

LANGUAGES OF BELONGING

Islam, Regional Identity, and the
Making of Kashmir

CHITRALEKHA ZUTSHI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico city Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

Copyright © 2004 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York, 10016
www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Zutshi, Chitralekha 1972-
Languages of belonging : Islam, regional identity, and the making of
Kashmir / Chitralekha Zutshi.
p.cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-521939-2 (Hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Jammu and Kashmir (India)—History. 2. Islam and
politics—India—Jammu and Kashmir. I. Title.

DS485.K25 Z88 2003

954.6—dc22

2003015966



NA 526941

Printing number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in England
on acid-free paper

*For my parents
Lalita and Bal Krishan Zutshi*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>Glossary</i>	xiv
Introduction	1
Kashmir: Land and Geography/Sources and Contents	
Chapter One: <i>Mulk-i-Kashmir</i>: History, Memory, and Representation	16
The Immortalized Mystics of Kashmir: Lal Ded and Nund Rishi/ A Threat to <i>Kashmiriyat</i> ? The Mughals in Kashmir/Bagh-i-Sulei- man: The Articulation of Kashmiri Regional Belonging during Afghan and Sikh Rule/The Period of Transition: Religious and Regional Identities during Early Dogra Rule	
Chapter Two: Political Economy and Class Formation in Kashmir	57
Peasants and Bureaucrats: The Rice Economy of the Kashmir Valley, 1846–1887/City on a Shawl: The Srinagar Shawl Trade, 1846–1883/The Impact of Colonial Intervention I: The Land Settlement, 1885–1914/The Impact of Colonial Intervention II: Trade and Commerce, 1885–1914/Transformation and Conflict in Srinagar City, 1880–1930	
Chapter Three: Contested Identities in the Kashmir Valley	118
Disputes over Sacred Space in Late-Nineteenth-Century Srinagar/ Homeland and Community in Kashmiri Discourse at the Turn of the Twentieth Century/State, Community, and the Law: Pol- iticization of Kashmiri Muslim Identities in the Early Twentieth Century/Poetic Renditions of Kashmiri Muslim Identities/Urban Politics and the Emergence of a New Muslim Leadership	

Chapter Four: Education, Class, Language, and Identity	169
Education and the Dogra State, 1846–1889/Education, the Dogra State, and Kashmiri Muslims, 1889–1915/Education, Kashmiri Muslim Demands, and the Dogra State, 1916–1930	
Chapter Five: The Politics of Identity: Religious Community, Region, and Nation in Kashmiri Discourse	210
1931: Events, Meanings, and Outcomes/1932–1933: Rise of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and the Muslim Conference/1934–1939: A Community, Regional, or National Ideology?	
Chapter Six: Kashmiri Visions of Nationalism and Regionalism	259
Revivalism vs. Nationalism? Kashmir in the Early 1940s/The Critique of “Nationalism” and “Communalism” in Kashmiri Political Discourse/The National Conference under Siege: Naya Kashmir and the Kashmiris, 1944–1946/India, Pakistan, or Independence? Kashmir in 1947/“Truth about Kashmir”: Kashmiri Politics in Postcolonial India, 1947–1953	
<i>Conclusion</i>	323
<i>Bibliography</i>	334
<i>Index</i>	353

PLATES

1 View of the Kashmir Valley. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	17
2 View of Charar Sharif, Sheikh Nooruddin’s Shrine. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	24
3 Shawl with Map of Srinagar. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection. Source: Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar.	51
4 Rice fields in the Kashmir Valley. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	60
5 Crowds thronging at a fair around Hazratbal Mosque. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	79
6 View of Srinagar city. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	108

7 Jama Masjid, Srinagar. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	123
8 Shah-i-Hamdaan Shrine, Srinagar. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	124
9 Hazratbal Mosque, Srinagar. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	125
10 Maqdoom Sahib Shrine, Srinagar. From Chitralekha Zutshi’s collection.	126

MAPS

1 Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir and its Main Administrative Divisions, c. 1846–1947.	10
2 Srinagar City, c. 1920. Source: Srinagar State Archives.	106
3 The Disputed Area of Kashmir and Neighboring Regions.	312

