

Intra-Community Sectarian Conflict Among Sunnis Of Kashmir (1880-1925 A.D.), Impact, Outside Linkages And Role Of State

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir witnessed a new sort of sectarian conflict in 1880's, it was unprecedented as prior to it sectarianism had remained confined to Shai-Sunni issue. Now huge number of people entered this conflict especially at Srinagar and its environs. The research paper explored the origin of this conflict; it looked for the causes that were responsible for this conflict, the ways through which this conflict was expressed, whether this conflict was externally inspired? what was the role of state and what was the impact on society? The findings of research demonstrated that its origin lied in introduction of Wahabi doctrines which had external linkages, this was resisted by Sunni Hanafis of Kashmir. It divided Kashmir Sunnis for ever on sectarian lines. Overall the role of state remained neutral in this issue.

KEYWORDS : *Hanafi, Kashmir, Shrines, State, Wahabi.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts among Muslims, based on ideological issues which often take sectarian character are nothing new to Muslims. Muslims have a long history of these types of conflicts, Sunni -Khawarji, Sunni -Shia, Mutazilite - Ashari, Mautridi, Sunni-Wahabi, later Bhai, Qadaini etc. All these conflicts were/are based on ideological issues and they have become part of Muslim religious life. Kashmir is no exception to these conflicts and at times these have taken ugly shapes.

Kashmiri Muslims have for centuries been predominantly Sunnis. 'Ahlus sunnah' is the term that Kashmiri Muslim scholarship has used as primary identity for Sunni Muslims of Kashmir¹. It was in 16th century A.D that Kashmiri Muslims witnessed a first divide, owing to the activities of Mir Shams ud Din Iraqi, a Shia preacher². This continued upto second half of 19th century when Kashmiri Muslims witnessed a second divide, and this time it was among Sunni Muslims.

Among the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence Kashmiri Muslims followed Hanafi school of thought. It is interesting to note that the person crowned for Islamization of Kashmir i.e. Mir Syed Ali Hamadani belonged to Shafi school of thought. Lawrence has pointed towards this thing without going into detail of this³. Hamadani's this move can be interpreted as a matter of expediency, as before his arrival Bulbul Shah, another Sufi had introduced Hanafi school in Kashmir and Hamadani perhaps did not want newly converted to get confused. This Hanafi identity had much importance in 19th century Kashmiri Islam. Zutshi writes "Although the schism between Hanafi and Wahabi appeared first in the 1880's membership of the Hanafi school would become the primary form of identification for Kashmiri Sunnis in the first decades of twentieth century"⁴. Contemporary scholars have narrated the belief of Kashmiri Sunnis, which were attacked by a new group which arose among Sunnis i.e. 'Wahabis', thus leading to conflict among Sunnis of Kashmir. Primarily these conflicts were based on questions regarding qualities of Prophet; celebrating Mawlid, devotion to Sufis; visiting their graves etc, all these issues had important place in Kashmiri Muslims life. Lawrence writes "Dastagir's fame is spread in the country. The followers of Dastagir are called Qadris, but all Muslims whether followers of Dastagir or any other saints, reverence that saint of Khorasan, and his name is invoked by the boatman as they paddle and upstream in the cry 'ya pir dastagir'."⁵ Thus shrines and saints were central component of Kashmir society in general and Kashmiri Islam in particular. Zutshi's argument that this renders Kashmiri Islam practice and ideology unique in the sub-continent is right because this formed the basic ground and issue of conflict, whether visiting shrines, devotion and prayers are permissible or not.

Adding to this another question of conflict was right to preach⁶ at different religious places i.e. mosques and shrines in Srinagar. These conflicts were expressed through sectarian speeches, petitions to Govt., literature and sometimes through physical clashes⁷. An important factor to note is that these conflicts also formed ground to test and assert leadership.

II. Origin of The Conflict

Conflicts started in Kashmir with the introduction of wahabi doctrines. Lawrence witnessing in 1890s writes "an attempt was made in recent times to introduce the wahabi doctrines in Kashmir, and about 200 families in the Shupiyani Tehsil accepted the wahabi faith, but Maharaja Ranvir Singh promptly stepped out the propagandists."⁸

In Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign Hussain Batku, a resident of Srinagar, attempted to preach what was termed as wahabi doctrines. He left Srinagar to study with Mian Nazir Hussain in Delhi, he returned to Kashmir to propagate the sect's belief through Mirwaiz Kashmir⁹. He raised a cry against Pir-Muridi, superstitions, rituals and denounced worship of Aashans (shrines). But the opposition of the local mullahs was so strong that the Maharaja was compelled to give orders for Hussain's expulsion. His mission was carried on by Sabzar Shah and Siddique Hasan. They made the Mohalla off Narwar in Srinagar a centre of their religious activities¹⁰. Sabzar Shah would sell armaments to women and in that process he would tell them about Tawheed o Sunnah¹¹. Another wahabi student of Batku, Anwar Shah Shupayuni hailing from Shopian¹², moved the centre of his activities to the city in 1910 A.D. He founded an Ahli-Hadith mosque in Zaldagar Mohalla in the city, where he preached against shrine worship¹³.

