



ISLAM AND THE ROLE OF SHRINES IN KASHMIR

Keřmir’de İřlam ve Trbelerin Rol

Dr. G. H. MİR*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to show the importance of the shrines as a social, cultural, religious, economic and political phenomenon in Kashmir. However, to understand their significance in Islamic context, we should aware of the Buddhist and Brahmanist past of Kashmir since the mass conversion of people to Islam could not part them with their pre-conversion orientations and practices. Thus it is emphasized in the article that a true picture of history of Kashmir cannot emerge unless it is viewed in the background of shrines.

Key Words: Islam, Kashmir, shrine, Buddhism, Brahmanism.

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Bu makalenin amacı Kařmir’de sosyal, kltrel, dini, iktisadi ve siyasi bir fenomen olarak trbelerin oynadıđı rol gstermektir. Bununla birlikte İřlami bađlamda trbelerin önemini anlamak iin, Kařmir’in Budist ve Brahmanist gemiřinin farkında olmalıyız; nk kitlelerin İřlam’a geiři onları İřlam ncesi ynelimlerinden ve uygulamalarından bir anda ayırmamıřtır. Neticede, makalede, Kařmir’in tarihinin dođru bir resminin, trbele-

* Sr. Project Officer, Directorate of Lifelong Learning, University of Kashmir, Srinagar



rin oluşturduğu arka plan olmaksızın ortaya çıkamayacağı vurgulanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam, Keşmir, türbe, Budizm, Brahmanizm.

The shrines play a significant role in socio-cultural, religious, economic and political life of Kashmir. A comprehensive study of the role of the shrines in the history of Kashmir is an interesting phenomenon. The saints being exemplars of piety and spiritual excellence during their life time gained greater popularity after their death¹ which determined the construction of shrines and emerged as centres of pilgrimage frequented by all the people irrespective of caste or creed. The valley of Kashmir, abounds in a fairly large number of saintly memorials, commonly known as 'peer var' - abode of saints, manifested profound impact on the life and society of Kashmir. However, before analyzing role of shrines, it is essential to say a few things about Islam itself as this is the predominant religion in Kashmir.

The meaning of the term Islam is, in the main peace, purity, submission and obedience. In the religious sense, it implies a total submission to the will of God and obedience to His Law. Allah asks men in the Quran to enter into Islam completely². The submission to the will of Allah and obedience to His Law saves men from thousands of submissions on one hand and accrues true peace and an everlasting enjoyment on the other. The submission to the will of Allah and the obedience to His Law should not be on blind faith, nor on ignorance, nor on the surrender to fatalism, and nor on the loss of individual freedom. Thus the true name of religion is Islam. Allah declares the veracity and true religion of Islam unequivocally³. Islam has been the religion of mankind from the descend of Adam to the earth. Adam was the first Prophet and he taught people to believe in the oneness of God and His Omnipotence, Omnipresence and Omniscience. Other Prophets followed him and they also went on preaching the same mission. From Adam (pbuh) to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), God's prophets have directed mankind to Him. They were the media of the message to humanity. It is why Islam is not named after the name of its Prophet (pbuh), as for instance Christianity is after Christ (pbuh), and Buddhism after its founder, the Buddha. Some european orientalisists do not like to call it Islam. They call it Muhmmadanism and the followers of Islam as Muhammadans. This is

¹ Luislave Lebon, The Psychology of People quoted by H. P. fair Child, *General Psychology*, p. 346; cf. Pandharinath H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*.

² *Al Quran*, Second Para (Sayaqool), Surah Bakr, aayat-208.

³ *Al Quran*, Third Para (Tilka-r-Rusul), Sura Al-Imran aayat-19.