CHAPTER I

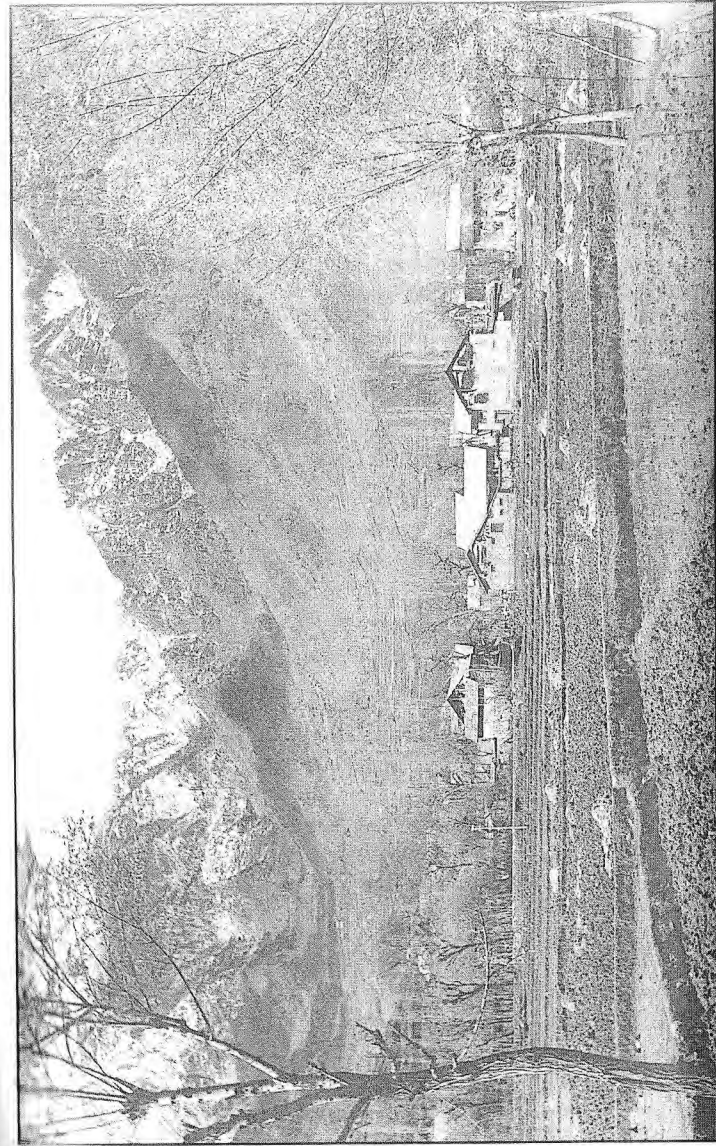
Mulk-i-Kashmir

History, Memory, and Representation

Even a cursory examination of the political culture of pre-colonial Kashmir highlights the bankruptcy of the concept of an immutable Kashmiri identity, particularly its inability to engage with various forms of belonging. We need to trace the main themes in the political culture of the Valley from the fourteenth to the mid-nineteenth century in an attempt to disentangle representations of Kashmir in popular and scholarly discourse from historical fact. While being far from the last word on pre-colonial Kashmiri history, such tracing does provide an initial thematic framework for a foray into this particularly understudied period.

I suggest here that the political culture of pre-colonial Kashmir was defined by its creative interaction between a variety of languages of belonging. The narrative on regional belonging in this period certainly transcended religious affiliations in expressing a vision of Kashmir as a homeland that had to be saved from destruction by outsiders. At the same time, it allowed for an accommodation, not an erasure, of religious difference. Kashmiris were quite aware of belonging to religious groups with a certain set of rules that set them apart from those outside the bounds of those rules. But they recognized larger affiliations, such as those with the land they lived in and the people who belonged to the region. Pre-colonial Kashmiri public discourse exhibited a comfortable coexistence of regional specificity and religious universality.

Contrary to popular belief, it was not the isolation of the Kashmir Valley that produced narratives of regional and religious belonging; rather, it was the Valley's links with the world outside that helped reinforce the poetic discourse on identities in the mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries. Instead of seeing the Valley and its inhabitants as being fettered by the mountains that surround them into



1. View of the Kashmir Valley. Chitralekha Zutshi's collection.

articulating an immutable, insular identity,¹ the use of another geographic metaphor, that of the river, is more apt in discussing the political culture and discourse on identities in the region. The river Jhelum, which has carved the Kashmir Valley out of the mountains and defines its geographic boundaries, is in constant motion, changing its course through the rough and tumble of the Valley's landscape, even as it continues to transform it. The articulation of identities by inhabitants of the Valley is a similar process of interaction—in this instance between socio-political factors, religious affiliations, and shifting geographic contexts.

The Immortalized Mystics of Kashmir: Lal Ded and Nund Rishi

Scholarship on religious identities in various regional settings of pre-colonial India is pervaded with the notion of religious syncretism, a term which, apart from being inadequately defined, does not satisfactorily address the issue of religious difference. By implying the existence of an amalgamated religious culture drawing from various religious traditions, the term not only erases the possibility of the formal appearance of confessional difference, but in the process creates further dichotomies, such as elite and folk religion and orthodox and mystical religion. Thus, it relies on normative understandings of religion, particularly Islam, judging the articulations of religious identity on the basis of their conformity to an unchanging body of religious thought, defined for instance by the *sharia*.² Scholarship on pre-colonial Kashmir suffers from similar limitations, since historians of Kashmir are particularly insistent on defining the period in terms of a fluidity of religious boundaries and the presence of a syncretic religious culture, both integral aspects of *Kashmiriyat*.³

¹ Pandit Anand Koul, for instance, described Kashmir as "a fairy land of peace and contentment, removed from the terrors and turmoils of the world and wrapped around the devotional silence of the Himalayas." See Anand Koul, *Lalla Yogishwari: Her Life and Sayings* (Lahore: Mercantile Press, 1900), 7.

² See, for instance, Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1201–1760* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1993); and Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³ Even scholarship that has attempted to transcend the concept of syncretism,

To this end, scholars present the mystic tradition in Kashmiri poetry as an example of "exemplary tolerance between different sects professing various religions."⁴ Moreover, they view it as a transcendental experience that was somehow far removed from everyday reality: "In this happy and tolerant climate the fertile mind of Kashmiris geared its intellect to unravel the unknown—beyond speech and mind. Mysticism is an exercise in the quest of the spirit. It is the identification of the self with the super-self."⁵ The collective memory of two historical figures, both mystic poets from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is critical to these arguments for a uniquely Kashmiri syncretic culture. Both figures invariably make their appearance divorced from the historical context.