The preachings of Ahli-hadith brought them into conflict with a great majority of the conservatives. For many years a heated debate took place in some mosques of Srinagar among the adherents of shrines and the Ahli-hadith, with regard to religious issues and wahabis were dubbed as 'Kutta' by the devotees of shrines¹⁴. Shopiani wrote tirelessly throughout his life, composing poetry and prose against the peculiarity of Kashmir Muslim practices associated with shrines such as Khatm Sharief, Milad Sharief etc¹⁵. These wahabi doctrines were opposed tooth and nail by the Hanafis, thus when Anjuman Ahl Hadith was formed, it was vehemently opposed by the local preachers Mullahs and Muftis of Srinagar. They issued a fatwa against the organisation debaring its members from entering mosque. However they carried on their programme, and they filed a suit against the decision of the Mullahs. The court pronounced its verdict in favour of the Ahli hadith. As the wahabis carried the day, they began to preach against the mullahs more courageously.

III. Ideology, Sacred Space, Leadership And Petitions

The ideological conflicts were entering into the very social fabric of Kashmiri Muslims, fight over sacred space, petitions to the govt. To gain favours and to turn decisions in one's favour formed an important part in this conflict as Muslims were mostly organised along the leadership lines of two Mirwaiz's¹⁶, one representing Hanafi Islam and other wahabi Islam, purely on ideological and sectarian lines. There were frequent clashes between two mirwaizs being leaders of people belonging to either Hanafi or wahabi ideology they claimed to preach an unadulterated form of Islam. Thus when Rasool Shah preached that Muhammad Hubbi was not a companion of the Prophet, the Khanqai or Hanafi sect asserted that he was one of them. When Rasool Shah preached at the shrine of Makhdoom Sahb against the wishes of Mutawalli, the latter took a petition to the Maharaja to prevent the Mirwaiz from preaching at his shrines. At the same time the Rasool Shah also sent his petition to the Maharaja asking the state to guarantee the mirwaiz family right of preaching at Makhdoom Sahb shrine¹⁷. Rasool Shah was often heard publicly denouncing the worship and deification of saints and other holy personages from the pulpits of Jamia Masjid¹⁸. When the state did not allow him to continue preaching at this shrine, the outcry from the other side became so vociferous that the Maharaja had to rescind the previous order, once again, while the dispute was formed in the theological terms, the issue at stake was the leadership of the community, since the two sides now claimed not only to represent a normative religious ideology but also a religious community¹⁹.

In another case a deputation of sayyids, pirs and traders led by Haji Mukhtar Shah Ashai in 1888 AD approached Maharaja with a petition on behalf of administration of Khanqai Mohalla asking him to pass a that would prevent mirwaiz Yahya Shah from preaching at places which by custom relegated to the authority of other mirwaiz. Maharaja's Governor asked them to maintain harmony and told them his highness has ordered to preach at a place by the consent of all members of Mohalla. It also barred Mirwaiz Yahya Shah from preaching at places where 100 residents were against his preaching. Now mirwaiz supporters had to react, they too approached Maharaja, not to stop Yahya Shah from preaching, as Mukhtar Shah was inciting people against Mirwaiz and Mirwaiz family has been responsible for teaching people Quran-o-Hadith²⁰.

Chitrlekha Zutshi who has gone through the petitions of both parties explains that Yahya Shah was labelled as a wahabi by opponents²¹. What is interesting here, is that he had studied at Deoband and almost all family members had Deobandhi affiliations. Kashmiri Sunnis made no difference between Deobandhi and wahabi, otherwise Deobandhis too follow Hanafi school of jurisprudence, it is likely that school of jurisprudence was given secondary importance and primacy to belief. Yahya Shah was blamed of calling people Mushrik (polytheists), he was dubbed as a wahabi in the guise of Hanafi. The Hanafis asserted in their petitions the shrines belonged to them and were meant only for the propagation of Hanafi school. They blamed Yahya Shah of preaching Wahabism which he had imported from Hindustan. On the other hand Yahya Shah's supporters

attacked them of being mushrik and being against tenants of Islam²². This conflict costed too much for Yahya Shah as he was fined and latter debarred from preaching at 22 Khanqas of valley.

