Complementary Identities, Dichotomous Constructions: Navigating religious, sectarian, and caste identities in Indian-Occupied Kashmir

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More than seventy communities constitute the social structure in the Indian-Occupied Kashmir, yet the popular notions about its population relegate the entire 7+ million people into the paired oppositions of Pandit-Muslim, Shi'a-Sunni, Sufi-Salafi etcetera. A sustained engagement with the members of the Kashmiri society compels one to ask what lies beyond the simplistic and popular binaries of religions, sects and denominations that have come to dominate the discourse on Kashmir's social composition? The current paper decentralises such an understanding through scrutinizing the oppositional construction along religious and sectarian identities. It does so by foregrounding the significance of caste identities that govern, to a large extent, access to social, material and cultural resources and make religion and sectarian identities more complex than what appears on the surface. This paper is part of a larger research that approaches the Kashmiri society through the vantage point of a small endogamous community of houseboat owners known as Houseboat-Hanjis. At the same time, it keeps the idea of holism at its core, thus looking at the various communities, organisations and institutions that constitute the society and navigating through them to understand how communities are arranged in a system of graded inequality. Apart from the historical and archival methods that have been utilised through this work, the research for the paper draws from the ethnographic fieldwork conducted intermittently between 2014 and 2018 mostly in Budgam and Srinagar districts of the Indian-Occupied Kashmir.

Keywords: Caste in Kashmir, Houseboat-Hanjis, Syed, Pirzada, Sufi-Salafi debate, Shi'a-Sunni, Kashmiri Pandit Migration, Muslim castes.

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Introduction

There are more than seven million people that constitute the population of the Kashmir Valley located in the Western Himalayas. As per the 2011 Census of India data the Indian-Occupied Kashmir Valley has 96.41% Muslim and subsequent small proportions of Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian populations. The diversity in this seemingly uniform population is an important dimension of the way the people of Kashmir have come to be defined primarily by academia, media and the state agencies. In most of the academically inclined accounts, the Muslim populations are defined in terms of sects and denominations whereas the Hindu populations are arranged along caste lines. The leading objective of this paper is to problematise such a formulation and delineate the units that constitutes the social structure of the Kashmiri society.

In order to do so, this paper discusses some of the prominently existing social categories viz. sectarian, denominational and religious identities and their significance in the socio-historical sense and in the existing power dynamics of the region. It aims to analyse these categories and problematise their oppositional construction into popularised binaries such as Shi'a-Sunni, Pandit-Muslim etcetera. The idea is not to undermine the individual categories per se; instead, the following sections locate the mentioned categories in the structural matrix and elaborate on their constituents and draw further on their relationship with each other.

The current paper is part of a larger research that approaches the Kashmiri society through the vantage point of a small endogamous community of houseboat owners known as Houseboat-Hanjis. Hanji is a blanket term for a number of occupationally defined castes which depend upon water bodies around the Kashmir Valley for their sustenance. These communities have traditionally resided in their water boats or along the shorelines of the lakes and rivers in Kashmir. Hanji communities that are associated with specific occupational activities derive their name from the commodity they deal in. For example, the fisher community is referred to as Gaad-Hanjis, *Gaad* being the Kashmiri word for fish. Hanji castes are located in the hierarchical structure of the Kashmiri society among the panoply of multiple castes. The interrelationships and power differential between these hierarchically arranged castes and social groups define the course that individual communities take.

The analysis of the Kashmir Valley's social structure, which is one of the implicit objectives of the current paper, will be incomplete if it does not take into consideration the dominant social groups that have historically controlled social, material and cultural resources. On the other hand in order to appreciate the existence and nature of Hanjis as a loosely linked group of communities in general and Houseboat-Hanjis in particular it is pertinent to do so in the light of their membership to various sects and religious organisations of which they may be a part, but the existence of which impacts the way Kashmiri society has come to be defined popularly. The members of a social group/caste/tribe may be located at the intersection or in the union of these varyingly defined sects, religions, and religious organisations, yet it needs to be seen what kind of impact these memberships may have on the actual class/caste belonging of people that function as the units of the larger social structure in Kashmir. The current paper is a step towards exploring such relationships and interactions between different sects, religious groups and castes in the

Kashmiri society. The paper explores the mentioned objectives in the following three sections wherein religious and sectarian identities are contextualised beyond their construction as dual categories and locates those identities in the complex milieu that is Kashmiri society.

Pandits and Muslims

The tritest and the most dominant binary in the social context of Kashmir is presented in the form of the *unique* existence of a minority 'Hindu' and a majority Muslim presence that makes it the only region in the Indian subcontinent where the single caste of Brahmins exists as *against* a large and seemingly *uniform* Muslim population (Parmu, 1969; Wakhlu, 2011). The repeatedly reproduced narrative about the continued Pandit presence in the Valley has been told with an emphasis on their ordeals during various Muslim regimes in medieval times. It has been argued that the Kashmiri Brahmins managed to survive in the hostile social environment of Kashmir in spite of the Muslim aggression and due to their own 'courage, perseverance and brilliance' (Wakhlu, 2011; Pandita, 2013), the essential attributes that are deployed to racialise caste groups placed higher in the hierarchies in South Asian societies.

Through memoirs, historical accounts and commentaries Pandit historians and chroniclers have portrayed that Brahmins were consistently losing power and were persecuted during the Muslim rule (Koul, 1924; Parmu, 1969; Wakhlu, 2011) between 14th and 18th centuries. However, every once in a while there is mention of one or the other powerful Brahmin official such as Jonaraja, Srivara, Utta Soma Pandita, Suha Bhatt, Yuddha Bhatta, Kantha Bhat and others (Koul, 1924; Parmu, 1969) serving as important functionaries in the same Muslim regimes. In these accounts, mostly by Brahmin chroniclers, wherever there are entries of non-Brahmins in the positions of power there seems to appear a state of chaos. For example, in Srivara's account, the period when Sultan Haider Shah (r. 1470-72) appointed an advisor, Purna, from the barber caste, is described as a period of loot and anarchy (Parmu, 1969). There are multiple examples of misplaced representation by mostly Pandit chroniclers such as Parmu (1969), Koul (1924), and Wakhlu (2011) that have a 'Hindu representation' (Madan, 2001) of other groups which to a large extent has constituted the history of Kashmir.

The Dogra period (1846-1947), which is regarded by historians as the Hindu rule over a largely Muslim population (Zutshi, 2011; Rai, 2012), provides a closer view of the interaction between various social groups. The proposition owes to the fact that there is a corpus of data in the form of chronicles, British East India Company records, *darbar* proceedings and correspondence reports between the company and the *darbar* officials from this period. It is in this period that the conflict between Brahmin and Muslim Malluh castes[1] (Lone, 2018) becomes all the more apparent. On the one hand, the relationship between Brahmins and Muslim Malluh castes with peasant and service castes comes across as of dependence and exploitation, on the other, the relationship between the

[1] Malluh refers to the cluster of Syed and Peer/Pirzada castes in Kashmir that occupy the higher most position in the local caste structure which is composed of multiple graded and occupationally defined castes. In certain instances, the word has a slightly derogatory connotation. For a description of the functioning caste system in Kashmir see Lone, 2017; Lone, 2018.

Pandits and Malluhs is informed by competition and conflict. The events and developments in this period provide a reference point to understand the contemporary social structure in Kashmir.
After taking in as the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir (hereafter, J&K) in 1846 in the wake of the first Anglo-Sikh war, the Dogra king Gulab Singh wanted to control powerful groups in the Kashmir Valley by attempting to assess and contain their landholdings. He was aware of the kind of impact local elites may have on the functioning of local bureaucracy and economy. So as to curb the power of the local elites his administration focussed on big landlords - both Pandits and Muslims. The cases of two of the most wealthy *jagirdars* - the Muslim Naqshbandi family and Pandit Sut Ram Razdan - provide interesting examples of the way power was distributed and was being negotiated between a handful of groups in the Valley.[2] In 1847, Pandit Sut Ram Razdan had rights over close to 65 villages spread through 15 paraganas in the Kashmir Valley (Rai, 2012, p. 49-50). Naqshbandis, a family claiming the Pirzada caste status, on the other hand, were specifically favoured by the previous Sikh regime (1819-1846) which granted them *jagirs* that grew disproportionately over the years mostly through corrupt means. The prominent shrine of Khwaja Naqshband Sahab in Srinagar, which was administered by the patriarch of the Naqshbandi family, had a large jagir as part of the shrine's assets since as early as Chak times in the 16th century. In the assessment by Andrew Wingate, the first British settlement officer in J&K, it was discovered that the Naqshbandi family had occupied wasteland worth rupees two thousand five hundred to their initial grant over a period in time. As part of the land settlement proposed and carried out by the British Resident Walter Lawrence in 1889, Naqshbandis lost 843 acres of land to the state, yet they remained one of the most powerful and landed families in the J&K state. Such cases of occupying wasteland were also observed in the case of Kashmiri Pandits, who did so in collaboration with their caste brethren in the revenue department (Rai, 2012). Both these cases provide a tiny glimpse into the kind of power that priestly castes held in the 19th century Kashmir. Their access to resources went through significant changes in the 20th century with land reforms, the rise of modern education and its access to other groups that did not come from such strata.