See also Al Quran, 5th Para, La-Yuhibul-Lahu, Sura Al-Mayidah, aayat-3.

absolutely a wrong assertion because Muhammad (pbuh) who propagated Islam said, “I am not a new Prophet. I only preach and follow what is being revealed to me”⁴. The very first sentence of Quran says, “This is a book which is beyond any suspicion—God’s words. This is guidance for those who fear God. Those who believe in the Oneness of God without seeing him. Those who offer Nimaz (prayers) and those who spend in the name of Allah from what has been given to them by Allah. Those who believe in the genuineness of what has been revealed to you and to all those people who came before you. They are the people who are free from punishment because they actually fear God”⁵. This extract of Quran has the significance that Islam is not a new religion. It is a continuous process which was completed by the last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). There are numerous aayats in the Quran which say that all Prophets have preached the same doctrine and there is nothing new which Prophet of Islam (pbuh) is telling you. It is interesting to note that the Quraish of Mecca had nothing to say against Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) except that “he is not telling us a new thing”.

He is telling us the tales of *ما خذوا إلا أساطير الأولين* those who came before.

He himself said *مصدقاً لما بين يديهم* I am confirming all that you have already with you in the form of Bible, Torah and other books of God⁶.

Now let us see what the message of all these Prophets has been. It has been that there is none but one God who deserves to be worshipped. Everybody is responsible to God for his deeds which will be judged by Him on the day of resurrection. The essence of the teachings of all these prophets has been given thus “it is not worship that you turn your face towards east or west. But the real worship of Allah is that you believe in right earnest in the existence of Allah, the reality of the day of judgment, the existence of God’s angles, the genuineness of all the Books revealed to different Prophets at different times, to spend in the name of Allah and help needy relatives, orphans, have-nots, those strained in the way, beggars and to free people from slavery, to offer Nimaz (prayers) to pay Zakat, to fulfil the promises when they are made to bear with fortitude the difficulties, and to be steadfast in wars. These are the people who have really confessed in the existence of God in the right sense⁷.

This is the essence of Islam, a religion which in itself is the essence of

⁴ *Al Quran*, 26th Para, Sura Ahqaf, aayat-8.

⁵ *Al Quran*, 1st Para, Sura Bakr, aayat 2 to 5.

⁶ *Al Quran*, 30th Para, Surah Aa’la.

⁷ *Al Quran*, 2nd Para, Surah Bakr.



all true religions as declared in the Quran “Quran is the consolidation of all Books revealed by Allah before Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)⁸”. These teachings of Quran have been supplemented by the Hadith and the Sunnah. We have been told to be good neighbours, to wish well to all, to be courteous, to be truthful and to be sympathetic to others.

Islam was propagated in Arabia. It was a dynamic movement, and it spread far and wide to most parts of the world. With the passage of time, the real and simple teachings of Islam got adulterated by the philosophies of other countries which were conquered by muslim conquerors. Muslims came to Iran and they borrowed many practices from Zoroastrianism. They came to India and took up many things from Hinduism and Vandanta. Books of Greek philosophies were translated by Mamoon-ur-Rashid of Baghdad and that philosophy of Greece became part of Islam. Thus Islam in course of time lost its original simplicity and dynamism. The Muslims imitated others. In India, the idol worship was rampant. Islam was totally against it, but the Muslims took it in a different way. That is shrines of saints and relics of godmen thus came into being as a new cult. The saints and prophets who were only to be revered and obeyed came to be worshiped. This gave birth polytheism (shirk) and infidelity (kufr). They started calling themselves followers of saints and Sufis. There have been people who refused to be drawn to these new ideas and they were puritans who believed in Quran, Hadith and Sunnah in letter and spirit, but they were always a few and the majority became believers in saints rather than injunctions of Quran.

Kashmir before Islam had been abode of Budhism and Brahamanism. The mass conversion of people to Islam could not part them with their pre-conversion orientations and practices. Hence the institution of shrines widely prevalent during Hinduism and their pilgrimage continued to be a sacred act within the indigenous traditions that is why Lawrence labelled Muslims of Kashmir as Hindus at heart⁹. The entire corpus of beliefs and practices associated with the shrines strengthened their roots after conversion by putting an Islamic content into it¹⁰. Coincidentally the muslim shrines assumed important position in Kashmir and retained their traditional influence. They (muslims) could not do away with such traditions. A shining example can be put that the strategic replacement of singing of hymns (bhajan and keertan) in temples by collective loud recitations of Awradi Fathia in shrines and

⁸ *Al Quran*, 30th Para, Sura Baiynah.