Scholars and lay persons alike recognize Lala Arifa—or Lal Ded, as she is commonly known—as the first mystic poet of the Kashmir Valley. She is credited with having introduced and given substance to the idea of *Kashmiriyat* through her verses, which have formed the cultural repertoire of generations of Kashmiris.⁶ The potent symbolism

such as Mohammad Ishaq Khan's work in the case of medieval Kashmir, has only succeeded in emphasizing the uniqueness of the Kashmiri Muslim identity. Khan argues against the portrayal of Kashmiri Islam as syncretic, since in his view the syncretic tradition has been a necessary concomitant of the process of Islamization rather than its culmination. Thus, for Khan, the exaggerated emphasis on "folk Islam" is liable to create the impression that the followers of the so-called folk Islam are not eventually moving in the direction of sharia-oriented Islam. As Khan correctly points out, it would be fallacious to assume that Kashmiris were unaware of the normative ideal of Islam and were not striving to attain it. However, it is clear that Khan's argument rests on the teleological assumption of the existence of a singular Muslim identity, encompassed by the sharia, which although defining itself through the local culture, ultimately dispenses with these local cultural elements over time in pursuit of true Islamization. See Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century)* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1994).

⁴ K.N. Dhar, "Mysticism in Kashmiri Poetry," in M. Amin Pandit, ed., *Alamdar-i-Kashmir: Standard Bearer, Patron-Saint of Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 1997), 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lal Ded's verses grace most sites on the world-wide web dedicated to the advancement of Kashmiri self-determination. See, for instance, <http://www.bumstead.com/kasheer/kashmir.html>, entitled "The Rape of Kashmir," which puts forth the following verse by Lal Ded: "I could disperse the southern clouds/I could

of the figure of Lal Ded is evident from the intense debate generated around the question of her religious affiliation. Kashmiri Pandits claim she was a Shaivite and a member of their community, while Kashmiri Muslims argue that though she was born in a Kashmiri Pandit family, Lal Ded accepted Islam later in her life.⁷ Despite presenting a complicated picture of the mystic poetess in his pioneering work on the transition of Kashmir to Islam, Ishaq Khan falls into arguing that Lal Ded was more influenced by Islam, which she adopted, than by Kashmiri Pandit Shaivism, into which she was born. To this end he states that “the presumption that she wanted to reform the Hindu society flounders on the bedrock of her seminal historical role which speaks more of her association with Islam than with Saivism.”⁸

Herein lies the irony and contradiction: the poet who represents the uniquely Kashmiri culture that transcends religious boundaries has herself become the center of contentious debate over those very boundaries between the two communities of the region. Rather than engaging in this debate, one is better served by examining Lal Ded’s verses in the context of the social and political landscape of fourteenth-century Kashmir. Lal Ded was born when Kashmir was undergoing plunder and pillage by a Tartar warrior named Dalchu in the early part of the fourteenth century. She witnessed the conversion of the Tibetan Buddhist ruler of Kashmir, Richen, to Islam and the establishment of the Sultanate in Kashmir under Sultan Shamasuddin, who took over the throne after marrying Richen’s widow, Kota Rani, in 1339.⁹ Lal Ded came of age in a society within which Islam had just begun to be introduced through the activities of the Sayyids of Persia. Without going into the intricacies of Kashmir’s transition to Islam, suffice it to say that this was a period of social and political turmoil as a new dynasty was established and a new religion came to be propagated with much fervor, particularly among the ruling classes.

empty the waters of the ocean/I could cure the affliction of Leprosy/But I could not make an idiot understand the truth.”

⁷ Madhu Kishwar, “Kashmir and Kashmiriyat: The Politics of Language, Religion and Region,” in Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 280.

⁸ Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam*, 73.

⁹ For a detailed description of the political history of this period, see R.K. Parmu, *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir, 1320–1819* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969) and Sufi, *Kashir*.

Lal Ded, far from a passive spectator to these changes, played a significant role in setting the course for the integration of these changes into the historical memory of the Kashmir Valley. Far removed from the preoccupations of courtly writers, she was able to capture the changes occurring in the social landscape of the Kashmir Valley via her simple Kashmiri verse. That Lal Ded was aware of the changes in her surroundings—which were leading to a redefinition of state, society and religious affiliations—and capable of questioning them—is amply clear from her verses. For instance, she sang:

Behold a wise man dying of hunger,
As an autumnal leaf shed from the bough;
And behold the oaf lashing the cook,
I languish to break the fetters of my delusion.

The fans, the canopy, the chariot, the throne,
The revelry, dancing, and the cushioned beds;
Have everything and yet you are not safe,
It cannot allay your dread of death.¹⁰

Although heavily influenced by Sanskrit, her poems constitute the earliest extant literature in Kashmiri either in oral tradition or manuscript form.¹¹ For this reason scholars have called her the forerunner of medieval Hindu reformers, such as Kabir and Nanak, who were part of the Bhakti movement and made significant contributions to the development of regional languages in other parts of the Indian subcontinent.¹²

The reason Lal Ded’s poetry is so essential for votaries of *Kashmiriyat* is self-evident from an examination of her verses. These are suffused with a sense of the fluidity of religious boundaries, and this has been interpreted as a manifestation of the Kashmiri ethos of tolerance. In the following verse, for instance, she seems unable to decide between being a follower of Allah or of Shiva:

¹⁰ Naji Munawwar and Shafi Shauq, *Kashur Adabuk Tawarikh* [History of Kashmiri Literature] (Srinagar: Department of Kashmiri, University of Kashmir, 1992), 20.

¹¹ G.L. Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir 1339–1846: An Introduction* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 27.

¹² See G.L. Tikku, “Mysticism in Kashmir: In the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Muslim World*, LIII (July 1963): 226–33.