It can arguably be said that families such as Naqshbandis were the Muslim counterparts of the Brahmins and are referred to as Pirzada due to their association with the management of shrines of saints.[3] In fact, the founder of the *Ahl-i-Hadith* movement in Kashmir Sayyed Hussain Shah Batkhu referred to them as 'Brahmans in Muslim guise' (Sikand, 2008 pp. 503). Syeds, on the other hand, claimed a higher status in the local caste hierarchy by claiming an association with Prophet Mohammed's lineage or in some cases to the lineages of the first caliphs in Mecca. Pandits, Syeds, and Pirzadas were able to exercise their control over resources at a scale which was incomparable with groups comprising peasants, artisanal castes and service castes. There is very little documentation of the role of Pirzadas as compared to the accounts and documentation that is available on Kashmiri Pandits by modern historians. It is in very few British accounts such as the ones by Andrew Wingate (Wingate, 1888 cited in Jamwal, 2013) that they are looked at as separate social classes and not clubbed with the larger population of Muslims.

[2] For more on their contestations with the darbar see Rai, 2012, p. 49-50; Chapter five, Zutshi, 1986; and Chapters two and three, Zutshi, 2011.

[3] Historically Kashmir has had a thriving culture of hagiolatry or worshipping of saints. The sacred and cultural landscape of Kashmir is dotted with shrines which are visited by the followers or believers of the presiding saints.

The castes of Syeds and Pirs depended on (shawl) trade, land and agriculture *management* as landowners, and functioned as legal service providers primarily in the city, and as *mutawallis* or custodians of the shrines. As custodians, they would have access to the revenue of towns and villages attached to the shrines and the offerings from the visitors (Zutshi, 2011, p. 128). As shawl traders the Syed, Pirzada and Shah families had close contacts with the European traders and bureaucrats. In his memoir Henry Torrens, a British army officer, refers to them as "merchant princes of Kashmir" (Torrens, 1862/2014), whose houses were especially visited by European traders and bureaucrats to experience the luxurious lifestyle of the Kashmiri elite. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rising economic depression, reorganization in the state administration and uncertainties in the trade and agriculture-related businesses the Pirzada and Syed castes looked towards state services. With government services becoming relatively permanent and stable employment generating avenue the need to seek jobs in government departments was becoming urgent in those sections too. However, they had not invested much in modern education owing to their focus on other aspects of the economy such as trade, commerce and sacred economy. A decline in the shawl trade in the later part of the 19th century after the closing down of French shawl market in the wake of Franco-Prussian war and further contestations over sacred spaces, as has been discussed in the later part of this paper, indicated that Muslim upper castes such as Syeds, Pirzadas and Shahs[4] needed to explore other sources of income. The growing concern led them to demand educational reforms and employment opportunities from the J&K darbar in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1885, the British government had been able to formally enter the Kashmiri political and administrative sphere by placing a resident in Srinagar. As a result of the demands of the powerful Muslim nobles of Kashmir and the growing British government's need to create educated subjects for performing administrative tasks, certain provisions were made for the Muslims of Kashmir in the first few decades of the 20th century by ensuring nominal representation in educational, political and administrative bodies.

The most significant state institution was that of revenue management which was controlled by ranks of officials drawing from a handful of Kashmiri Brahmins and upper caste Muslims. Wingate's submission on the revenue system being 'ryotwari in ruins', referred to the fact that 'there still existed in each village dominant office-holding families, one of which traditionally exercised revenue control' (Wingate, 1888 cited in Jamwal, 2013). Most of these families were from Syed, Pir and Brahmin castes and had performed these functions for Afghan, Sikh and early Dogra regimes. At the village level, there was the post of *lambardar* who functioned as the village headman and was responsible for collecting revenue from the villagers. *Lambardars* were paid five per cent of the total revenue collected as their fee. Rai (2012) mentions that these petty office holders came under the revenue department which was dominated by Kashmiri Pandits. These castes would work together so as to exploit the working classes, that is, the cultivators and the artisans.

The beginning of the 20th century saw the rise of a Muslim class with modern English education from within the Muslim upper castes. At the same time the presence of 'Hindu' Punjabi Khatris was increasing in the Kashmiri courts. They were brought in by the Dogra Maharaja so as to

[4] Shahs constitute a community/caste in Kashmir that trace their descent to the ruling dynasties in Central Asia and the Middle East.

counter the presence of local elites in places of power and by the company officials who had already developed a colonial administration in Punjab. As a result a trained staff was being imported into Kashmir.

In the initial decades of the 20th century, Kashmiri Pandits had to increasingly compete with Punjabi Khatris as well as Syeds, Pirs and a few upper caste Sheikhs[5] for the administrative jobs they otherwise had the monopoly over for multiple generations. In the changing socio-political conditions in the state and with the advent of modern education the domain of education and state service became important sites of contestation. The Muslim spiritual and intellectual leadership which was entirely composed of upper caste Muslims, primarily Pirzadas, stopped their clientele or followers from taking to modern English education (Naseer-ud-Din, 1971 as cited in Zutshi, 1986). The Kashmir darbar and the Muslim leadership (e.g. Mirwaiz Ahmadullah, President of the Anjuman Nusrat-ul-Islam) together believed that the Muslim community, which was composed of multiple lower-middle castes, was itself responsible for their own wretched conditions. Expressing such views Mirwaiz[6] Ahmadullah asked the government to provide employment to existing *educated Muslims*, which of course were composed of a handful of Muslim upper castes. It is important to note that the first Muslim person to receive a graduate degree in 1918 was Ghulam Ahmed Ashai (Pandit, 2019, p. 102), who came from the affluent family of Shawl traders who were also the patrons of the much revered Khanqah-i-Mualla in downtown Srinagar also known as Shah-e-Hamadan mosque. Ghulam Ahmed Ashai was appointed as the first registrar of the University of Kashmir between 1948 and 1953. The numerically small class of upper caste Muslims were beginning to enter into professions which were primary domains of Pandits.

This became a juncture at which the interests of upper caste Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits came to a clash. What needs to be noted is that the relationship between upper caste Muslims and Pandits was not of inequality but of competition in the domains of education and employment. The desperation on the part of Kashmiri Pandits and upper caste Kashmiri Muslims arose from two different spaces and converged towards a single point - of entering state employment and securing control of the agricultural as well as non-agricultural land. As has been discussed above the Dogra regime that established its rule in 1846 attempted to dismantle the elite classes in Kashmir - both Pandits and Muslims - so as to install their own preferred groups in powerful positions. The upper caste Muslims and Pandits were so entrenched in the politico-economic structure of Kashmir that it appeared to be difficult for the Maharaja to undermine their hold on the means of socio-economic power in Kashmir. Together these groups constituted less than 7% of the total population of Kashmir, yet they held a considerable amount of power not only in terms of their wealth and immovable resources but also their networks with the British government.[7] The Maharaja decided to co-opt Kashmiri Pandits by favouring them over upper caste Kashmiri Muslims. What needs to

5 Sheikh/Shaikh refer to local Muslim castes that converted to Islam at different periods after the 14th century. There is a graded nature to the arrangement of these castes into one society. Higher status is sought by those that converted from erstwhile Brahmin and Rajput castes. However, there is a paucity of sources that can confirm the existence of a strict varna system in the medieval Kashmir.

6 Mirwaiz is a title used for the head preacher. For example, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is the current head preacher at the Jamia Masjid in downtown Srinagar.

7 For example the case of Sut Ram Razdan and Naqshbandi family discussed earlier in this paper.

be noticed is that there was a lot of criticism of the Dogra regime in the newspapers in Punjab, since there was a curb on the publication of newspapers in the Valley. The fact that Dogra Maharaja had not been in the best of terms with the elite Muslim families had a tremendous influence on the kind of publicity the *darbar* received in the neighbouring Punjab, which worked as a place of information dissemination in British India. There were many Kashmiri Muslim families that had close connections with the Muslims in Lahore. At a later stage, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were conciliatory efforts between upper caste Muslims and the Dogra *darbar*, but it had provided enough bad press and substantial reasons to the British government to intervene in the matters of the *darbar*.

