**Dilution of ‘Kashmiriyat’ and Regional Nationalism**

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Iam highly skeptical of the attempts of various political organizations to either communalize or demonize the notion of “Kashmiriyat” to serve their vested interests.

The various communities in the state of J & K – Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, Dogras and Ladakhis – have tried time and again to form a national consciousness in order to name a cultural alterity through the nation. The construction of “Kashmiriyat,” or asyncretic cultural ethos, by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah’s NC involved culling selected cultural fragments from an imagined past that would enfold both the Pandits and the Muslims.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, with his socialist politics, sought to challenge the safely guarded domain of privilege and power which had disenfranchised the Muslim majority, reinforced the seclusion of Kashmiri women, and made their support irrelevant for the Dogra sovereigns and later for the regimes installed by New Delhi. Interestingly, it was the Kashmiri Muslims led by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who rallied around the notion of regional nationalism.

*The process of nationalist self-imagining and the revival of “Kashmiriyat” is likely to remain in a nebulous state so long as the destiny of mainstream Kashmiri politicians and separatist politicians is etched by the pen of calligraphers in New Delhi and Islamabad respectively, and determined by manoeuvres in the murky den of subcontinental politics*

The notion of “Kashmiriyat” was not handed down to me as an unachievable and abstract construct; on the contrary, it was crystallized for me as the eradication of a feudal structure and its insidious ramifications. It was the right of the tiller to the land he worked on. It was the unacceptability of any political solution that did not take the aspirations and demands of the Kashmiri people into consideration; the right of Kashmiris to high offices in education, the bureaucracy and government. It was the availability of medical and educational facilities in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It was the preservation of literatures, shrines and historical artifacts that defined an important aspect of “Kashmiriyat.” It was the fundamental right of both women and men to free education up to the university level; equal opportunities afforded to both sexes in the workplace. It was the nurturing of a contact zone in social, political and intellectual ideologies and institutions. “Kashmiriyat” was pride in a cultural identity that was generated in a space created by multiple perspectives.

The notion of ‘Kashmiriyat’, or of the syncretism of Kashmir, popularized in the 1940s and 50s to defeat the centralizing strategies of the successive regimes of independent India .

This significant concept does not attempt to simplify the ambiguity and complexity of religious, social and cultural identities. It neither attempts to assert a fixed identity nor reinforce the idea of purity of culture.

“Kashmiriyat” brings about a metamorphosis in the determinate concept of the Indian state, and creates a situation in which the nation-states of India and Pakistan are forced to confront an alternative epistemology.

At a time of political and social upheaval in the state, this notion engendered a consciousness of place that offered a critical perspective from which to formulate alternatives.

Uncertainty about the status of the former princely state has loomed large since 1947. In an atmosphere of unpredictability, in the frightening darkness of political intrigue, in the paranoia of political deception, the fungi of undemocratic policies and methods continue to grow unabated.

The process of nationalist self-imagining and the revival of “Kashmiriyat” is likely to remain in a nebulous state so long as the destiny of mainstream Kashmiri politicians and separatist politicians is etched by the pen of calligraphers in New Delhi and Islamabad respectively, and determined by maneuvers in the murky den of subcontinental politics.

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