

Religious Understanding Among the Youth of Kashmir Province- An overview

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Abstract

Historically, Kashmir is unique in religious identity. It has both a record of assimilation and conflict in the past and current history. In this paper we found that youth of Kashmir are vulnerable to serious religious radicalization. The incessant appearance of Hijabs/head scarf and long beards and even with little murmuring of *Award*, the couplets which once Shah-i-Hamadani allowed to be chanted, are not only blurring and disappearing but seen through the prism of suspicion, mostly an innovation (*biddah*), by the puritan Islamic ideologies. The survey reflects that such an imagination has laid its roots in the valley. We also found that Kashmir has retained the assimilation power even after the trauma of conflict. We went through history, a survey sampling, interviews and discussions conducted in various colleges and schools of the valley from 2011 up to 2016.

Keywords: Religion, conflict, dialogue and Kashmir

About the survey: Survey was supported by the team of *Global Youth Foundation* in the different Colleges of the valley under the aegis Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial and Museum Library. Global youth Foundation is an NGO of which the author is coordinator-South Kashmir. This NGO works for the peace building among the youth in valley amidst conflict. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial and Museum Library was the funding agency, which is an autonomous institution under the ministry of

culture, Govt of India. The current survey started in 2011- 2016.

1. Contextualizing Religious past

The valley of Kashmir is nestled securely at an average height of about 6000 feet above the sea level in the mighty Himalayan ranges with snow covered lofty peaks. This oval shaped valley for Kashmir spreading approximately 8 miles in length and 25 miles in breadth, and is filled with magnificent scenery at each and every inch. This small piece of land is an exquisite fairy land. There is scenery for the artist and layman, mountains for the mountaineers, flowers for the botanist, a vast field for geologist and magnificent ruins for the archaeologist (Lawrence 2002: 14). Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim dominated valley. It has three major divisions which include Jammu with Hindu majority, Kashmir with Muslim majority and Ladakh with Buddhist majority.

In a population of 1.25 crores, according to 2011 census out of which Islam is practiced by about 68.3 percent, 28. Percent follow Hinduism, 1.9 percent follow Sikhism, 0.9 percent are Buddhists and 0.3 percent follow Christianity. About 97% of the population of the Kashmir valley are Muslims. Shias' live in the district of Badgam, with a majority population, and has been peaceful and has resisted separatism. Shia population is 15 Lakhs of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is 14% of entire state population¹.

The religious past of Kashmir is documented in chronicles as communally harmonious and tolerant. Hindus and Muslims lived side by side sharing their courtyards and playing tools from the very childhood. Cultural bond, although not very different, was mutually shared. The realisation of true brotherhood without the religious consciousness

¹ Population by religion community - 2011". *Census of India, 2011*. The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Archived on 25 August 2015.

flowed in the veins of Kashmir' (Snidden 2013). Buddhism, Hinduism and Animistic type religions had been prevalent in Kashmir at various points of time. Islam started making inroads in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Islamization of Kashmir in 14th century led to the decline of Shaivism and other religious practices. Buddhism and Hinduism impressed each other very much in Kashmir and there was this religious fluidity existing among the people when Islam came to Kashmir. The Kashmiri's maintained the impressions of past religions while assimilating new religious beliefs. The syncretic tradition always got carried into the culture of people (Wani Ashraf 2005: 212). Each of the cults of Shaivism, Tantricism, Visnavism and other different sects- that prevailed in Kashmir at the advent of Islam – was an amalgam of different beliefs; and all of them shared some common features. The assimilation was deep that even Hindu-Muslim marriages were a normal feature not even frowned upon by the die-hard *Brahmans* (Wani Ashraf: 213). Kashmiris accommodated each other in 14th and 16th century AD. Even the *Rishis* mentioned the Hindu/other religious phrases in their poetry while preaching Islam in Kashmir. There is no mention of complete eradication from the past religions, not even the mentioning of strife/sword for spreading of one's religion. There is no recorded documentation of serious group clashes between the Hindus and Muslims in the remote past. This does not mean that they treated each other as blood brothers. One can, however, document the serious record of assimilation and accommodation among the various religions in Kashmir (Khan Muzaffar: 2012: 313).