I would keep the point at which departure of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley took place in the 1990s as a significant event in the following section, especially for the reason that in the current discourse on Kashmir those years are deemed to be the period when 'communalism' had completely engulfed the Valley. The mainstream Indian media and many Pandit spokespersons claimed that Muslims were determined to drive out minority 'Hindus' from the Valley. Entire Indian media, the bureaucratic apparatus and intelligentsia along with Pandit spokespersons took part in painting a picture in which the Muslim masses forced the 'Hindus' of Kashmir to leave their homes. However, what is missing is a detailed sociological, anthropological and historical understanding of the event and the conditions that led to it. I would digress a little here and talk about one of the most prominent sociologists from India and his work.

In the year 1965, the PhD dissertation of the celebrated anthropologist T.N. Madan was published as a book. It was titled 'Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir'. The focus of the thesis was, as is evident from the title, on the kinship system amongst Kashmiri Brahmins in two villages in South Kashmir. This much-celebrated ethnographic account needs mention, apart from its coveted status among Indian anthropologists, due to the fact that in the late 1950s Madan went ahead and studied people from his own caste, a practice *mostly* lacking if not entirely missing amongst upper caste researchers in general and anthropologists in particular. The book contains an early disclaimer that it does not focus on 'converted Muslims' however there is sufficient mention of them vis-à-vis their unequal relationship with the Brahmins in the village along with the tabular representation (Fig. 1.1) of their place in the local caste hierarchy.

In that sense, it doesn't completely overlook the power equations between Brahmins and Muslim 'occupational groups' or 'caste analogues' as Madan refers to them. On the contrary, it is quite specific in providing glimpses into the asymmetrical relationship of Pandits with various occupational groups in the village and the justifications therein.

It was interesting to read the review of the book by American anthropologist Burton Benedict, which summed up the book in the following sentence:

"*At last a book about Indian family and kinship which is not about caste*.." (Benedict, 1968).

Apart from the assumption on Burton's part that the book was about 'India and Indians' he also assumed that Madan (2016) had kept caste constant in the book which has helped him focus on

the aspects of family and kinship. It is a surprising assumption on the part of an anthropologist reviewing a book, which asserts the idea of caste in Kashmir in its very title, to be formulating family and kinship by detaching them completely from caste, wherein the primary role of family and kinship in the sub-continental societies has been to perpetuate caste apart from other subsidiary functions. Mayer (1960) provides an interesting case study of Ramkheri village in Madhya Pradesh to show that caste and kinship functioned simultaneously as principles of social organisation. Ahmad (1976) has raised the query whether caste and kinship constitute mutually exclusive organisational principles of social structure. It comes across in his analysis that both caste and kinship function simultaneously to perpetuate the existing social structure in the South Asian societies. The purpose is not to universalise the cultural forms that may exist in Mayer's (1960) Ramkheri and in Madan's (2016) two Kashmiri villages but to bring up the interrelatedness of kinship with the caste in the subcontinental societies.

TABLE XIII

Economic Relations between the Pandits and the Muslims

Pandits	*Muslims*
(*a*) Landowner	(*a*.1) Sharecropper (*a*.2) Hired labourer
(*b*) Wholesale trader who buys to sell	(*b*) Supplier of goods (butter, blankets, etc.)
(*c*) Retailer (shopkeeper, grocer)	(*c*) Buyer of goods for consumption
(*d*) Buyer of goods and services	(*d*.1) Retailer Butcher Cotton carder Milkman Mill owner/miller Oil presser Tailor Hired labourer
	(*d*.2) Artisans: basket weaver, blanket weaver, blacksmith, cobbler, potter and rug maker
	(*d*.3) Village servants: barber, carpenter, builder, cattle tender, midwife and washerman
(*e*) Mill owner	(*e*) Buyer of service
(*f*) *Hakeem* (Physician)	(*f*) Patient
(*g*) Patient	(*g*) *Hakeem*
(*h*) Money lender	(*h*) Borrower
(*i*) Tutor	(*i*) Pupil
(*j*) Master	(*j*) Domestic servant

Fig. 1.1

Source: Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir, Oxford University Press

Kashmir, where the large majority of the population is enlisted as Muslims in the census documents (Census of India, 2011), is seldom analysed in terms of its social stratification or social composition. Scriptural Islam, to some extent, does not permit stratification amongst its adherents based on the facts of birth, but there are various ways in which different societies with Muslim populations are organized hierarchically and horizontally. In the Indian subcontinent, the ideas of caste, *quom*, *biradari*, (Wakil, 1972; Nazir, 1993) and *kram* (Khan, 1997; Dabla, 2012) etcetera are used to arrange societies in ways that certain groups not just occupy ritually higher positions, they also hold control over most of the existing resources in material terms.

In the context of Kashmir, T.N. Madan refers to Muslim occupational groups as 'caste analogues' or 'caste substitutes' in one of his later published essays (1972/2001). In the essay, he explains it as the ingenuity on part of highest caste Pandits *to conjure up* (emphasis mine) a system of caste substitutes even out of a non-Hindu environment (Madan, 1972/2001). This system of social stratification had been put in place to make use of Muslim occupational groups so as to avoid the polluting effect of the, mostly menial, occupational activities that bring them the products they would use to carry out daily activities and important brahminical rituals. Madan defines in very clear terms the internal structure of the Kashmiri society along with Pandits' relationship with various Muslim castes. The relationship is asymmetrical in nature and it is in that context he mentions the dependence of Pandits and Muslims was not mutual (1972/2001).

There is palpable anxiety in Madan's text wherein he emphasises that these occupational castes did not depend upon Pandits for their livelihood in the post-land-reform (the 1930s and 1950-1970s) class formation[8] in Kashmir and which may lead to withdrawing cooperation by Muslim specialists (1972/2001). Madan, in that sense, had been able to sense the diminishing dominance of at least Kashmiri Pandits if not all the upper castes in Kashmir.

In the above mentioned monograph (2016) and in his later essays Madan (1972/2001) candidly enlists the minimum number of storeys in a Kashmiri Pandit house to be three, which is also lamented about by the journalist Rahul Pandita (2013) in his memoir focussing on the Kashmiri Pandit migrations in the 1990s and later. Pandita's emotionally charged account recounts his mother's constant yearning for her house in Kashmir which had 'twenty two rooms'. In another anthology of essays by thirty Kashmiri Pandit writers put together by Varad Sharma and Siddhartha Gigoo (2016), the three-storeyed house remains the object of constant yearning. In a separate account Siddharth Gigoo (2011) voices similar concerns about relocating to smaller houses after their 'forced' migration from Kashmir. These individual testimonies then need to be read in the light of what an ethnographic study published in the 1960s tells us. Madan (2016) provides us with an understanding of an average Kashmiri Pandit homestead which is never less than three storeys and can go up to have one more storey. In 1957 it documented to be having '55 three-storey, 2 four-storey and two double-storey Pandit houses in the binucleated villages in Anantnag' (Madan, 2016). I have been conducting intermittent fieldwork in Kashmir over the last seven years now and my observations are not completely different from those of Madan's. However, the analysis of the data suggests something more. The talk of three-storeys or twenty-two rooms is important in one way though it may bring in what T.N. Madan and Ankur Datta like

8 For more on this see Aslam, 1977; Prasad 2014.

to call the 'class question' amongst Pandits, which implies that there existed both rich and poor Pandits among the larger Pandit population in Kashmir. The quantitative data (Evans, 2002) suggest there was a 'minority' Pandit population which enjoyed a certain kind of life not available to large populations constituting various graded strata of Kashmiri Muslims groups.[9] To conveniently move from caste to class when the enquiry is about a larger society differentiated into multiple communities restricts or limits the researcher in presenting a fair picture of the society and socio-material relations and takes the focus away from the proportional distribution of resources available in a society.[10]

