders whether the same culture will ever prove to be a binding force for the people of Kashmir again and thereby, perhaps, be the stimulus for the resurrection of *Kashmiriyat*.

While, not everything should be considered gone to dust, in order for Kashmiri culture to withstand and resurrect itself, a multi-faceted approach should take place, alongside with the concerted efforts of civil society, local authorities and cultural and religious institutions. Reviving the Kashmiri language, through literature and musical contests, fostering a sense of pride in Kashmiri heritage, launching initiatives for preserving and restoring Sufi shrines and having a public emphasis on wearing the traditional folk attire, are just among few small steps which could act positively in the revival of *Kashmiriyat*.

“Let the old art of bedtime storytelling and lullabies in Kashmiri be the first small, but positive step in this much awaited revival.” (Kashmir Observer, 2015, n.p.)

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