But there flows the counter argument to the theory of assimilation and accommodation. It is documented that when Awanitwarman came to power in 855 A.D, Vaishnavism got prominence in Kashmir. It was the time to completely eradicate the Buddhism from Kashmir. The next ruler Shankaravarman confiscated lands and *viharas*. The next ruler Khemagupta, burnt the remaining *viharas* and out of one burnt *vihara* he

created the temple of Lord Shiva (Hassnain: 1973: 28-29). It was the political decision to annihilate Buddhism from valley. According to the Aziz Ahmad, Rinchana, the son of Buddhist Ladakhi, who accepted Islam and captured the throne of Kashmir in 1320 A.D, “the very fact of his conversion to Islam from Buddhism is because Buddhism was no more a power-base , possibly not even the religion of any significant number of hose-holds” (Sarao 2009: 3-4). The way Shaivism uprooted Buddhism from the valley, the Islam turned the same for Shaivism but not with force. Pandits, who now lived in minority after the Islamization of Kashmir, hardly clashed with Muslims during the Mughal invasion on Kashmir in 1586 A.D. There were instances of near-riot, like the one instigated by Khawaja Mam in the reign of Shah Jehan, which according to the Muzaffar khan must be viewed as an isolated event.

In this context, there exists a delirium with the term *Kashmiriyat* which is perceived as *the identity* of Kashmiri culture. Some of the historians claim that when Islam came to Kashmir, the two communities-Hindus and Muslims started creating different civilizational identities; one with the larger phrase of *Ummah* and other as a separate ethnic group with different philosophies now in vogue. One community was worshiping idols and other strictly monotheistic. One would burn their dead and other would bury. They started calling each other as *Kuffars* (non-Muslims with the tag of must go -to -hell) and *mlecchas* (impure, unclean) (Wani Ashraf: 2005: 275). However, one cannot discredit the tolerance that logically would have flowed because had Muslim rulers not remained tolerant for four hundred and eight years rule of Kashmir, it would not have been possible for the Hindus to maintain their usages, institutions and laws (Anand Koul: 9).

At some point of time in the history we see that free thinking was a part of culture of Kashmir. Free thinkers among Buddhists, during the reign of Asoka, led by Maahanatika settled in Kashmir. This group is believed to have laid the foundations of Mahayana school of Buddhism. The Greek

ruler Menander is reported to have been defeated in a discussion by great Buddhist scholar Nagasena. Nagarjuna, who is believed to have lived in the jungles of *Sadarhadvan* (the present Harwan), is reported to have invited scholars for debates and triumphed over many learned Brahmans in discussions on Buddhism (Hassnain: 2011: 13). There are recorded events when religious identity displayed a uniqueness in Kashmir. Kashmiri's unique religiosity is seen when Shankaracharya, the great philosopher, tried to set the local Brahmans of Kashmir on the real path. He was in turn forced to accept their philosophies. He is reported to have laid down and prostrate before the Chakreshwari temple when a disease had struck him because all other treatments failed. Kashmiri Muslims continued many practices which were culturally Hindu. When Mir Shams Ud Din Iraqi, a scholar and saint of Shia sect came to Kashmir, he was distressed to find Muslim practices. He made efforts to restore the pure Islam (Mohib Ul Hasan). His restoration invited trouble and he had to flee from the land. Later in the beginning of 20th century when Hussain Bakhtu the founder of Ahl-i-Hadith movement in Kashmir tried to reform through puritan Islam, the reaction was so grave that maharaja had to exile him (David Devadas: 2009).

How does one perceive this ambiguity of religious identity? Kashmir valley according to PN Bamzai is known for its unique cultural ethos which has evolved through centuries in a seamless coexistence called *Kashmiriyat* (Bamzai: 1962: 29)², which is one of the dominant discourses related to the identity of people of Kashmir. When we visit the past there had been Shia-Sunni, Hindu-Muslim and Sikh-Muslim

² The known original sources of Kashmir like *Rajtarangi* in 12TH century by Kalhana, latter on followed by the works of Walter Lawrence, Dr A Q Rafique, Professor Ishaq Khan, P N K Bamzai, GMD Sufi, Mohd Ashraf Wani', Yusuf Teing, the biographer of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, and others works reflect this seamless coexistence of Kashmiriyat. In modern days it is being utilized as a political tool by many parties, however, it has its origins truly into the Kashmiri culture from the very beginning.