For twenty-nine years now every time the migration of Kashmiri Pandits is referred to, it is mentioned in the same breath as communalism on part of Kashmiri Muslims. Ethnographic (Madan, 2016; Datta, 2017; Malhotra 2007), census (Evans 2002; Lawrence, 2010) and other kinds of quantitative (Duschinski, 2007) and qualitative (Gigoo and Sharma, 2016) data suggests that Kashmiri Pandits did not simply exist as a Hindu minority in the Kashmiri society, they maintained their Brahmin caste status not just in ritual terms but also by imposing it and reproducing it structurally through maintenance of their hold over resources which, to say the least, were solely controlled by a handful of groups. As per the 1931 census, 78% of gazetted officials were Hindus and Sikhs (Evans, 2002). While it cannot be denied that Dogra state had brought in 'Hindu' Punjabi resource persons to work for the darbar but the population of Punjabi Khatris was much less than 1% and Sikhs constituted less than 1.5% population of the total population in the Kashmir province of the Dogra kingdom. Kashmiri Pandits constituted close to 4% population. Thus 'Hindus' which included Pandits and Khatris along with Sikhs constituting less than 8% population in the Valley held sway over 78% resources. Rest 22% officials were listed as Muslims. Since an entire population with considerable internal variations were clubbed under the category of Muslims it involves reasonable speculation to deduce what castes were represented in the state institutions. Additionally, the census report from 1911 is indicative of something more substantial in terms of representation in the educational institution of certain specific castes (Johar, 2018). The census report mentions 'Babazadas, to which class most of the Pirs and Mullahs of Kashmir belong, have returned a proportion of literate that looms largest in the literacy list of Mohamedan races and tribes found in the state' (India, 1911). Following excerpts from a report submitted by a (Pandit) high school master suggests how Pandit officials looked at the Kashmiri society itself:

> *The Hindus and the high-class Mussulmans will not like to see their children learn a profession while surrounded by the other Mussulman children, at least for some time till these come up to the standard of Hindu children or the children of high class Mussulmans.*[11]

Not only were these distinctions made but also pronounced further by referring to certain castes which were considered lowly in the social scheme of things in Kashmir as can be read in the excerpts from the same report:

9 For more on this see Johar, 2018.

10 For a detailed discussion on the class question among Kashmiri Pandits see Johar, 2018.

11 Political Department, File No. 101/P-102, 1907, Jammu State Archives.

> *It is not at all desirable that the children of the Hanjis and sweepers and the like should be allowed to mix with other children.*[12]

This is one of the many instances which are telling of a functioning caste system with a local character that has existed in the Kashmir Valley with a predominantly *Muslim* population. Another instance in Datta's (2017) ethnographic account a migrant Kashmiri Pandit in Jammu makes a clear distinction between a *Khandani*[13] Muslim and a *Gair-Khandani* Muslim. Following testimony from Datta's (2017) book acknowledges the mutual recognition of social differentiation derived out of their subscription to certain groups and lineages by Pandits and Muslims:

> *In the past, we were truly secular. We Pandits never lived in ghettos. But those of us who came from good families would mix with only khandani [prominent families] people. Pandit, Muslim, or Sikh. It did not matter. See, you saw that my new tenant is a Kashmiri Muslim. But it does not matter what he is. His family knows mine for a long time. And he is khandani. Didn't you see how he spoke and behaved? (Datta, 2017, p. 148)*

Some of these documented instances reaffirm caste as a primary category of distinction and its operationalisation in varying contexts. Most of the scholarship on Kashmir paints the picture of Kashmiri Pandit migration as one single event polar opposite to the otherwise valorised idea of a syncretic *Kashmiriyat.*[14] The maximum one reads in texts created by Pandit writers about their own conditions from pre-migration days is that they were the educated elites in Kashmir and were tormented by the Muslim rulers. What kind of relationships they had with the rest of the Kashmiris has hardly been analysed. What kind of relations did they have with the peasant classes, for example? Madan's (2001, 2016) supremacist accounts do provide an understanding through tabular representations (fig 1.1) of caste equations between different caste groups. Yet, there is a large void in the literature exploring the kind of unequal relationship Pandits had with a large Muslim population in the Valley. Apart from a few references (Parrey, 2016), the vast literature on Kashmir fails to problematize the caste-class divide between Pandits and other Muslim groups or *castes* who, in the 1980s, had first or second generation educated members asserting their rights for a homeland which was to be governed by their collective wish.

Kashmiri Pandits formed important appendages of the Indian state and were the local propagators of the ideology that encapsulated the idea of India, something the majority of Kashmiri population was fighting against. The Indian state machinery that was produced and reproduced over succeeding decades drew its governing members from dominant classes and from a handful of (upper) castes and communities cutting across religions. Kashmiri Pandits not only embodied and represented the idea of a Brahminical Indian state but they also symbolised years of exploitation and deceit that kept the majority of lower strata Muslims without education and in penury. The

12 Political Department, File No. 101/P-102, 1907, Jammu State Archives.

13 Khandani refers to identification with an illustrious lineage, which in other words is an indication of belonging to an upper caste in the South Asian context. Gair-Khandani is an antonym of the same.

14 For more on this see Introduction in Zutshi, 2011.

popular perception of a Kashmiri Pandit was that of somebody who wielded power in his pen. Common usage for Pandits in Kashmir which suggest derogatory connotation is - *kalam-i-truss* - roughly translating to "pen prick" or somebody who should be beware of, for his pen had more might than many swords. Their notorious pen could manipulate the tax calculations and put poor peasants and vulnerable in economic jeopardy (Johar, 2014).

Major changes started taking place from the early 20th century onwards when a section of the Muslim population emerged as the new literate class. The shift took place due to the measures brought about by first the British-influenced policies in J&K state and later due to the post-colonial reform policies which eventually led to changes in the educational set up and land redistribution to some extent[15]. The formation of a sizeable literate and self-sustainable class has been one of the primary reasons that have led to challenging the status quo. However, the major changes were brought about by the implementation of Naya Kashmir[16] framework at the policy level which gave rise to a large peasant class with relatively stable means of economic production and access to modern education.

It will be simplistic to say that the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits took place because they became dispensable to the political economy of Kashmir. Instead, there is a need to acknowledge that the caste-class conflicts between Pandits and Muslim castes were unavoidable in the changing socio-economic scenario which were constructed as being communal in nature.

This does not imply that Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have always shared an antagonistic relationship. Instead, the relationship between communities in Kashmir is informed by far more than just the religious labels. It comes across in the memoir of Prof Neerja Mattoo (2016) wherein she writes about her natal family's friendship and togetherness with one Shah Family in Srinagar. Patriarch Shah was one of the most distinguished doctors in Kashmir at a time when there were very few *Muslim* doctors. Ms Mattoo's father was a professor with double M.A. degrees in Physics and English. The two families did not let some of the caste considerations, such as dietary segregation informed by ideas of ritual purity, come in the way of their deep friendship and togetherness (sic). The context in which the two families found common ground is also defined by caste relationships for one claimed the Saraswat Brahmin status and the other would trace their linkages to the succeeding caliphs' clans in Mecca, as is often heard in the narratives of many upper strata Muslims.

One also wonders whether it was the sheer meritocracy of the Pandits and Shahs that earned them those coveted degrees and thus secured government jobs or there was more to it? Access to education and its attainment was a function of caste and community-based membership in the early 20th century Kashmir. It was only towards the late 20th century a sizeable educated class came into being with the educational reforms through British intervention and 1950s onwards through the policies of the J&K state, which were rooted in the history of the people's struggle for their legal and economic rights.

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15 For a detailed exposition on this see chapters 2, 3 and 4, Wani, 2019.

16 In 1944, the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference presented a memorandum titled 'Naya Kashmir' to the then Maharaja of J&K which included the layout of the plan to develop J&K into a constitutional democracy with a welfare state in command. See chapter 2, Wani, 2019 and Kanjwal, 2017.

The state-sponsored discourse around 'Kashmiriyat' which inadequately focuses on a syncretic existence of religious communities in Kashmir may not have actually existed in the form it has been advertised in, primarily for political purposes. The relationship between Kashmiri Pandits and different Kashmiri Muslims castes has been of varying nature, depending upon the kind of social class and regional demographic contexts they were a part of. In writing about her family's cordial relations with the neighbouring Shah family, Ms Mattoo refers to her interaction within a relatable class (caste) of people wherein religious sanctions do not hinder deep friendships and other status markers such as caste and class become primary modes of interaction. One hardly reads about the nuanced nature of these interactions in the Valley, wherein the often used categories are those of Pandits/Hindus and Muslims, Shi'a-Sunni etcetera.

However, basing judgements on the entire society solely on individual examples such as Mattoos and Shahs may not be the most scientific method to use to arrive at conclusions. It is not that Pandit families were never close to non-upper caste Muslims in Kashmir. Tumans, the family I stayed with during my fieldwork, swears by the friendship with their Pandit neighbours in Bhagwanpura, who left for Delhi at some point. Their families are still very close and visit each other. Though the course of the Pandit community - both Gor and Karkun - and Hanji community has not been the same. That the Pandit community meet the desired fate as per the scriptural prescriptions is being observed and facilitated by both state and central governments through the deployment of policies for their adequate educational attainment, to correct the rate of employment and their rehabilitation (Johar, 2018). On the contrary, a large population of Hanjis living around water bodies and in rehabilitation colonies have abysmal educational and employment rates (Shafi, 2010). As per the data provided by Shafi (2010) from Habak, Aabi Gurpura, Dagpura Telbal and Dhobi Ghat areas of Srinagar, the literacy rate among Gad-Hanjis was close to 28%, which was limited to basic literacy up to matriculation. The data provided by Sanyal in her study published in 1979 provides figures which are marginally different from these figures. The stagnant social conditions through generations are a marker of the course communities have taken over the past four decades. The course of Kashmiri Pandits, Pirzadas and Hanjis is not independent of historical and social forces and as has been analysed above it is rooted in the social system of which these communities are a part.