I said la illah il Allah
 I destroyed my Self in it
 I left my own entity and caught him who is all-encompassing
 Lalla then found God
 I went to look for Shiva
 I saw Shiva and Shaitan (devil) together
 Then I saw the devil on the stage
 I was surprised at that moment
 I adore Shiva and Shiva's house
 When I die, what then?¹³

In the following famous verses, she openly questions the Brahmanical orthodoxy of the period:

Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere
 Then do not distinguish between a Hindu and Mussalman.
 If thou art wise, know thyself
 That is true knowledge of the Lord.¹⁴
 I gave up falsehood, deceit, untruth,
 I saw the one in all fellow beings, and
 Preached the same doctrine to the mind.
 What then is the inhibition in eating
 The food offered by a fellow human being?¹⁵

Lal Ded was undoubtedly against organized religion, particularly as represented by Brahmanism, and probably laid the groundwork for the propagation of Islam among the Kashmiri populace by the Rishis. Furthermore, her verses illustrate the union of the streams of Shaivite philosophy and Sufism in fourteenth-century Kashmir. However, it is significant that her poetry does not attempt to present the vision of a land where religious affiliations do not matter. Instead it presents society in a state of flux, with religious and regional affiliations in the process of redefinition. To identify an "ethos of tolerance" in Lal Ded's verse is an anachronistic reading of the Kashmiri mystic tradition, which was revived and popularized, significantly, in the 1930s and 1940s by proponents of an emergent Kashmiri nationalism.

¹³ Hafiz Mohammad Inayatullah, *Lalla Arifa barzabane Kashmiri* [Lalla Arifa in Kashmiri] (Lahore: Din Mohammad Electric Press, undated), 14–15.

¹⁴ Koul, *Lalla Yogishwari*, 61.

¹⁵ Nil Kanth Kotru, *Lal Ded: Her Life and Sayings* (Srinagar: Utpal Publications, 1989), 29.

Considered Lal Ded's spiritual successor, Sheikh Nooruddin or Nund Rishi (b. 1378), is another figure central to the memory and meaning of *Kashmiriyat*. Again, both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims claim him as their spiritual guide, the former referring to him as *Shazanand* (one who has attained ultimate truth) and the latter calling his verses the *Koshur Quran* (Kashmiri *Quran*).¹⁶ Since Sheikh Nooruddin is more squarely placed in the Islamic tradition, his writings have had a significant impact on the discourse on Kashmiri Muslim identities. Mohammad Ishaq Khan, in the only English full-length study of the Rishi movement—of which Nooruddin was the founder—points out that the mystic's religious career and the development of Kashmiri Muslim society are integrally connected: "An understanding of Islam's historical manifestation in Kashmir, therefore, requires a prior understanding of the man who influenced the Kashmiri mind more than any other religious leader."¹⁷ Thus Khan sets about to discover not only the mystic Nooruddin but also the maker of what he calls the "Kashmiri Muslim identity." The potency of Nooruddin to proponents of *Kashmiriyat* lies in the fact that not only was he a Muslim, but, according to them, he practised a kind of Islam that blurred religious boundaries. As Khan puts it: "Nooruddin's poetry expresses the cultural style of the Islamic civilization in a regional setting . . ."¹⁸ By effectively bridging the gap between religious thought and its regional backdrop, Nooruddin's poetry provides a ready vehicle for Kashmiri nationalists.

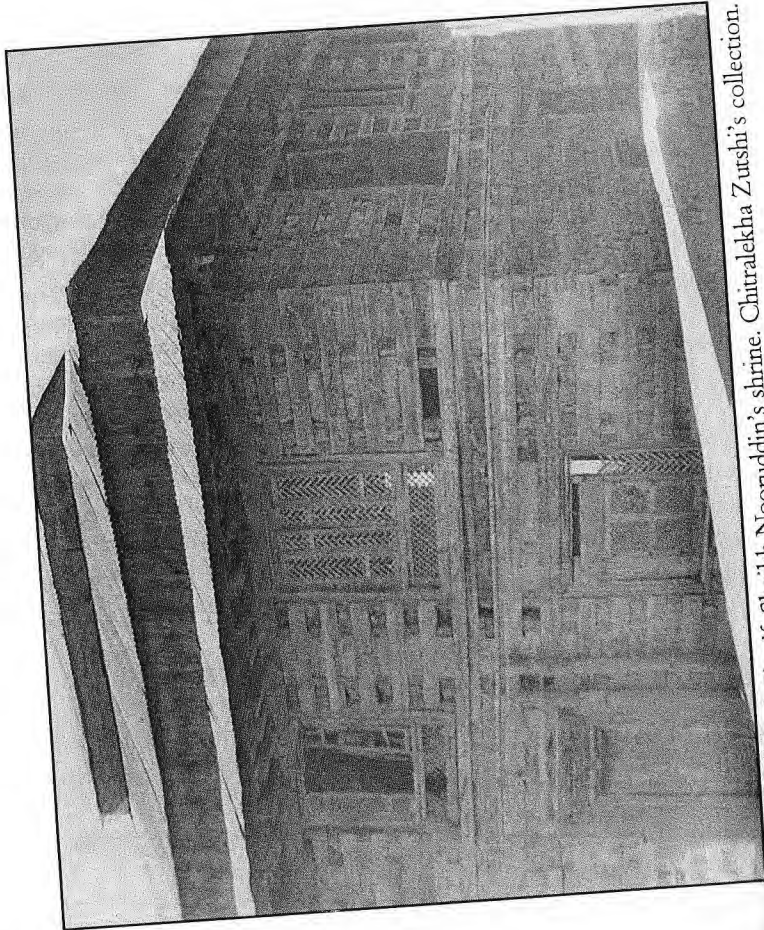
A more fruitful means of analysing the poetry and social significance of the two Kashmiri mystics, particularly Nooruddin, is to place them in the context of what Sheldon Pollock has referred to as "vernacularization," a process occurring in the early centuries of the second millennium in South Asia and other parts of the world, through which "the universalistic orders, formations, and practices of the preceding millennium were supplemented and gradually replaced by localized forms."¹⁹ It was during the course of the vernacular millennium that,