conflicts. The question arises whether these conflicts have to do anything with the religious awareness or civilizational identity. These conflicts according to the David have to do with one up-man ship rather than religious consciousness (Devadas: 2007: 33). The Hindus and Muslims were one and when a right erupted on 22 September 1932, fifty Hindu and Muslim leaders attended a tea party at Rainawari to build the bridges (Devadas: 2007: 33). The community togetherness was found mostly during marriage ceremonies. “We were always helped and advised by the Muslim neighbours on the wedding of our daughters and sons³” says a Pandit family from a village Dadasura, of Tehsil Tral, 45 kilometres away from Srinagar in Southern Kashmir. Dishes were served in the same palates. The Pandit-Muslim antagonism can be traced back in the historical texts of Kashmir written by Hindu and Muslim chroniclers, Jonaraja to Hassan Khoihami. There are evidences that during the time of Hassan Shah, a Shahmiri King some mosques were burnt by Pandits and also harassment of the Pandits by the Muslims is recorded. This counter argument of antagonism runs parallel to the *Kashmiriyat* argument.

Politically after the Mughal invasions in 16th century AD, the history of Kashmir is tangled with misfortune. Mughal invasions were followed by the consistent invasions of Durrani Empire of Afghanistan. In 1819 Sikhs under Ranjit Singh occupied Kashmir and in 1846 the Kashmir was sold by the British government to the Gulab Singh in the famous *treaty of Amritsar*⁴. Latter on different regimes -Afghans, Sikhs and

³ A direct conversation with a Pandit family at Dadasura Tral, 45 kilometres away from the Srinagar city. The village Pandits migrated in 1990's but some of the families never thought of leaving the Kashmir valley. Tral has many such Hindu families and according to them they are living very happily with Muslim neighbours. There is no denying that these families feel the brunt of 1990's still and some of them do live in fear due to the ongoing conflict.

⁴ The idea of greater Kashmir was created in the treaty of Amritsar, which involves the Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh division's administered by India; Pakistan administered Kashmir and Gilgit- Baltistan; and the Chinese administered Aksai Chin and Trans-Karakoram tract.

Dogras- ruled the Kashmir. Dogras There are isolated events found even during the time of Mirza Hazar khan, Afghan governor, when he forbade Hindus from learning Persian. Such events are documented by the Hindu writers, like Jai Lal Killam. But there are instances during the times of Sikh rule, when Muslims suffered. During the Dogras, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that in 19th century Ranbir Singh thought of converting the Kashmiri Muslim community into Hindu (Nehru : 2004: 228). There is more to add to the counter argument against the historian's claim of seamless co-existence of Kashmir. It was when HariSingh, the Maharaja, accepted partially through the recommendations of Glancy Commission, in 1932, a share in government jobs for the Muslims and extension of educational faculties for them, the result was *Roti Agitation* lead by Jia lal Killam. He wrote in the memorandum to Maharaja:

“The Muslamans have presented their claims avowedly on communal grounds and for communal ends” (Muzaffar Khan: 2012: 318)

In 1931, Kashmir witnessed communal violence between Hindus and Muslims due to the injustice done by the Hindu rulers to Muslims subjects. Muslims protested the injustice on educational and economic fields which resulted in the signing of a memorandum to the Lord Reading on behalf of Muslims advocating employment, mosques under the control of government to be handed over to Muslims, abolition of beggar etc. Eventually, this led to the series of protests and violence and killing of Hindus as well by the Muslim mob. This resulted in the signing of Glancy commission in 1932, the commission recommended religious freedom to all, equal rights for all in the government etc. However, this violence was directed towards government and there was less harm inflicted on Hindus as such (G N Shah: 1978). Hindus were well off than Muslims which ignited reasons for Kashmir's educated class to revolt against the Dogras (Devadas: 2007: 33). But these events are isolated and

have been consistent after 1947, when two nation theory on the basis of religion was practiced to divide India into two distinct identities. The time of partition was a testing time for Kashmir to retain its assimilative eagerness which has been there since thousands of years. In 1947, when India was communally blazed, Kashmiris' held equilibrium of brotherhood. This was the reason that despite the all-encompassing darkness, the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi, who is considered to be a champion of non-violence, saw a ray of hope in Kashmir, when the whole country was burning on communal lines can be taken as an argument for the existence of tolerance in Kashmir.