The way Kashmiri Pandits made themselves indispensable to the political economy of Kashmir, all the more so after the Indian independence given the fact that Brahmins as a class was consolidated for the first time at an all India level,[17] comes through in the way plan for a New Kashmir was devised. Sheikh Abdullah's reluctance towards Pandits' and Dogra state's dominance remained palpable in many of his speeches (Rai, 2012; Pandita, 2009). Sheikh was well aware of the kind of sway Pandits held over important state institutions including education, judiciary, administration etc, something acknowledged by Lawrence in his writings (Lawrence cited in Rai, 2012). Interestingly, the Naya Kashmir manifesto which was implemented during Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's term as the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (1953-1964), gave representation to 'Pandits, Sikhs and Harijans' by giving them two instead of one vote in the

[17] I would like to mention the portal RoundTableIndia: For An Informed Ambedkar Age authors and specially Kuffir/Naren Bedide for developing on this idea through his range of published articles, few of them mentioned in the reference section.

assembly in the transitional period (Kanjwal, 2017). The manifesto, as it appears, took into consideration religious minorities in the Kashmir Valley, that is, Pandits and Sikhs. As far as Jammu region is concerned it emphasised on *Harijans*, a terminology devised by the Indian National Congress leaders, used to refer to the erstwhile 'Hindu' untouchable castes primarily associated with occupations considered *unclean* in a caste society. Ironically, multiple communities from within the Kashmiri society such as Hajjams, Goor, Watals, Doms, Hanjis had close to no representation in the assembly. The Kashmiri society was conceived in terms of the religious majority-minority binary which in turn safeguarded interests of the ruling classes formed out of Muslims upper castes and Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley as has been discussed above in terms of their representation in administrative jobs and access to immovable property. At this juncture, the ruling classes were becoming all the more synonymous with the power elite (Mills, 1999). Such a formulation of populations into the binary of majority Muslims-minority Hindus, are rather unhelpful in the South Asian contexts where societies are arranged primarily in terms of gradation and rank (Ambedkar, 1987) as has been demonstrated in the sections above. The following sections discuss the issue of sectarian and denominational identities within among the Muslim population in Kashmir and how they fit in with the larger social structure in the Kashmir Valley.

Shi'a and Sunni

The apparent division between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims into two sects goes almost 550 years back in the history of Kashmir. The conversion to Shi'ism of the local population is mostly ascribed to Mir Shams-ud-din Iraqi. He first came to Kashmir as a missionary in the early 16th century to spread the message of the Nurbakhshiya order, a religious order started by Saiyyid Muhammad Nurbaksh. Shams-ud-din Iraqi recruited people in Kashmir and Ladakh regions into the fold of the Nurbakhshiya order. Over a period in time, Shi'ism became the dominant sect and Nurbakhshiya was incorporated as a sub-order under this more popular, prominent and widespread identity. Currently, the followers of Nurbakhshiya order are limited to Kargil region in the Indian-occupied J&K.[18]

The two prominent sects, Shi'a and Sunni, have had a history of being antagonistic towards each other since the early days of conversion of Musa Raina, a *wazir* at the darbar of Fateh Shah (r. 1505-1516 CE), and his followers into the Nurbakshiya order (Wani, 1987, p. 11). Under Raina's command and influence a large number of Chak population, a group of people defined along ethnic lines, converted to Islam. With passing years, the Nurbakshiya order came to be identified with Shi'ism in Kashmir. The high point of Shi'ism was observed in the middle of the 16th century when Chaks rose to power and established Chak dynasty in Kashmir in 1554 CE. Even after the decline of the Chak dynasty, there continued to be a presence of Shi'a nobles in the Mughal regime, such as Ibrahim Khan (1662-64CE) who acted as the Governor in the Mughal administration in Kashmir. There were intermarriages between Shi'a nobles from the erstwhile Chak dynasty and Mughals. For example, the Mughal emperor Akbar married the daughter of Shams Chak, a prominent Shi'a figure of 16th century Kashmir (Dhar, 1989, p. 40). Currently, Shi'a population

[18] Interview with Dilawar Khan, Jammu, May 2018.

constitutes a sizeable minority spread in selected few quarters of Srinagar and Budgam districts of Indian-occupied Kashmir.

With regard to the general populace, Shi'a and Sunni populations in Kashmir maintain separate social organisations internally. Through the course of the fieldwork, a kind of strict avoidance of each other in terms of marital alliances and communal food sharing was observed between the members of the two sects. Such avoidance is not informed by religious diktats but has been developed over time due to historical group rivalry and the conflicting interpretations of religio-historical events and scriptures related to *nasab* (genealogy) and *hasab* (inherited merit) (Ashraf & Ansari, 2019). However, from a structural point of view, these categories do not help much in delineating the hierarchical system that constitutes Kashmiri society. Shi'a and Sunni sects are divided into multiple castes and tribes which are placed at different rungs of the socio-economic ladder in the larger society. There are priestly, peasant, artisanal and fisher castes among others that make for a sizeable population of the Shi'a sect. The relationship between these castes is of inequality yet the popular sentiment that defines their relationship is informed by the apparent division between the sects.

The more populous Sunni sect comprises a larger number of castes which owes to the population size and the historical factors that led to the conversion of a relatively small population into Shi'ism. The presence of these two sects and the overemphasis on their mutual exclusiveness conceals the complex internal divisions that come across to be much more significant as far as socio-economic indicators are concerned. Some of the poorest working classes in the Valley ascribe to both Shi'a and Sunni Islam.

A minority population within the Demb-Hanji caste ascribe to Shi'a Islam. They grow vegetables in the floating gardens in the Dal Lake referred to as *radh* and *demb* in Kashmiri. The vegetables from *radh* and *demb* are sold in the morning floating market that is set up every morning for a few hours inside the Dal Lake. The Shi'a vegetable growers in Dal Lake constitute a minority population within the larger group identified as Hanjis in general and Demb-Hanjis in particular. Similarly, Gaad-Hanjis, the members of the fisher community, subscribe to both Shi'a and Sunni Islam in terms of their sectarian affiliations. Another Shi'a occupational group associated with Houseboat-Hanjis is locally known as Kwothar. They are known for what is termed as 'curing' or patching of the houseboats, an aspect of boat maintenance typical to houseboats. They are a small community that specialises in treating the hull of the houseboat with the help of a locally grown grass mixed with jute so as to enhance the life of the wood. Some of them have shifted to Budgam district and are brought to Srinagar especially for this job since the technicalities of the craft are only circulated among within the community members. The Kwothar community constitutes working class population that depend upon odd jobs to make the ends meet since their occupational specialisation provides them limited work opportunities given the declining number of houseboats and the low probability of the need for repair.

The western rim of Nigeen lake is adjoined by one of the largest Shi'a quarters in Srinagar. Some of the tourists at the houseboats prefer to hire three-wheeler auto rickshaws to travel around the city. Whenever a tourist requests for a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw some or the other auto driver is called in from the neighbourhood, who is invariably a member of the Shi'a sect. They have a

regular presence in the occupational lives of Sunni Houseboat-Hanjis. In such contexts, their relationship is defined by occupational needs and not by Shi'a-Sunni rivalry. At the same time, the sectarian consciousness is quite deep-rooted. When asked whether the Shi'a Hanjis are doing any better in socio-economic terms than Sunni Hanjis, a Shikara-Hanji from the Sunni sect described the differences and similarities between the two in the following words:

> *They also do the same work as other Demb-Hanjis, they are also poor. But they are Shi'a (he pronounced it sh'ay). Did you notice they are working on a day like this… their concern is money and not the festival (it was a day at the end of Ramadan when the exact time and day of Eid was still being discussed, but certain Shi'a quarters had already ended their fasting period).*
>
> *They are Muslims but their ways are different than us. They have different mosques, different Pirs and they follow whatever happens in Iran... We do not marry with them. They have their own people with whom they marry.*
>
> *They are quite poor. Not like the Shi'a Pirs.. or even Hakeems. They are not any better than us, some are even poorer.*

The above excerpts are from an interview that was conducted with a Shikara-wallah who ferried us from Nigeen Lake to the floating market in Dal. It marks the difference that various communities make between each other, yet they are also aware of the similar social location of the Shi'a lower castes. The relationships between communities are far more complex than simply defined in terms of sects, castes, and denominations.