As the conflicts were on rise, to let law and order not break down, the governor of Kashmir passed an order in July 1910 A.D. that laid out the jurisdiction of the two Mirwaiz's within the city of Srinagar. The people began to participate in this issue and most Srinagar localities participated in the literal division of the city into spheres of influence based on the location of sacred spaces and its landscape²³. So when the issue of the Drogjan mosque appeared, here a person in 1911 A.D. had applied to let Mirwaiz Ahmadullah preach at his mosque. But it was rejected and consequently it was decided on majority basis which disfavoured Mirwaiz Ahmadullah²⁴.

Conflicts among Muslims did not remain confined to sermons from pulpits, clashes on streets and petitions to govt. But a good amount of sectarian literature was also produced. Shaikh Ahmed Tarabali wrote a letter to Yahya Shah and explained to him the benefits of visiting shrines²⁵. Shaikh Ahmed Waiz, a Kashmiri Pir wrote *Rajamul Wahabiya Najumul Sahabya* i.e. throwing stones at Wahabis. According to him he wrote that book in poetic form to prevent Muslims from being misled, since memorizing poetry is simple and makes subject matter more interesting²⁶. This was translated into Kashmiri by Maulana Sidiq Ahmed Hajia as *Najumul Huda Rajumul Tuga*²⁷. Similarly Aziz ul Haqqani wrote 'Burhanul Muslimeen' in defence of Sunni beliefs²⁸.

Another work to mention is of Abu Abdul Hai Pir Ghulam Ahmed Hanafi Kashmiri entitled 'Shamshir - Birhana Bar Dushmanan'. He wrote that Ahli-Hadith were not people of Hadith but Ahli Biddah and Ahl-e-Hawa, followers of innovations and selfishness. He quoted Prophetic tradition that a cunning man would rise and start a movement in Najd Arabia which would go against the principles of Islam, the author claimed that Abdul Wahab, the founder of the Wahabi sect, was the individual, which had declared all Muslims apart from himself and his followers, kafirs and non-Muslims²⁹.

Another important work is Pir Hasans Tarikh Hasan, which has a separate chapter on Wahabi movement, he briefly discusses the Wahabi movement in Arabia, sub continent as well as in Kashmir. He briefly mentions the brutalities Wahabis inflicted on Sunnis in Arabia. He calls Wahabi movement a spark, which had already burnt the beliefs of many people and was soon to rise high in skies. It looks Hasan was pointing towards the division, sectarianism as well as corruption to belief system that would happen in Kashmir in future³⁰.

IV. Looking For Linkages, Conflict And Outside Connections

At the time when Kashmiri Sunnis got engaged into a fierce conflict with Wahabis, it had already started outside the boundaries of Kashmir. It was the same time when Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan Fazil e Brelvi, founder of Brelvi school of thought had waged a war against the Wahabis of sub-continent³¹. Going deep into this conflict we find some noted dissimilarities, though at times there are some similarities too. In the rest of sub continent there were some basic issues on which war was fought, though Sufism and Sufi shrine element was there but issues like Imkan e Kazabkzab (can God lie), is Prophet Noor, does he possess knowledge of unseen? Celebrating Prophets mawlid etc. formed some issues³². These issues though at times raised did not gain prominent place here. Here issues of Tawheed o shirk formed the core issues, celebrating Prophets mawlid and most prominently the issue of shrines (devotion and worship), with this was associated the power politics, right to preach and occupying the sacred space. Wahabis in this regard were quite unique in the whole of sub continent as they too demanded right from state to preach at these shrines where as in Arabia and sub continent Wahabis wanted demolition of these shrines.

Another important question is, was this conflict inspired or influenced by outsiders? This issue is important in the sense of growing Muslim consciousness in the sub continent at that time. In case of Wahabis there is no denying the fact that they were inspired and influenced by people from outside Kashmir. Many prominent Wahabis like Hasan Batku were students of Nazir Hussain of Delhi. Tarikh Ahli Hadith refers to activities of Wahabis of sub continent in Kashmir. Nazir Hussain, Siduque Hasan Khan and Sana Ullah Amritsari had linkages with Wahabis of Kashmir³³. Similarly people belonging to Mirwaiz family had connections with Deobandh school. Rasool Shah and Yahya Shah had studied at Deobandh, they even shaped their movement on Deobandh pattern, as is evident in case of Kashmir Khilafat committee and Jamiat Ulema i Kashmir. Another important factor was Anwar Shah Kashmiri prominent Kashmir cleric at Deobandh. He visited Kashmir many times³⁴ though failed to achieve success in converting Kashmiri Muslims to Wahabi ideology. Those who raised against cry against shrines were attacked by shrine adherents of propagating Wahabism which they had imported from India³⁵.