2. Conflict in Kashmir and its impact on religious understanding

Has Kashmir retained the assimilation power post-1990? Due to the conflict and eruption of militancy in 1989 in Kashmir, Islam and Jihad were used for fighting the Indian occupation, due to which many Kashmiri youth joined the ranks of militancy (Hizbul Mujahedeen)⁵ to carry out the attacks against India. Pakistan also symbolized the martyrdom by preaching jihad through various religious organizations, like Jamat-i-Islami. Hence, much of the freedom struggle in Kashmir was religion inspired. Hizbul Mujahedeen wants the accession of Kashmir with Pakistan and hence will do anything to make it happen and for this the *theory of jihad* is justified by all militant organizations and Hurriyat Conference (G)⁶ in the valley. The glorification of jihad and the local

⁵ Hizb-ul-Mujahideen founded in 1985, is a Kashmiri separatist group. It was designated as a terrorist organisation by India, the European Union and the US. HM is active in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir since 1989.

⁶ The All-Party Huriyat Conference was founded in late 1993. It is the first political body claiming to represent Kashmiri interests and grievances founded since the conflict broke out in 1989. While it has held discussions with central government

support these Mujahedeen, as locals name them, get is overwhelming. The support for them is mainly because for many students of the valley, they are fighting a just war. The doctrine of martyrdom is extracted from Quran and Hadith and hence an enthusiastic will to die for the sake of religion is developing as a trend among the new generation of Kashmir (Sikand: 2003). However, in the academics debate of jihad is blistering and there is a lot of academic work available on Islam and it's compatibility with peace and dialogue! (Abu- Nimer: 2006). The questions have been raised in the past whether Islam permits violence? And how far the jihad in Kashmir has scriptural justifications? These questions are actually not dealt scholarly in Kashmir and one finds no substantial academic study of idea of Jihad in Kashmir. Soon after the conflict began in the valley, people started to view conflict through the prism of religion. It is so because conflict has reached to a level where the life in Kashmir is exceedingly in jeopardy and in matters of life and death one often turns to religion (Mark: 2000). Besides that there has been an ideological reinforcement, the impressions of which came mainly from Pakistan and also from Muslim reformative cadence ringing in the Muslim world in 1990's. In all this religion was used for the political mobilization and for the organization of political activities.

The first lot of Kashmiri youth who began to look for violence as a major strategy to counter Indian occupation, were impressed and influenced by many world events like Iranian Revolution, the character of Umar Mukhtar of Libya, the rise of political Islam (Maududi ideology) and Ahl-i-Hadith movement. There is also a list of broken promises and injustice done by Indian state on Kashmiris which was the major and immediate reason for which religion tried to cover and justify the fighting against India. The exclusivism was the worst thing conflict

officials, the Huriyat does not speak for all the armed militant groups fighting for independence.

generated. Religious nationalism escalated when slogans like “neither east nor west, only Islam” reverberated in the streets of Srinagar⁷. The imagination of restoration of pure Islam and lost Muslim glory reflected from the videos of Hizbul Mujahedeen, recently. In one of the videos democracy was declared *haram* (unlawful) in Islam and Kashmir cause was seen beyond the nation state interest. Zakir Musa, the present divisional commander of Hizb vent his feelings and declared his *jihād* as a universal mission of establishing caliphate- the lost glory. It was a natural historical consequence which led to this drift in religious identity. One is the failure/scepticism towards the ideal *Kashmiriyat* to deliver justice at political level. This is because state patronizes this ideal but displays intolerance to any dissent in the valley. Second, at the political centre of India, Hinduism has become an ideology due to which it is very difficult for Muslims perceive Hindus of India as assimilative. Its highest law and order governing agencies has displayed injustice towards Muslims, like the hanging of Afzal guru and Maqbool Bhat. Besides that the constant killing spree of innocents has put a black spot on the India’s philosophical claims of secularism which in turn has led most of the young Muslim Kashmiris to dream of Islamic Caliphate.