⁹ Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 286.

¹⁰ Imtyaz Ahmad, *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India*, Delhi:Manohar Publications, 1984, p. 16.

mosques after every Fajr prayers contained praises to Oneness of God and salutations to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The shrines have widely recognized faith and reputation among the people and all the people looked at the shrines with awe and veneration. The unbounded faith made the people love and respect the shrines more than their lives. They would sacrifice anything dearest to them for the sake of saint and shrine. If the people in Kashmir had nothing to eat they would always donate one thing or the other to the shrine even if they had to sell some dearest household article¹¹. The faith in shrines and relics can be had from the fact that when holy relic (moe mubarak) of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was brought to Kashmir, the crowd to receive the relic was so large that many people were trampled to death in the stampede¹². When in December 1963, the sacred relic (moe mubarak) was found missing at Hazratbal shrine, the people throughout the valley got annoyed and frustrated against the ill act and forgot two times meals¹³. Similarly when the holy relic (moe mubarak) of Syed Abdul Qdir Jeelnai (ra) popularly known as Dastageer Sahib was on its way to shrine of Khanqahi- Qadriya at Khanyar, the people showered thousands of rupees on the relic that many a people who had gathered around could enrich themselves by collecting the money¹⁴. The shrines are as a means to ward off the evils and securing grant of favours both spiritual and mundane.

The impact of shrines has been so overwhelming in building bridges within the community in tonning down the differences and respect for one another. It reinforced feeling for togetherness and concern for each others welfare in the face of forces of disintegration and divisiveness. The striking similarity in observance of exuberant rituals and traditions related to shrines promoted and strengthened the umbilical ties between the Hindus and the Muslims. The religious personality of Kashmir developed since times immemorial in a unique style. The shrines worked as beacons of love and brotherhood. "Seldom in the history of mankind, so writes Sir J. Marshal, has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilizations so vast and so strongly developed, yet so radically dissimilar as the Hindus and the Muslims meeting and mingling together¹⁵". The distinctive character of shrines is the reflection and manifestation of communal harmony in Kashmir which led Mahatma Gandhi to pronounce that he had found a 'ray of light' only in Kashmir

¹¹ *Murasila Kashmiri Panditan 1872*, p. 14.

¹² Peer Hassan Shah Khuihami, *Tariqi Hassan*, Vol 3rd, Translated into Urdu by M. Ibrahim Srinagar, 1960, p. 293.

¹³ Mirza Kamaludin Shaida, *Khalasatul Tawarikh*, p. 307.

¹⁴ Gh. Mohiud din Miskeen, *Tariqi Kabeer*, p. 323.

¹⁵ S. M. Iqbal and K. L. Nirash (ed.), *The Culture of Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 27.



when the entire subcontinent was in the grip of darkness of communal passion and hatred¹⁶. The popular faith with Islamic concepts dominating the socio-cultural and religious life but interspersed with the local traditions Hindu and Buddhist elements of thought and cultural saga reflect the assimilative and synthesising potentialities of Kashmiri people through the ages and enrich the thought content and socio-cultural heritage of the valley.