A part of the fieldwork in 2017 fell in the month of Muharram when the members of Shi'a sect go through ritual mourning. The mourning reflects in overt symbolism such as everyday dressing up and taking out processions through the streets. The believers do not start anything new or celebratory this month, such as marriage, engagement or a new job. The mourners prefer all-black attire. On most of the days in the Islamic calendar months of Muharram and in the first ten days of the second month Safar, the evenings are busy when the mourners carry out processions enacting the aftermath of Karbala war or simply pass through the public sphere enacting symbolic mourning.[19] In regions that have a small population of Shi'as, the public mourning is kept limited to 10 days. Srinagar and Budgam town in Kashmir have a sizeable population of Shi'a castes. On one such evening during the month of Muharram, I was travelling in a Maruti 800 with one of my key participants through a Shi'a dominated locality in Srinagar. The roads were empty and the shops were shut since both Shi'as and non-Shi'as knew that it was the time for mourners to carry out the daily procession. There were police barricades on all the routes making it difficult for us to leave the area. We tried a couple of alternate routes and finally managed to leave for our destination. Including Asif and Abid, there were three of us in the car. I asked a few questions regarding mourning practices and rituals. As we left the Shi'a area, Asif, who is in the first year of college told me in detail the various ways in which mourning is enacted by inflicting pain upon

19 For more on this see McHugo, 2017.

oneself. Having described various aspects of the Muharram and the rituals associated with it he said -

> "*it is mostly the lowly Shi'as who perform these activities publicly. There are Shi'as who would not do all this. They would enact the rituals superficially and that too in private, not like these ruffians who are out there on the streets making a spectacle... The high-class Shi'as do not do all this*."

The incident and Asif's words left me thinking about the relationship between the working classes and the enactment of public rituals for the maintenance of sectarian identity. It is public knowledge that the month of Muharram leaves men who perform self-flagellating rituals bruised and scarred for weeks and months. This pain and suffering have a symbolic value in Shi'a theology. However, the heavy job of actual bodily suffering and its public enactment is performed mostly by the working class followers of the sect. It is not that Syed and other upper castes never participate in the public mourning, but largely they avoid such an overt display of ritualism in the public sphere, most possibly because it involves actual danger to human lives. However, the need for castes such as Hanjis, Navid etcetera to perform these rituals publicly, acting as the representatives for the larger sect, is traced as much in the religious devotion as in the social obligation. Such exceptional times provide the people with an opportunity to exhibit their religiosity publicly. In the absence of high caste status, they explore such occasions for social mobility through ritual means. Ironically, for groups such as Syeds, it functions as a mechanism of keeping the cultural distance from the lower caste Shi'a members. The social inequality finds a way to invade possibly all spheres of sacred as well as the mundane aspects of society.

An important aspect of the internal caste hierarchy within the Shi'a sect in Kashmir has been discussed by Peer Ghulam Nabi Suhail (2018). In the early decades after the end of the Dogra monarchy, the J&K state government announced the implementation of the policy of land redistribution to the cultivators tilling the land. The Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, 1950 and its revised versions in 1972 and 1976 set a specific limit to the possession of land by landowners in J&K state. A substantial part of the expropriated land was redistributed by the state authorities. The land that was expropriated was mostly under the control of upper caste Shi'a and Sunni landlords. Simultaneously, a large amount of it was controlled by Kashmiri Pandits. Suhail (2018) mentions that in the wake of the announcement and implementation of the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, 1950, a *fatwa* (decree) by a respected Shi'a religious leader was passed which prohibited the Shi'a peasants from accepting such land, which, according to the decree 'rightfully' belonged to the landlords and was declared *haram* (forbidden) for the peasants. The decree was followed by many peasants/cultivators who belonged to the Shi'a sect. However, there were some who went ahead and took the land as their due share for they had been the ones who had been tilling it for decades and considered it their rightful share. It was a remarkable moment for the way power was exercised and challenged in a collective sense. Apart from other issues the incident educates about the occupational divisions translating into varying castes within the adherents of the Shi'a sect. The religious leader came from the Syed caste and his focus was on safeguarding the interests of the Syed landlords which were definitely threatened in the wake of the announcement of the land redistribution in J&K. A small number of Shi'a peasants who received the land in spite of the risk of being ostracized were referred to as *gassib* (land grabbers) by the

upper caste Shi'as. The entire incident is telling of the nature of resistance communities develop in dealing with ensuing circumstances and acting in accordance with their class interests instead of blindly following the diktat of their religious leader, something Subramanian (2013) also observed in her field where Mukkuvar fishers went against their religious leader at the parish in order to secure their economic and political rights. Apart from other important details, these negotiations with the religious and civil authorities bring into question the state and degree of hierarchy that exists in a particular society. Suhail (2018) argues that the majority of Shi'a peasants did not get land owing to the *fatwa* by their *Aghas* (religious clerics). In either possibility what comes up prominently is the social segregation between landlord classes and the peasant and artisan classes and the control of the former over the latter two. The epithet of *gassib* (grabber) imposes itself as a marker on an erstwhile landless class, thus pre-deciding their social interactions, possibilities of marriage alliances and their chances at community-based economic and educational opportunities. Such case studies are significant in raising questions about the idea of a homogenous sect or religion. Simultaneously, they inform that hierarchy does not go without getting challenged at important junctures in history as in everyday life.

Shi'a and Sunni identities exist as prominent sectarian identities among Kashmiri Muslims, yet a sole focus on them does not help much with delineating the structural components of the Kashmiri society. In fact, the sectarian identities have been utilised time and again by political actors in mobilising people against each other so as to claim and gain access to power in the social and political realm. However sectarian identities have not translated into better socio-economic status for castes lying on the lower ends of the local caste hierarchy.

The following section discusses the identities that derive out of varying religious practices and reform movements and their interaction with community-based identities.

The Sufi-'Wahabi' spectrum

The division of Kashmiri society along varying Islamic schools of jurisprudence is a conspicuous dimension through which the present-day society is increasingly defined (Sikand, 2002; Kishwar, 2015). Its significance has often been acknowledged, albeit in a rather essentialised sense, by the Indian state (Kataria, 2017) and the Indian media (Swami, 2013) which mostly define the Kashmiri Muslim population in terms of moderate and extremists. In a stereotypical sense, Sufis are associated with the former, whereas, organisations and sects such as *Jama'at-i-Islami* and *Ahl-i-Hadith* are identified with the latter. Another popular Islamic group which is often referred to in the context of Kashmir is 'Wahabis'. Interestingly the latter most group does not have even a marginal presence in Kashmir. Often *Ahl-i-hadith* is confused with Wahabism, however, these are substantially different organisations from each other in terms of their affiliations and religious content with certain common characteristics. For example, both Wahabism and *Ahl-i-hadith* are placed under the category of Salafi Islam, whereas Sufism is identified with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam. *Jama'at-i-Islami* which is looked at as more of a political organisation due to its focus on political Islam also falls under the larger Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Sufism has varying thoughts and practices and has multiple internal variations (Sikand, 2008, p. 490). Suhrawardi, Qubrawi, Naqshbandi, Qadri and the Rishi constitute the

major orders of Sufism in Kashmir (Sikand, 2008, p. 490). Except Rishis, who claim an indigenous origin, all the other trace their origin in Iran and Central Asia.

As far as the community of Houseboat-Hanjis is concerned, the individual members have subscriptions to different sects and religious organisations. There is a numerically small population among Hanjis that subscribe to *Ahl-i-hadith* sect while some of the community members are also members of *Jama'at-i-Islami* Jammu & Kashmir (JIJK). A larger section of Houseboat-Hanjis prefers to visit shrines and consider it a part of their Islamic duty and piety. They refer to themselves as '*Aqeedah waale*,'[20] which literally means 'the believers'. However, the local reference to '*aqeedah waale*' means followers of any of the Sufi shrines, or those who visit shrines of saints for religious/spiritual reasons. The shrines that are mostly visited by Nigeen Lake dwellers, the region and people with whom a large part of the fieldwork for the current work was conducted, are Makhdoom Sahab, Dastageer Sahab and the Hazratbal *dargah*.