Currently, the rise of BJP in the centre and the installing of communal antagonist leaders like Aditya Yogindarnath has widened the gap and more pumping of Islamic zeal in Kashmir. This is the point where a separate monolithic ethnicity of Kashmir is about to give rise far distant from the productive and assimilative Kashmir of past. The survey we conducted reflected that 40% of the students see *jihād* in the category of

⁷ See various works on Kashmir Conflict: Bharti Das, (2005) *Irritants in Indo-Pak Relations*, Kilaso books, New Delhi, Bhat S C and Bhargava G.K, *Land and People of Indian State and Union territorial*, Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, Bose, Sumantra. (2005) *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*. Harvard, 2005, Christopher Snidden.(2013) *Kashmir; The Unwritten History*, Harper Collins, India, David Devadas,(2007) *In Search Of Future- A Story of Kashmir*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, India..

greater jihad, which means to strive against own self. Some of them had a notion of fighting a war in the name of God, which was very less, approximately, 10%⁸. A very good percentage of students, more than 50 percent of the students aim for a good future (doctors and engineers). During the interviews and dinner chats we found that *jihad in Kashmir* was a reaction to the human rights violations done by the Indian army and state police from last two decades, and it has substantially less to do with the greater frame of *clash of civilisations*⁹. There are some areas where we went for interviews after 2016, wherein, Jihad is glorified as a war against India and has remained a soul purpose for the students. The southern Kashmir -Tarigam and Bugam area- of Kulgam have seen incessant rise in radicalism after 2016. Vast majority of the students, due to the non-availability of weapons, have resorted to stone pelting against Indian army and para-military forces, which has led to the killing of hundreds of teenagers since 2008.

Some of the students in the colleges had now no hope in the judicial system of India, which has from last three decades hanged some of the influential Kashmiri leaders like Maqbool Bhat and Afzal Guru. Both of them live in the Kashmiri memory as victims of Indian Judicial system. This has developed a sense of hatred towards the judiciary. Moreover, the most importantly, Narinder Modi, Prime Minister of India, stood a criminal in the collective conscience of Muslims of Kashmir. Most of the

⁸ Survey is still undergoing and in 2011 it was supported by the team of *Global Youth Foundation* in the different Colleges of the valley under the aegis Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial and Museum Library. Global youth Foundation is an NGO of which the author is coordinator-South Kashmir. This NGO works for the peace building among the youth in valley amidst conflict. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial and Museum Library was the funding agency, which is an autonomous institution under the ministry of culture, Govt of India.

⁹ Samuel. P. Huntington in his theory of *clash of civilizations* has mentioned the exodus of Pandits of Kashmir as an example of this theory. However, there is no reaction from the separatist elements to the coming back of Pandits of valley. Almost all Kashmiri Muslims welcome them home in 2015. See, various news items in local dailies of Jammu d Kashmir regarding the return of Pandits.

students see him a culprit in Gujarat pogrom. Judiciary of India gave him a clean chit and was democratically elected as a Prime Minister of India. This sent a wave of shock among the people of Kashmir.

These may be the major reasons of shift in the religious outlook of Kashmir. Since 2008 Kashmir has witnessed three huge uprisings against India; 2008, 2010 and 2016. All these uprisings resulted in escalation of militancy in which young people join militant ranks. It is fact that *theory of jihad* extracted from texts attract these young kids but if one scratches the logic of jihad idealised by the recently killed Hizbul Mujahedeen commander Burhan Wani, it is evident from his life sketch that he was constantly tortured by the state police and para-military forces. State violence is the primary cause of attracting youth in Kashmir towards *jihad*. Zakir Musa, the successor of Burhan Wani, has through his videos openly talked about the Islamic Caliphate- the reason de[^]atre for taking up the arms but one cannot avoid the 1987 failure of democratic process and rigging of elections by the state machinery, which predominantly acted both as a catalyst and cataract for militancy.

3. Religious understanding about “Other Religions” post-1990.

The post-1990 is important because armed conflict began in the valley. Soon after the conflict the Indian state began to see the rebellion against India in Kashmir as a result of Islamic radicalism¹⁰. Keeping in view its religious past it would be interesting to see whether Kashmir’s religious outlook has drifted due to conflict. In this milieu we tried to understand religious understanding of youth post-1990 not through the books and literature but through surveying, chats and interviews to see whether