But the case of Sunnis is different, they too were defenders of the same belief system which Ahmed Raza Khan Brelvi was defending in sub continent. But so far no scholar has been able to establish any direct connection between the Ulema of Bareilly and Sunnis of Kashmir in the time period between 1880 A.D-1925 A.D. No reference is made to him by Sunnis, and none of his books has been found to have reached Kashmir in this period, similarly we don't find any Kashmiri who had received education at his institute in Bareilly or any of his students visiting or preaching in Kashmir. Nor has any contemporary source made any reference to any other

scholar of sub continent of the said time., whatS were referring to were their own fore fathers, ancestors and sufis either of kashmir or outside Kashmir.

Thus what we find is that though wahabis were influenced and inspired by outsiders but same is not the case of sunnis they reacted to wahabism at their own without any outside influence or inspiration.

V. Impact On Kashmiri Muslims

The wahabi-sunni conflict which started in 1880s had both short term as well as long term impact on Kashmiri muslims as it divided sunnis of Kashmir forever. Though wahabis known for their religious zeal left no stone unturned to wahabise Kashmiri muslims but they could hardly make any considerable amount of success. kashmiri muslims strictly remained attached to their ancestral faith³⁶. On other fronts wahabis achieved a good amount of success. wahabis from very early looked for institutionalizing their ideology and they gained success in establishing institutions like Anjumn Nusratul islam (society for the victory of Islam) in 1899 AD³⁷. It became their main agency of spreading their ideology, it aimed at spreading modern as well as religious education, but it set its religious syllabus on wahabi lines against biddah, shirk etc. In 1905 AD, the Anjumn set up Islamiya high school in srinagar, again aimed at spreading modern as well as religious education. Another field of their achievement was politics. Wahabis especially belonging to mirwaiz family had connections with Deobandh School in India. Influenced by their work, yousf shah set up a branch of khilafat committee in 1924 AD .Further to form cadre based movement he brought many likeminded people together to form Jamiat ulema e Kashmir on the same lines of Jamiat ulema hind³⁸. Further to reach out to masses he set up printing press and launched two weeklies 'al islam and rehnuma'. Ahli hadith another wahabi sect also achieved success in attracting people towards them, being staunch opponents of Sufism they faced many hardships but they attracted some likeminded people , through their periodicals and weeklies .Though small in number they formed a disciplined organisation.

Sunnis though faced many threats from wahabis could not institutionalize their ideology, they failed to establish madras and other institutions. It was in 1920s that they started counter reformation and got organised under the banner of Anjumn Tableegul Uslam. But they remained politically backward. They could hardly organise themselves on wahabi lines. Politically in the leadership battle between Sheikh Abdullah and Mirwaiz yousf shah they supported the shaikh group. Similarly no ideological literature periodicals and weeklies could be seen in their context. Yet even after facing such grave crisis they continued to remain in majority.

VI. Role Of State

This aspect of study attains great importance owing to few reasons

1. The first being the very nature of state, which is at times called as sectarian or to say the religion of ruling class was different from the religion of subjects.
2. Secondly it is argued that state fuelled these conflicts in order to get benefitted.
3. Thirdly that state supported sunnis or Hanafis against wahabis.

The point that religion of rulers of the time was different from the subjects is very clear as Dogras were Hindus by faith especially Ranbir singh who was very orthodox in his views. It was in his reign that sectarian conflict among sunnis started. Now what was role of state?The first thing is clear that state did not start this conflict ,as these had already started in rest of sub continent ,no party blamed state for this, infact sunni blamed wahabis of importing wahabism from outside kashmir. Also the question that state benefitted from this conflict as this kept muslims busy in their own business so that they may not rise against state needs objective study, as state benefits from things like this irrespective of the thing weather it fuells this or not ,but at times state also faces problems in maintaining law and order. Now which sect was favoured or supported by state? Normally it is thought state supported Hanafis , owing to the previous record of wahabis in rest if sub continent and that Hanafis being a majority sect, would support state whenever needed. When one makes an objective study, it becomes clear that role of state was neutral in this matter³⁹. As in case of Pather Masjid which was handed over to wahabis though sunnis were in majority⁴⁰, also when wahabis were debarred from entering mosques court gave decision in their favour,otherwise it would not have been difficult for state to influence decision of judiciary. Also in case of Mirwaiz yousf shah who got many benefits from state, Rs 500, shawls etc. Which were then severely criticised by followers of shaikh Abdullah. In the same way state also decided in favour of Sunnis, as mentioned in previous pages.

Thus it is clear that these were internal issues of Sunni Muslim community, inherited by them and imported to them. State had nothing to do what so ever with their emergence and its role was neutral in this issue.

VII. Conclusion

The conflict which started in 1880's was inherent conflict of Muslim community. It began with introduction of Whabism, which was an outside phenomenon, this motivated and inspired by outsiders. Sunnis of Kashmir responded to this conflict at their own without any external support. Thus it divided the Sunni Muslims of

Kashmir forever. It had political implications as the opponents of Mirwaiz later supported Sheikh Abdullah. The overall role of state remained neutral in this issue and also it did not generate this conflict.

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