An analysis in terms of the representational parameters provides an interesting picture. Historically, the Sufi shrines, have been dominated by their 'traditional managers', who, apart from managing the sacred economy also wield moral authority over the masses. The prominent shrines around Srinagar are managed by hereditary title holders from particular Pirzada caste such as Naqshbandi, Shaal, Ashai and Hamadani, who are known as the *mutawalli* of various shrines. For example, the *Khanqah-i-Mualla* is managed by the prominent Ashai family, Khwaja Naqshband Sahab is managed by the Naqshbandi family that derives its names after the patron saint of the *dargah*. Similarly, there are many small and big shrines throughout the Valley that have similar administrative structures. The ones around urban centres are more prominent in terms of their cultural, religious and economic significance. These shrines receive daily donations from devotees, followers and visitors to the *dargah*. In the local parlance, these sacred centres are referred to as *ziarat, astaan*, or *dargah* and are different from a masjid or mosque, where the followers come primarily to pray. Whereas, a shrine is a place which either houses the grave/tomb of the patron saint or a sacred item/relic that bestows the place with sacred value. There are various philosophical and theological explanations that highlight the significance of such practices in the Kashmiri cosmology.

On the other side of the projected spectrum are sects such as *Ah-i-Hadith*[21] and *Jama'at-i-Islami*[22]. Both have a growing presence in the Valley. The rise of *Ahl-i-Hadith* or various other religious organisations which propose theological logics against saint worshipping need to be contextualised in the political economy of the shrine culture in Kashmir. Managed by Pirzadas and Syeds, there is a robust and thriving economy around each such shrine. One then needs to understand the hierarchy of sacred spaces since various social groups have resorted to developing their own sacred space in the form of mosques and by associating with sects that reject shrine worshipping. Apart

20 In a more formal typology, groups which prescribe hagiolatry or worship of saints/tombs, are referred to as A'tiqadis or Khush A'tiqadis, both of them translating as believers (Wani, 2010). As per popular as well as academic perceptions (Wani, 2010) such groups constitute significantly large populations in Kashmir.

21 For a detailed exposition on the development of Ahl-i-Hadith movement in Kashmir, see 'Ahl-i-Hadith Movement in Kashmir, 1901-1981' by Khan, 1984

22 On the trajectory of Jama'at-i-Islami movement in Jammu and Kashmir over the past half a century, see Sikand, 2002.

from other functions such as seeking autonomy in their politico-religious sphere, such acts are meant to contest the hegemony of Syeds and Pirzadas. The stronghold of upper castes on the economy is such that *ziarats* like Hazratbal and Chrar-i-Sharif function as power centres in the Kashmir Valley. In the present section, I explore whether the reform movements have been able to move away from the primary unit of social inequality in Kashmiri society.

Interestingly, movements like *Ahl-i-Hadith*, that advocated a more 'scripture oriented' Islam without much intervention on the part of interpreters such as Pirs and Mullahs also drew their leadership from the uppermost strata (primarily Syeds) of the Kashmiri society. Sikand (2008) notes that "none among the early leaders of the *Ahl-i-Hadith* mentioned in the movement's official history were from the peasantry, and only a few, such as Sabzar Shah, a street hawker, and Maulana 'Abdur Rahman Nuri, the son of a poor, blind reciter of Qur'an, belonged to the urban working classes" (p. 507). However, the initial objections that were raised against such intercessions by shrine managers and mediators did not come from upper-caste Muslims. From Nuruddin[23] in 14th-15th century to Shaikh Ahmad Trali in the 19th century, the initial assertions against hierarchy and for a just society based on egalitarianism came from the working classes of the Kashmiri society. Sheikh Nuruddin was brought up in a caste of shepherds and Shaikh Ahmad Trali came from a caste of oil-pressers (teli). The ideas that were taken up by Syed leaders of the *Ahl-i-Hadith* movement in Kashmir were being discussed by Trali almost five decades before its arrival in Kashmir (Khan, 1997). Currently, the much-revered shrine of Sheikh Nuruddin at Chrar-i-Sharif in Budgam district and the sacred economy around it is controlled primarily by a small group of Pirzadas. Similar trends can be seen in Hazratbal and other important sacred centres, whereas the populace that makes a large number of adherents and visitors to these shrines come from middle and lower strata.

The Sufi-Wahabi dichotomy was played out at a bigger scale in the politics of Kashmir in the late 19th and increasingly in the 20th centuries. This was then transposed on to the Kashmiri politics and determined the way society was to be identified in the binaries of Sufi-Wahabi by Kashmiris themselves as well as outsiders. The conflict between Yahya Shah, the head preacher at Jamia Masjid in Srinagar and Mirwaiz[24] Hamdani, the head preacher at Khanqah-i-Mualla or the shrine of Shah-i-Hamdan flared into an ideological tussle in the last decades of the 19th century.

The conflict between these two powerful religious authorities, that started as a personal conflict grew and involved, among others, the most affluent and prominent individuals of Kashmir including Hajji Mukhtar Shah Ashai who took the side of Mirwaiz Hamdani. On the other side were Khwaja Hassan Shah Naqshbandi and Khwaja Sanaullah Shaal who supported Yahya Shah's (Mirwaiz Kashmir) claim to some of the sacred centres in Kashmir.[25] Both the Mirwaiz came from the same extended family of hereditary priests. At some point in the early 19th century, the sacred

23 For a detailed analysis of Nuruddin's role in the formation of Kashmiri society, see Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis, by Mohammad Ishaq Khan, 1997.

24 The head preachers of Jamia Masjid and Khanqah-i-Mualla were both known as Mirwaiz, the latter translating as 'head preacher'. They were distinguished by the suffix used in front of the title. Yahya Shah, who had the informal authority at Jamia Masjid was known as Mirwaiz Kashmir, whereas the one in-charge of Khanqah-i-Mualla was known as Mirwaiz Hamadani.

25 For more on this see chapter three in Zutshi, 2011.

centres around Srinagar were informally distributed into two parts, like family property. The idea was to neatly demarcate the shares of brothers in the common 'property'. By the effect of this distribution, Mirwaiz Kashmir had the unsaid right to preach at certain shrines and mosques while Mirwaiz Hamdani had his share of sacred centres to preach at and partake in the sacred economy. In 1888 CE the conflict broke out between the family members with respect to the preaching rights at Khanqah-i-Mualla, which was so far managed by Mirwaiz Hamdani. The conflict between the two factions led to the pronouncement of religious practices. Mirwaiz Kashmir or Yahya Shah and his supporters called the Sufi practices by the other faction involving *biddat* (innovation) and referred to Mirwaiz Hamdani as his followers as *mushriks* i.e. those who involve and authorise saints and other earthly authorities between followers of Islam and the God (*Allah*). Mirwaiz Hamdani's supporters accused Mirwaiz Kashmir and his followers of being Wahabis, something that was considered a dangerous ideology even by the British officials and the Dogra administration. These conflicts spilt onto the public domain and catalysed the process of identification with one religious group or the other. This trend continues to this day where one can notice an ongoing debate between followers of different Islamic religious groups. The followers of Mirwaiz Kashmir and Mirwaiz Hamdani and multiple other religious groups come from peasant classes, working classes and service classes. However, their membership or association with a particular religious group did not necessarily alter the facts linked with the socio-structural and in turn socio-economic realities. The primary structural unit is mostly located in one's community identity, which allows access to domains of resources of various kinds - both material and non-material.

In certain instances, the reformative ideas introduced by religious group-specific teachings were subverted to some extent by certain Sheikh castes. For example, some of the followers of *Ahl-i-Hadith* sect in Srinagar have broken away from the tradition of appointing a preacher from the priestly caste, rather they would learn the Quran, the Islamic rituals and the requisites for guiding the followers and recruit the priest from among themselves. Among reform-oriented families, the caste boundaries are sometimes breached yet these endogamous boundaries are crossed only up to a particular extent. Conversations with some of the members of *Ahl-i-Hadith* sect that identify with Bhat and Parrey castes in Srinagar informed that even though many inter-caste marriages took place they were all within middle-level castes. Castes considered too high or too low are not part of such marriage alliances. Thus alliances with Syeds and Pirzadas on one hand and Hanjis, Doms and Watals on the other are considered close to impossible given the wide social distance between them.