The shrines provided much needed opportunity to add something jubilant and joyous in the long dreary and dull life of Kashmir during the period of urs (fair) occasions. These sacred centres were thronged by great musicians Jugulars wrestlers, dancers to display their art and skill at large gatherings at shrines. The visitors got a chance to experience the magnetic performances of artists of different areas of Kashmir. People feel lucky to watch the dambali (folk dance) performed by professional dancers of different areas of Kashmir. One can not resist the temptation to dance with dambali faqirs and the dancers fell in ecstasy. The shrines of Baba Naseeb Din Gazi at Bijbehara, Lal Bab Sahib at Zakura and Khan Sahab at Baramulla attracted the people in streams and swarms to watch the Dambali. The shrine of Qamar Sahab at Ganderbal was visited by the people mostly on the occasion of festival. Shikaras and Doongas were engaged by the people on the eve of festival. They arranged tea and sumptuous dishes, organized musical concerts with the voluntary contribution. The people bonfired a bundle of leush (piece of timber with rich content of resin or turpentine) at night on the occasion of urs at Ashmuqam as a mark of jubilation commemorating the killing of a dev (demon) by Baba Zain-Ud-Din Wali (ra) of Aishmuqam. In course of time the custom spread to people among other areas of Maraz¹⁷ (south Kashmir). In the villages where leush was not available people lighted sheaves of hay as a source of momentary recreation. The Ziarat of Mian Shah Sahib at Rainawari was equally venerated by both the communities and developed a spirit of cordiality. They gave themselves up to jollity and played with fireworks. A significant feature of this shrine was that people both the Hindus and the Muslims threw feasts on the seventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Poh¹⁸.

Before the dawn of modern era the people particularly in rural areas lived in culture of silence and their contacts and communications were

¹⁶ Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar* (Autobiography), Srinagar, 1986, pp. 242-244.

¹⁷ In Pre-modern Times south Kashmir was popularly known as Maraz and north Kashmir as Kamraz.

¹⁸ The tradition is quite contrary to the rishi cult of Kashmir. The rishis of Kashmir abstain from eating. The people in locality of Mian Shah Sahab, Rainawari prepare fish particularly on this day, *Srinagar Times*, 26th January 1989.

extremely limited. The festive occasions provided a rare opportunity for the people to come out of their stagnant social environment and interact with the pilgrims from different areas thereby providing a platform for their cultural exchange in the face of bleak cultural life of Kashmir. Arthur Neve thus remarks that there are great days to which the people especially women and children look keenly forward; for not only is their display at the shrine, but the opportunity of showing of their best clothes and jewellery and of watching the shops of city and making their frugal purchases. A bundle on the man's back contains a few days' rice and condiment, and the wife carries a fat cock as a present to the Mullahs¹⁹.

The shrines have given new face to the economy of people in Kashmir. The large gatherings and congregations on Fridays and festive occasions at shrines in Kashmir have promoted and intensified the commercial activities. The crowded streets are swarming with shops, stretching beyond horizon, selling colourful and attractive items. The purchase of any article from the premises of shrine on the occasion of urs in particular is considered as a Tabruk (gift) in the household. During urs the shrines provide artisans, craftsmen and other performers from across the valley a platform to display their exquisite work of art to a larger audience.

The mobilization of mass support through mosques and shrines is a very significant feature in the history of Kashmir. The Kashmiris throughout the ages have suffered prolonged and severe economic depression, lifelong bondage and other socio-religious atrocities which thwarted their access and involvement to multiplicity of life. The constant oppression, social stagnation and cultural isolation had undercurrents of deep frustration among the people which added to their inability to express their thoughts and feelings and raise a voice against the oppression. The shrines and the mosques particularly the Jamia Masjid of Srinagar which were indeed the platforms to assemble for political purposes and to express their feelings against the excesses and exploitation. Thus the protests and demonstrations against heavy taxation, consequent destruction of industries, forced labour, a law severely punishing muslims for cow slaughter, shifting of market from Jamia Masjid to Mahraj Gunj²⁰, keeping muslims away from Govt. services and other such oppressions by officials of Maharajas during the Dogra rule²¹ were the issues confronting the muslims. The people used to meet at the shrines and the

¹⁹ Christian W. Troll (ed.), *Muslim Shrines in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 180.

²⁰ Gh. Nabi Khanyari, *Wajeent Tawarikh*, research Library Srinagar, p. 122.

²¹ Christian W. Troll, *Op. cit.*, p. 180.



mosques particularly at Khankahi Moula and Jamia Masjid to protest against the atrocities.

To conclude, the shrines played a very important role in the life and history of Kashmir and a true picture of history of Kashmir can not emerge unless it is viewed in the background of shrines.