10. Indian media and various

there is any shift in religious identity. We perceived that Kashmiri younger generation has retained the power of assimilation but at the same time we perceived the threat to its record of assimilation. For an example, about the religious understanding of Sikhs, we perceived that the most of the students, about 29.50% think that Sikhs are Guru Nanak Worshipers and about 22.50% of the students held that Sikhs are Guru Nanak followers. Almost 15% of the students had a very good opinion and understanding about the Sikhs and just only 4.50% of the students had a bad opinion. This bad opinion is placed in the backdrop of “jokes”, this community is held humorously responsible for. Some of the Sikhs teach, in religiously-receptive schools, like Madrasa Taleem-Ul Islam Tral, where Kulwant Singh teaches mathematics from last twenty years. Some of the reverent Sikhs like Shan Singh runs Education College’s thronged by Muslim students. The very few places, like Tral, share the Sikh population and the interaction, there in, with the Muslim population is amazing. They have little theological knowledge about their respective religions but the cultural bond is very strong, which is beyond religion. The survey reflects that the two communities had a great regard for both the religions. The survey reflects that the both communities are very optimistic about the role of religion, like they believe “religion does not teach hatred”, something deeply ingrained in the subconscious minds of Sikhs of Tral. The Guru Nanak Public School is one such example where Quran is taught. For Pradeep Singh, the Mass Communication student from Baramullah College in North Kashmir, “Islam is a wonderful religion and I am living in Kashmir not because I am from Kashmir but because of good Muslim neighbours”. For Pradeep the similarity between Islam and Sikhism is the community service both the religions provide without borders. Pradeep never carries the bad history something very positive for the dialogue between Sikhs and Muslims. He has a grudge against Aurangzeb (d. 1707) for martyring their 9th Guru but he never puts all Muslims responsible for it. He also does not believe, which

most of Sikhs do not as well, that Chattisingpora was a Muslim act¹¹. We don't find any religious antagonism or any radical change in the religious outlook of Muslims about Sikhs. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs join together on special occasions in various Sufi Shrines of the valley and search for transcendental unity with God (Bhat and Bargava 2005: 115). Such type of togetherness gives them peace and develops respect for the revered saints of the past (Marazi: 2015: 16). Gurduwaras and Sufi shrines demonstrate a wonderful blend of religiosity and are open to all faiths.

About Hindus, the survey reflected that 22.5% students perceived Hindus as brothers. They admitted that Hindus are good people. A majority of the students, almost 35% wrote that Hindus are polytheists in terms of metaphysical beliefs. The interreligious understanding is certainly less found, like no knowledge of Vedas and let alone the concept of Unity of God therein. Muslim students do not respect the philosophy of polytheism because the tradition of Islam strongly condemns it. Moreover, the mosques reverberate with the hatred towards the idea of *shirk* (associationism), which Hindus are mostly blamed of. The debate with polytheists is dealt very differently by the Prophet and Quran, who are found guilty of the one unforgivable sin of *shirk* or *Ishrak*. 'They must convert from this sin' is the absolutist tone of the Quran (Jacques Waarden Berg: 1999). There are arguments between polytheists and Muhammad on the concept of God dealing in which Prophet makes a continuous effort to make them understand the oneness of God through the *ayat*, the 'signs' of God contained in the Quran, in nature and history.

One of the students Hilal Ahmad from Boys College Anantnag during an interview had issues with the idol worship of Hindus which according

¹¹ An interview with the Pradeep Singh, currently the student of Mass Communication at Kashmir University. The interview was taken in 2016 at Baramullah College.

to him is a sin but must be respected for what they do. In return the question we raised was; how could you respect an idea which you and your tradition dislikes? The Hilal answered, “We have to see it from Hindu perspective if we have to understand Hinduism, which is that they venerate and love their religion and we have to respect their feelings so that in return they respect ours”. Kashmir has a unique tradition of being with other and this may be the reason why only 5% of the students according to the survey had a bad opinion about the Hindus, which upon analysing has much to do with the ongoing conflict with Hindu army in subconscious mind. Such an analysis shows that Kashmir has still retained the seed of communal harmony, even though they have passed through the trauma of conflict from last two decades. Students don't look into the texts of Hinduism, they see the working definition of Hinduism through the Indian state. The survey reflected the idea of religion and politics is getting intermingled into the thinking of Muslim students and this is true at larger level or international level as well. However, there is decline of religious assimilation which once was observed. The alien practices for which once Mir Shams ud din Iraqi was distressed is a bygone case now. Students wear the dresses and share the imagination which connects them to Arabia, the mainland of Islam. The incessant appearance of Hijabs/head scarf and long beards with little murmuring of *Award*, the couplets which once Shah-i-Hamadan allowed to be chanted to compete the Hindu couplets, are not only blurring and disappearing but seen through the prism of suspicion, mostly an innovation (*biddah*), by the puritan Islamic ideologies. The survey reflects that such an imagination has laid its roots in the valley.