¹⁶ This title refers to the fact that the bulk of Nooruddin's poetry is a Kashmiri rendition of the *Quran* and *Hadith*. G.N. Gauhar, *Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi)* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 54.

¹⁷ Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹ Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500," *Daedalus* 127 (2) (Summer 1998): 41.



2. View of Chrar Sharif, Sheikh Nooruddin's shrine. Chitralekha Zutshi's collection.

according to Pollock, "cultures and communities were ideationally and discursively invented,"²⁰ leading to the creation of new regional worlds. The emergence of regional languages as the languages of literary culture played a significant role in the development of these regional cultures. It is clear that the activities of Lal Ded and Nund Rishi fit in with Pollock's general theory, since these individuals began to compose texts in a language "that did not travel," perhaps even with the knowledge that it did not travel as far as Sanskrit or Persian, ultimately leading to the creation of a regional ecumene in late medieval Kashmir.

Sheikh Nooruddin's poetry was composed in the diction used by common Kashmiris, and although dominated by the message of escape from this life of illusion, is redolent with a sense of place. Regarding Nooruddin's influence on Kashmiris and their language, Khan writes: "As such, Kashmiri owes a great deal to Nooruddin since it is through his compositions that it articulated the expanding complex of impulses and responses, and orchestrated the music of consciousness. Kashmiri, in the ultimate analysis, is the verbal correlative of people's genius; it symbolises . . . a way of life."²¹ Regardless of whether one can view Nund Rishi's poetry in terms of a self-conscious articulation of a break with the earlier more global and transregional culture in order to produce a regional alternative, it is undeniable that his poetry did indeed contribute to the development of the Kashmiri language, and later to the articulation of a self-consciously Kashmiri culture.

However, there were distinctive features in the process of vernacularization in Kashmir, particularly when compared to the kingdoms of southern India. Foremost, in Kashmir, the primary site for the production of vernacular culture at the outset was not the royal court, as was the case with vernacularization elsewhere in the subcontinent. In fact, it was not the courtly elite that sponsored vernacularization, but religious leaders such as Nooruddin, who specifically separated themselves from the court, which continued to operate in a classical, universal language, namely Persian. Nooruddin was able to create a framework for a regional culture through his use of the Kashmiri language to propagate a devotional religion, which was, significantly,

²⁰ Ibid., 42.

²¹ Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, 107.

outside the purview of the state. In fact, the reigning Sultan of Kashmir, Ali Shah (1413–20), ordered him arrested for preaching rebellious ideas to the people.

Second, religious and regional cultures were being articulated in tandem with one another in Kashmir so that the process of Kashmir's transition to Islam is integrally linked with the process of vernacularization in the region. Sheikh Nooruddin's poetry contributed to the production of a regional culture on the site of the development of a new religious culture. As Pollock points out, in southern India vernacular writings themselves became new scriptures, thus obviating the need for the translation of Sanskrit holy texts into the vernacular.²² In Kashmir, while Rishi writings did indeed become sacred in a sense, Sheikh Nooruddin's object was first and foremost to bring the message of Islam to the people of Kashmir, whom he exhorted to embrace Islam as encapsulated in the *Quran* and *Hadith*. Contrary to presentations of Nooruddin as a Rishi who was neither Hindu nor Muslim but one who followed a syncretic religion, he was clearly a Muslim. As he himself said, "I uttered the Kalima, experienced the Kalima/Converted myself into the Kalima/Kalima permeated into every fiber of my being/I reached the abode of the abodeless with Kalima."²³ In fact one of his poems, dedicated to explaining the meaning of being Muslim, could easily be placed in the early twentieth century, when Kashmiri Muslims were redefining the boundaries of their community. A couple of verses from his poem suffice to illustrate the point:

One who does not neglect one's daily duties,
Who longs to live by the sweat of one's brow,
Who controls the bestial anger of one's mind,
Who shows fortitude in provocation,
May be truly called a Muslim.

He will be among the people of paradise
Who shares meals with the hungry,
(Who) is obsessed with the idea of removing hunger,
Who humbly bows (in prayer) in all sincerity,

²² Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium," 63.

²³ G.R. Malik, "Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani—The Mystic Poet of Kashmir," in Kalla, ed., *Literary Heritage of Kashmir*, 146.

Who scorns anger, greed, illusion, arrogance, and self-conceit,
May truly be called a Muslim.²⁴

Third, to make a sharp distinction between regional and universalistic cultures in the Kashmir case would be to overstate the point. While in other parts of the subcontinent, particularly southern India, votaries of regional cultures were attempting to self-consciously break away from the universal ecumene, their Kashmiri counterparts, writing in a vernacular medium, nevertheless expressed a universal humanism, as reflected in the above verse. After all, the regional culture of the Valley was being articulated in the universal language of Islam. And although Nooruddin's Islam was clearly affected by its Kashmiri context, it was quite as much a part of the universal Islamic faith as an expression of the particulars of Kashmiri Islam. If asked, Nooruddin would most definitely have contradicted the notion that the Islam he preached was a version peculiar to the Kashmir Valley.