The personal or group or national interest or even inspirations often determines the religion in a particular society (Singh 2008: 47). The events in the valley of Kashmir, which disrupted the communal bond of Hindus and Muslims, as in that famous Pandit exodus, according to the survey has little to do with the theological differences but more political

reasons were found. Moreover, 90 percent of Muslim students according to the survey in the colleges are determinant to receive the Pandits back and most of them, the time this paper is written, are returning to the homes. Although, there still is a scuffle going on between separatist, mainstream and Indian state about their place of settlement. For Muhammad Yunis, the student of Government Degree College Bijbehara, who wrote while answering the question on the pandit migration?...that 'Unless we are educated not just literate...nothing will change...I don't buy this thing that Jagmohan, the then governor of Jammu and Kashmir, is responsible for the exile of Pandits. There were people with the religious disposition who were instrumental in what happened here...see there is a time to mend the fences but a lot has gone past. There should be something more to feed the idea to bring Pandits back...not just by telling them that we open our arms for you'. Most of the students in the colleges have not lived practically with the Pandits but they have framed the opinions, like that of Yunis, by either reading the history or orally from their parents. On 22nd of July, 1997 in Sangrampura Budgam seven Kashmiri Pandits were killed by some 'unidentified gunmen'¹². In January 1998 two Kashmiri Pandits got killed in Wandhama Ganderbal. In 1998, twenty six Hindus were killed in Pran Kote of district Udhampur. In 2000, thirty Amarnath pilgrims were killed and in the same year 36 Sikhs got killed by unidentified gunmen. In 2002 Ragonath temple was attacked in Jammu killing 11 people on spot. In 2003 in Nadimarag Shopian, two Hindus were killed by unidentified gunmen. In 2006, 35 Hindus were killed in Doda by unidentified gunmen (Ganguly:

¹² The term 'Unidentified gunmen' has not been discovered but the fact reveals that some unknown agencies deliberately are involved in such acts. Unidentified gunmen have been a mystery in Kashmir since 1990's. Most of the communal breakdown was done by these agencies and the local dailies like Greater Kashmir , Rising Kashmir, Alsafa (Urdu newspaper) and even national newspapers of India, like Times of India and (The Hindu: 2009) etc. captioned the term unidentified gunmen for them. Kashmir's killing spree through these unknown agencies still continues.

1995: 35). Since December 1989 the strength of insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has fluctuated. The last time communal violence erupted was in 2008 when Hindus and Muslims clashed over state Governor's decision to allow a Hindu shrine board, the right to land use. At that time a more than 70 Muslims were killed, but in clashes between Muslim protestors on the one hand and the police on the other (Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay: 2013)¹³. Since 1990 many Muslims have been killed by the Indian army and local police which certainly is not a communal act but having Hindu army in the mind this often is interpreted as Hindu-Muslim conflict at the larger level.

In Kargil, for an example, Buddhists have grievances against Muslims (Kumaraswamy 2009: 149). The underlying causes of the conflict are more political but it has been presented as religious. The Muslims in Leh District and Buddhists in Kargil district have legitimate resentments. The resentment against the 'other' is global, Buddhists begrudge against Muslims in Ladakh and vice versa (Sikand Yoginder: 2006). However, the analysis reflects that resentment is largely, what Rene Girard calls (to have) economic and (to be) political (Girard: 2008). We asked about the recent clashes between the two communities in Ladakh to ex-vice chancellor of Islamic University of Science and technology, Professor Wahid Siddiqui. He said that "I see them as by-product of the overall dispute over the JandK State between India and Pakistan, where the two states manipulate opinion to bolster their own positions. The communal clashes in the Leh District of Ladakh first gained prominence in 1989 and 1990. It is difficult to believe that this synchronicity has nothing to do with the eruption in the valley. Similarly, if we track the intra- JandK

¹³ But there have been previous instances when Hindus and Muslims have clashed. These clashes have often been sparked by the most mundane of manners – similar to the rest of India. A motorbike rider inadvertently driving too close to a procession of members of another community; a young prankster teasing a girl from another community; not supporting the Indian cricket team vociferously enough during a match with the Pakistan team.

state animosities on the other side of the LOC, between Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK, you will see a similar pattern”¹⁴.