Finally, it would be fallacious to argue that the classical language, Persian, which was part of a larger—one can argue Islamic—cultural space, declined as a literary language in this period. It would also be misplaced to create a dichotomy between Persian as the language of non-Kashmiri rulers and Kashmiri as the language of the people of Kashmir, since elite Kashmiris adopted Persian as their literary language and some of the most potent expressions of regional belonging from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries are, in fact, in Persian. Sayyid Muhammad Amin Uvaysi, popularly known as Baba Mir Uvays, was a mystic from the Sultanate period who had ties to the ruling dynasty and wrote primarily in Persian. Uvaysi's verse illuminates the interaction between region and religion as well as the particular and the universal:

The whole creation belongs to me:
Beyond the void is my abode.

O supplicants of Time, listen attentively:
My banquet spreads from Qaf to Qaf.²⁵

²⁴ Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, 124.

²⁵ Qaf or Jabl al-Qaf in Islamic cosmology is the name of the mountains surrounding the terrestrial world; the expression Qaf ta Qaf implies the whole terrestrial world. See Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 24.

Know that this world of being is naught;
The true world, be sure, belongs to me.

He whom you find to be without any trace
Is watchman at my gate.

I chose solitude in Kashmir,
For this universe is my garden.²⁶

As a Muslim, the poet accepts the whole world as his abode and, at the same time, recognizes that his chosen place of belonging is Kashmir. Since he is a Muslim, the whole world belongs to him; as a Kashmiri, he belongs to Kashmir; and yet this poet's chosen language of expression is Persian, not Kashmiri.

The mystic tradition, for self-evident reasons, has been central to expressions of *Kashmiriyat*. The mystic poets of Kashmir, perhaps unintentionally, laid down the framework for a regional culture defined by the emergence of a vernacular, which coexisted with the emergence of a religious culture defined by a universal religious faith. However, the image of Kashmir as a place where Islam and religious culture were somehow different, and more accepting, needs to be qualified. Medieval Kashmir was a society in transition where social, political and religious affiliations were in a process of redefinition. Mystic poets, on the site of poetry and religious debate, were able to capture this fluidity most evocatively, providing Kashmiri nationalists with rich ammunition for the propagation of *Kashmiriyat*.²⁷

A Threat to *Kashmiriyat*: The Mughals in Kashmir

P.N. Bazaz laments in his book: "Meanwhile, as a last flicker of the dying Kashmiri Nationalism, the patriotic nobles put Usuf's son Yaqub Khan on the throne and fought vigorously against the Mughal

²⁶ Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 23–4.

²⁷ So strong is the association between Nooruddin and the vision of this uniquely Kashmiri cultural identity that while most shrines became centers of dispute between rival factions of Kashmiri Muslim religious leaders, and between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims in the twentieth century, the shrine dedicated to the memory of Nooruddin at Charar-Sharif remained the only uncontested sacred space in the Kashmir Valley. When the shrine burnt down in 1995, Kashmiri political groups

armies . . . But Yaqub Khan proved unfit as a ruler," and patriotic Kashmiris had no alternative but to seek the Mughal emperor's help to liberate the Valley from his tyrannical rule.²⁸ According to G.M.D. Sufi, the Mughals weakened the courage of the hitherto martial Kashmiris and broke their independent spirit.²⁹ Almost all works on the history of Kashmir consistently portray the incorporation of the Kashmir Valley into Mughal India after Chak rule as the beginning of the end of Kashmiri independence, when *Kashmiriyat* came under threat from outsiders. In Bazaz's view, Mughal governors proved to be "tyrannical, barbarous and uncultured," and encouraged Hindu-Muslim and Shia-Sunni factionalism among the tolerant and peace-loving Kashmiris.³⁰ While these scholars lament the decline of Kashmiri cultural identity in the Mughal period (1586–1758), I would argue that it was precisely in the Mughal period that Kashmiri poets first began to self-consciously articulate a sense of regional belonging.

Kashmir occupied a special place in the psyche of the Mughal emperors. Even as it was administratively integrated into the larger empire and began to share in the prosperity enjoyed by other Mughal provinces, Kashmir was different in that the Mughal emperors took keen personal interest in its affairs. In fact, the axiom of Kashmir as the paradise on earth, which even then belied the reality of the condition of the Valley and its inhabitants, was coined by the Mughal emperor Jehangir.³¹ Jehangir's obsession with the beauty of the Valley led to an alteration of its landscape, since some of the more scenic architectural marvels of the region, such as the Mughal Gardens and the Pari Mahal, were built during his reign.³² The emperor was so enamored of the Valley that he took an uncommon interest in the concerns and complaints of its people. He dismissed one of his high-ranking officers, Qulich Khan, then governor of the Valley (1606–9), on receipt of complaints against him: "O protector of administration! your

alleged that it was an act of arson by the Indian state, and a direct attack on *Kashmiriyat*.

²⁸ Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, 70.

²⁹ Sufi, *Kashir*, vol. II, 675.

³⁰ Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, 71.

³¹ Sufi, *Kashir*, vol. I, 295.

³² Francis Younghusband, *Kashmir* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911),

complainants are many, your thanksgivers few/Pour cloud water on the lips of the thirsty or get away from the administration."³³

Undoubtedly, the Mughals epitomized the tradition, as Mridu Rai states, of effacing Kashmiris from depictions of Kashmir: "Therefore, in Mughal miniatures, Kashmir put in an appearance either in the form of humanly manicured gardens or of scenery glimpsed incidentally through a window in what was otherwise predominantly the architecture of the Mughal city. The Kashmiris were barely deemed worth the wastage in paint."³⁴ Nevertheless, the argument needs some qualification, since it forecloses the possibility of the ability of Kashmiris to reinsert themselves in artistic or poetic renditions of their beautiful Valley. Kashmiris might have been absent from the paintings, but they were capable of both creating as well as integrating the newly emerging vision of their land into a discourse on belonging.

The Mughal era was one of intense cultural regeneration in Kashmir, when Kashmiri poets and ideologues built on existing cultural forms through contact with poets from the Delhi court and the court of Persia. Persian became the medium of literary expression, not only for those who migrated to Kashmir, but also for native Kashmiris. Kashmir became the center of intellectual convergence for Iranian poets such as Saib, Kalim and Qudsi; for poets from the Mughal court such as Faydi and Urfi, who came on short visits to the Valley; and for native poets, even as the ghazal became the primary form of literary expression.³⁵ Kashmiri poets composed numerous *masnavis* (narrative poems) in this period for presentation to the Mughal emperors. This descriptive poetry was dedicated to glorifying the beauty of the Valley, establishing its geographical contours, and describing the gardens and buildings constructed by order of the Mughals. This was the period in which the lush meadows of the Valley, its snow-capped peaks and calm lakes, were immortalized in beautiful verse.

The uniqueness of the landscape found further expression in the works of Kashmiri painters who produced miniatures in a style known

³³ Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 84.

³⁴ Mridu Rai, "The Question of Religion in Kashmir: Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Rights, c. 1846–1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2000), 2–3.

³⁵ Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 94–7.

as Kashmiri Qalam.³⁶ To dismiss this art and poetry as simply further evidence of the invention of a landscape devoid of its people would be to overlook its incorporation into the cultural repertoire of the Valley, the symbols of which were created and manipulated by Kashmiris themselves. This was the period when the Valley was first likened to a garden, a work of natural beauty that stood out as unique from the rest of its surroundings. The image of Kashmir as a garden became increasingly important in the works of poets from the late eighteenth century. In fact, the image continued to inform nationalist writings of the 1940s, when Mahjoor composed his famous poem, "My Country is my Garden."

Even as the poets of the Mughal period glorified the beauties of the Valley, their poetry did not obscure the realities of the land and the lives of its people. Although clothed in philosophical terms, the following verse articulates poignantly the curse of the Valley and its inhabitants:

The path of poverty [faqr] is evident from the road leading to Kashmir:
Its very first step means the renunciation [*tark*] of the world.

How can one pass this path with ease:
For the very first condition means relinquishing life?

How can a traveler escape this calamity,
Except that a slip of the foot may become a cause of his rescue?³⁷

The land of Kashmir, as articulated in the works of Kashmiri poets of the Mughal period, may have existed for the most part only in the imagination of the Mughal emperors and their court poets, but it is undeniable that its cultural expression informed later articulations of Kashmiri identities.

The Mughal period saw the continuation of the Kashmiri tradition of mystical poetry, although in a new form and medium of expression. Prominent Kashmiri mystical poets of this period were instrumental in expressing the interaction between religious traditions, even as the Kashmiri regional identity was being formulated. A representative

³⁶ P. N. K. Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir, Political, Social, Cultural, from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New Delhi: Metropolitan Book Company, 1973), 576.

³⁷ Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 98.

mystic poet is Habibullah Ghanai, or Hubbi (1556–1617), who was born to a grocer in the Valley and became a famous dervish recognized by Emperor Jehangir. Although he composed in Persian, common people recognized his ghazals, since they were sung in musical assemblies in order to create an atmosphere of ecstasy. One of his verses attempts to understand the nature of religious differences:

Tell, O Heart, the why of the diversity in religions:
Why is one a disbeliever, the other a believer?

This diversity arose out of the contradiction of names:
One is opposed to the other, and that opposed to the next.

With these two sects only the two Gods are pleased,
But this is not worthy of the Supreme Lord's wish.

The diversity of religions is not his making,
For in that exists neither disbelief nor belief, neither doubt nor certainty.

O Habib, your sayings he alone shall comprehend
Who in Self sees His visage and gains his knowledge.³⁸

Although Hubbi's answer to his queries is an escape from Self, the significance of his verse lies in its illumination of religious affiliations as sites of debate, rather than as strictly defined and divinely ordained entities. At the same time, the very fact that he was plagued by these questions implies that religious difference did exist in the Valley.

C.A. Bayly argues that "it was often the binding force of unevenly developing and differently expressed regional patriotisms and the political discourse of good government rather than the policies of supposedly secular pre-colonial rulers that provided the main resistance to those forces in pre-colonial India which stressed the exclusive bonds of religious community."³⁹ If viewed from this perspective, and placed in the context of the development of regional identities, the existence of religious affiliations that were not antithetical to a sense of belonging to a land becomes easier to understand. (Later, I discuss this point in greater detail.) During the Mughal period, Kashmiris were not only incorporated into the culture of the Mughal court, but by extension

³⁸ Ibid., 100–4.

³⁹ C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45.

became integral parts of the discourse and principles of ethical government that were developed in this era. Successive governors of the province introduced the institutions of Mughal government to Kashmir. Generally solicitous of the welfare of Kashmiris, the Mughal emperors established a tradition among Kashmiris of complaint to the central government in cases where the governors were subjecting people to oppressions and mistreatment.⁴⁰ As noted earlier, Jehangir expelled one of his governors from the Valley because of complaints against him.