Reflections of survey

The survey reflects that the future generation of the valley had a very little knowledge about Buddhism. About 40% students in colleges knew little about the Buddhism and its basic tenets. Only the students of history were familiar with Buddhism as a religion. Some 0.5% student’s had a bad notion¹⁵. The bad notion, which upon interpreted may be placed again in this backdrop that they are polytheists. The students had a deep respect for Lord Buddha and the rationale is that Lord Buddha’s story is taught at primary level in General English in the educational institutes of the valley, wherein Lord Buddha is taught as a man who gave no importance to the politics but to religion and went ascetic in search of inner peace. The NCERT (The National Council of Educational Research and Training) class 10th, has a separate chapter for “Lord Buddha’s sermons at Banaras” by Anand Meena. One of the students Bilal Ahmad Bhat from Degree College Anantnag finds “eight fold path” of Buddha as venerating. According to the Bilal Buddhism is same as Islam because they both lay emphasis on peace precepts. The mental outlook towards the Buddhism changed recently in the valley when the images of Burmese Muslims went viral on social media which was followed by a number of academic articles entitled “Buddhism and violence” and with many hashtags on facebook. The aftermath of Burma events had a very strange impact on the understanding of Buddhism.

¹⁴ A direct interview with Professor Wahid Siddiqui, ex- vice chancellor, Islamic University of Science and Technology Awantipora, on 19th of January 2017. Professor hails from Ladakh.

¹⁵ Survey conducted by the team of Global Youth Foundation in the different Colleges of the valley in June 2011 under the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum Library.

Muhammad Asif is a B.A final year student at Government Degree College Bijbehara. According to Asif, “the time I saw the images on Facebook the question that came to my mind was; why they hate us?” Asif considers all the Muslims of the world a single community and when any harm is done to them in any part of the world; the kneejerk reaction from the students like Asif is “us versus them reaction”. These students hardly take other dimensions of the conflict into consideration. They perceive it as attack on Islam.

Conclusion

The global interdependence is the great fact and challenge of our time, the implications of which we must discern quickly. And that interreligious dialogue is a necessity for working together on issues none of us can solve alone. Kashmiriyat was there to decipher the challenges of interfaith dialogue for theologians and philosophers, who are working hard to articulate from the stand point of their own traditions, whether Christian or Buddhist or Muslim, how they might understand the diversity of religions in the light of their own particular heritage (Eck 1995: 27). However, most of the people we met are ordinary, not necessarily out to change the world or to save it, but simply to live in it with a greater understanding of their neighbours of other faiths. But, yes, little was preserved of the past identity which needs to be revisited.

The lack of interfaith dialogue in our valley was highly felt during the survey and there is not a single work which is done in this area, nevertheless, there are religious studies departments like, Department of Islamic Studies at University of Kashmir and at Islamic University of Science and Technology at Awantipora, and recently a new religious studies department was established at Central University of Kashmir, moreover, there are religious seminaries which preach traditional Islam,

but unfortunately no work has been done on religious dialogue yet. If we are right in our literature survey, this striving is the first of its kind in Kashmir which may open further possibilities of the dialogue in the valley¹⁶.

Recommendations

1. Previously, an initiative was taken by the ICRD by conducting some eight seminars involving more than 400 members of Kashmiri civil society on both sides of line of control. The results found during these seminars have been astonishingly well as in case of a Pandit who willingly forgave militants after his family was killed (David R Smock: 2006). Such initiatives where people are asked to study their religious texts to bring reconciliation can immensely work.
2. The concept of forgiveness and non-violence is found in all the religions practiced in Kashmir, this can immensely strive towards peace. Faith based reconciliation can also do wonders through upholding the track-two diplomacy of the governments.
3. The lack of interaction among the people of different faiths was strongly felt during the survey, which must be done through people to people contact. The absence of seminars on interfaith must be held to build the relations, like I have not witnessed a single seminar in which Shias and Sunnis participated let alone Hindus and Muslims.
4. The religion is not taught in secular institutes. There is Islamic Studies subject taught at college level but not comparatively to build a larger understanding.
5. In Kashmir there is huge impact of Madrasas on the religious outlook

¹⁶ To visit the universities in Kashmir follow the links, www.islamicuniversity.com, www.kashmiruniversity.net, www.cukashmir.ac.in.

of life, this often conflates with the secular institutes.

6. Mosques have been an area of strife, primarily Jamia Masjid Srinagar, in Kashmir. These mosques can be used, more than ever, during the Friday sermons for circulating the Islamic concept of social justice. This is possible only if mosques will be regulated by the government.

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