Most significant to later articulations of regional identities, however, was the establishment of the tradition of Kashmiri historiography in Persian. Akbar ordered the translation of the *Rajatarangini* into Persian, a task allotted to Mulla Ahmad Shahabadi. During Jehangir's time, Malik Haider and Narayan Kaul Aziz—one a Kashmiri Muslim and the other a Kashmiri Pandit—wrote detailed histories of the Valley in Persian.⁴¹ It is also significant that one of the more prominent historians of the late Mughal period, Khwaja Azam Dyadmari, was the first historian to revive the memory of Lal Ded in his famous *Tawarikh-i-Kashmir* (History of Kashmir), written in 1730.⁴² By the early eighteenth century, local Kashmiri historians had begun to play an important role in articulating a sense of belonging to Kashmir by carrying forward the tradition of complaint to its logical conclusion, evident in the following verse by Khwaja Mohammad Azam:⁴³

So great is the distress of the people of Kashmir,
That it escapes even their own comprehension.

When the people were weakened by famine,
Chaos sprang up from town to desert.

No rice or grain can be found anywhere,
Except in the wheaty-complexioned beauty of the beloved.

Bellies like ovens are heated to the grilling point,
Yearning for a piece of bread.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, 386.

⁴¹ Ibid., 556.

⁴² J.L. Kaul, "Kashmiri Poetry: Some Forms and Themes," in Kalla, ed., *Literary Heritage of Kashmir*, 92.

⁴³ Khwaja Mohammad Azam authored a history of the Valley entitled *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*. See Sufi, *Kashir*, vol. II, 373.

⁴⁴ Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir*, 86.

Written after the famine that hit the Valley in 1733, this verse clearly makes a plea for restitution to the Mughal court. However, at this time the Mughal central administration was in no position to redress the grievances of even its Kashmiri subjects. Provincial governors had become independent and assertive in other parts of Mughal India, leading to the rise of independent successor states. The same process unfolded in Kashmir, with the significant difference that, instead of becoming an independent kingdom, Kashmir succumbed to the Afghans in 1752.

Although Kashmir was in a sense objectified in the poetry, painting and imagination of the Mughal emperors, it would be historically inaccurate to assume that Kashmiris themselves had no role to play in this process. It would also be a gross oversimplification to suggest that Kashmiris bought into the image of their land created by the Mughals. Not only were Kashmiris instrumental in shaping an image of their land, they also utilized, by the eighteenth century, these expressions to articulate a sense of being Kashmiri. Additionally, neither the sense of regional identity developing in this period, nor its later expressions, would exclude religious affiliations from their purview. The rhetoric of regional identities would at times include and at other times transcend religious identities. At no point, however, would it deny their existence.

Bagh-i-Suleiman: The Articulation of Kashmiri Regional Belonging during Afghan and Sikh Rule

God wanted that this blue-colored land
Should tire of wailing like the reed's heart.

He gave its control to the Afghan,
He gave Jamshid's garden to the demons.⁴⁵

Articulations of Kashmiri regional belonging that included and transcended religious, tribal and other local affiliations became particularly insistent during Afghan rule (1753–1819). From a beautiful garden that was the envy of the entire world, Kashmir now became a garden left to the mercy of cruel Afghans bent on its annihilation: “I

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 159. Tikku states that the above verses were on the lips of Kashmiris during the Afghan period.

inquired of the gardener the cause of the destruction of the garden/drawing a deep sigh he replied, ‘it is the Afghans who did it.’⁴⁶ Rellegated to a subservient position and severely oppressed by the Afghans, Kashmiris increasingly turned to poetry as a means of expressing their opposition to the rulers and a sense of belonging to their homeland. Despite the lack of patronage, Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits alike wrote prolifically, recording the mood of the times and their deep sense of resentment toward the new rulers, attempting to invoke ideas of good government during the chaotic rule of both Afghans and, later, Sikhs.

If the Mughal period is seen as the beginning of the end of Kashmiri independence by Kashmiri historians, the Afghan period is seen as its end. Most historians of Kashmir agree on the rapacity of the Afghan governors, a period unrelieved by even brief respite devoted to good work and welfare for the people of Kashmir. According to these histories, the Afghans were brutally repressive with all Kashmiris, regardless of class or religion. Merchants and noblemen of all communities were assembled and asked to surrender their wealth to the first Afghan governor, on pain of death. Kashmiri peasants, jagirdars, nobles and merchants alike were buried under the burden of heavy taxation. The *jazia*, or the poll tax on Hindus, was revived and many Kashmiri merchant families fled the Valley for the plains during this period. With the departure of merchants and with the peasantry avoiding cultivating the land for fear of exactions, the Kashmiri economy was effectively ruined.⁴⁷

Without detailing the oppressions of various Afghan governors, for there were many, suffice it to say that the Kashmir Valley underwent a period of immense political and economic crisis over sixty-seven years of Afghan rule. Despite its near accuracy, this tale of plunder and woe needs to be qualified through mention of Kashmir's position at the crossroads of trade routes from the north, north-west and east during the Afghan period. The axis of the Mughal empire—the Grand Trunk Road—was completely redirected by the Afghans. The new route, in the eighteenth century, circumvented the Punjab and Delhi

⁴⁶ According to Bamzai, a local poet wrote these lines during the Afghan period. See Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, 424.

⁴⁷ Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, 197–8, and Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, 424–37.