The rise of *Jama'at-i-Islami* in Kashmir has played a significant role in the political developments in Kashmir over the past seven decades (Sikand, 2002). However, there is a limited understanding of the social composition of this religio-political organisation that flourished in the second half of the 20th century. A significant dimension arises when one looks at the social backgrounds of the founders and functionaries of the organisation. It does not seem to be a coincidence that almost all the founder-members of Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) came from families of shrine managers or Pirzada caste. They belonged to sections that had access to education and were looking for spiritual and political moorings in a fast-changing society in the early and mid 20th century. JIJK came into being in 1952 when it separated from its parent body, *Jama'at-i-Islami Hind*. The first *amir* (president) of JIJK, Sa'aduddin Tarabali, a graduate in those days when the

education was available to only a selected few, came from the Pirzada family linked with Ahmad Sahib Tarabli, the renowned Sufi mystic of Srinagar. Another significant functionary of JIJK was Maulana Ghulam Ahmad Ahrar, who also came from a prominent Sufi lineage and was educated at Lahore and Amritsar in the early 20th century. Qari Saifuddin, who belonged to an illustrious Pir family, went on to acquire the top posts in JIJK. Hakim Ghulam Nabi, who held positions such as deputy *amir* and secretary-general of JIJK, was born in a prominent Pir family of Pulwama and was sent to Delhi and Deoband for receiving an education. According to Sikand (2002), the common thread among these members of Pir and Syed families 'gave them a position of leadership and authority within their own local communities, in which the Pirs and their descendants were traditionally looked upon with considerable respect and reverence' (p. 720). Almost all of them were educated at prominent universities and colleges in Punjab, Delhi or the United Provinces in British India. Association of certain occupational, educational and social activities were often along the lines of caste. This does not mean that all the members and functionaries of JIJK came from rich families, it was their caste status that gave them *de facto* access to positions of power within the organisation. The case of popular leader Sayyid Ali Shah Gilani, who came from a Syed family but had a humble economic background is an interesting case in point to learn about caste-class relations in reproducing the social order. Unlike many others in his village, he was sent to attain education at Lahore and Delhi. Gilani very quickly rose the ranks within JIJK and figures as an important charismatic leader of the masses. It needs to be emphasised that the ideas of individual charisma and merit are not the matter of discussion here, which I acknowledge, play an important role when it comes to political leadership. Instead what is being stressed upon is how a pre-existing social order makes space for the newer actors from dominant social backgrounds in what are termed as reformist organisations. The most radical and reform-oriented religious organisations do not operate outside the power equations that are defined by caste and community affiliations in Kashmir. The focus of JIJK has been on the educated young men from lower-middle-class backgrounds in primarily North and Central Kashmir, though they also have a sizeable presence in the southern part of the Kashmir Valley. The issues of representation of various groups in such religious organisations are a matter that conveys much about the way Kashmiri society is arranged along the axis of caste and power. Thus the distinction between Sufis and so-called hardliner religious organisations may not actually inform enough about the socio-economic status of groups that actually constitute the larger membership of these organisations.

In the following section, I discuss the Sufi practices in a Houseboat-Hanji family and its function in a society where power equations are constantly being adjusted between various groups.

A large majority of the members from the Houseboat-Hanji community, especially the older generation, consider themselves *aqeedah waale*, or followers of the Sufi tradition. I interviewed a number of them and each one of them had multiple stories to tell with respect to their encounter with the evil and how calamities fell upon them and how their Pir[26] saved them. These stories, most of the times, have supernatural elements which give them a fantastical essence, refer to powers beyond human abilities but at the same time rooting them in the everyday concerns of the very people telling those stories. Mr Azim Tuman, an octogenarian houseboat owner, had similar incidents to tell about his Sufi master whom he would visit whenever he found himself in trouble. After the Sufi master died his grave was visited regularly by Azim Tuman and other close sets of

26 Not to be confused with the Pirzada caste. Many of the patron saints in the Valley were rooted in reformist movements and need not always belong to the Pirzada or Syed castes.

followers. When I met Azim Sahab for the first time in 2017, he was already in a frail condition, yet he would regularly tend to each chore in the house and the houseboat. Towards the end of 2018, his health deteriorated to a great extent. He told me that it was time for him to visit the *mazaar* of his Sufi master. After a couple of months, he was diagnosed with renal cancer. In the wake of his illness, the role of Sufism in his own life as well as for his family became all the more visible for someone observing it from outside. The family organised an elaborate supplication ritual or *niyaz* to ward off the illness of Azim Sahab. It needs to be mentioned that Tumans represent one of the affluent minority within the Houseboat-Hanji community. The following section explores how the Sufi rituals and practices constituted as much a devotional and religious exercise as it was a social message to reestablish and remind of the status of the family within the community as well as in the larger social network including neighbours, clients, friends and acquaintances.

The offering of *niyaz* saw a twenty-four-hour-long event which involved two elaborate feasts, collective prayers initiated and led by priests and a musical evening filled with Kashmiri Sufi music. On the first day of the supplication ritual, the entire morning was spent preparing for the afternoon feast by the *wazas*, the traditional cooks. In the empty space next to the family house a large *shamiana* was erected and carpets laid down for the people to sit. The afternoon meal was served to the guests that constituted mostly relatives, the helpers from within the community and outstation guests from as far as London and Bombay among others. The guests also included some of the prominent Kashmiri Pandit acquaintances of Yaseen Tuman, one of the three sons of Azim Tuman, who had travelled from Bombay and New Delhi.

Before the dusk fell the priests began chanting verses with a rhythmic musicality typical to Kashmiri tradition. The prayers and chanting continued for about an hour after which the priests were fed and departed. The female and male guests were served *wazwan* in separate sections of the tents. As we laid down the *trami* (the traditional copper plate in which the multi-course meal called *wazwan* is served) in front of the guests we figured that a large number of guests were from within the community. At the same time, there was a noticeable presence of people from outside the community. The guests and the patrons who make for an integral part of the history and development of the Tuman family sat together under the tent and shared the meal with the community members. After everyone had finished eating including the family members, the tent was prepared for the live Kashmiri Sufi music. The mattresses were laid down with warm sheets, blankets and duvets to keep warm through the chilly autumn night. Men and women sat on opposite sides of the tent. Rashid Hafiz, a popular and much respected Sufi singer sat against the wall of the tent along with his entourage of five singers and musicians and performed through the night till 6:30 am. The songs were recorded on mobile phones and in the professional audio recorders by the audience. The songs were mostly in Kashmiri, except for a few requests from the audience which were sung in Urdu. once the musical evening had picked up the pace, Azim Tuman made a brief appearance around 1:00 am and sat in the middle of the tent in a chair. He requested Hafiz sahib to sing a couple of his favourite songs after which he soon retired to his room. Through the course of the night milk-tea, *qahwa* (traditional Kashmiri tea) and noon-chai (salty milk-tea) were served at various intervals with Kashmiri bagels, bread and dry cake. I met some of the visitors a few days after the ritual and discussed its significance. Nazir Ahmad, who runs a humble houseboat business in Dal Lake along with his older son said referring to the Tuman family - “it makes me

very proud when some of the community members come in big cars or own palatial houseboats but that is not the story of the entire Houseboat-Hanji community. The affluent houseboat-owners are still a minority, yet their presence is important for us as a community…". According to Nazir, community members like Tuman sahab were in a better position to negotiate with the actual custodians of power and resources in Kashmir and India on behalf of the entire community.

The entire ritual constituted a Sufi way of reaching out to higher spiritual and religious powers to seek help for the sick member in the family. It was also a way of conveying to the neighbours, the community members, the relatives as well as the society members that the family stood united and strong amidst difficult and vulnerable times. Azim Tuman had a marked presence in the social life in Srinagar. He served in the governing body of Kashmir Houseboat Owners Association (KHBOA) for three terms, which led him to deal with state administration and institutions such as Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) and the J&K Tourism Department. He had also been instrumental in mobilising for resources for the Houseboat-Hanji community. Being aware of his social status as well as his illness, the family members had a crucial responsibility to send out a message to everyone. The three sons of Azim Tuman and their cousins worked together through the feast, the prayers and the Sufi musical evening. The ritual, apart from its most important religious and spiritual aspect, served to make a public statement that would reassure the community members as well as reaffirm the status of Tuman family in the social world outside of the Houseboat-Hanji community. In this specific case, Sufi spiritual practices acquire a larger role than their most obvious explanation. It goes beyond the religious and spiritual and impacts the social and the worldly at the same time when it engages the 'higher authorities'. The performative aspects of such conspicuous rituals are important in understanding how social actors perceive the changing dynamics and acknowledge the power and authority vested in an individual as a family member as well as a community member among other identities.

Specific religious practices associated with organisations apart from providing a common platform to the followers have multifold functions. Such 'hidden transcripts', as Scott (1992) refers to such processes, are often missed out from the direct reading of rituals and practices deployed by groups that have differential access to power and resources in the society. The point of emphasis in the preceding section has been along the line that religious groupings and their role need to be read and explored beyond their obvious stereotypical characterisation as syncretic-hardliner dichotomy and need to be rooted in the realm of the larger social structure that sets the limits to individual communities' role and socio-economic well-being.

Conclusion

Through a sustained critical engagement with the varying social groups this paper has drawn upon the differences and exchanges between communities that together constitute the Kashmiri society. Such differences and exchanges are characterised by much more than individual religious, sectarian or religio-political identities. In the diachronic analysis, it comes across that the binary of Pandit-Muslim has not helped in defining the way social equations have changed over the past three decades. The argument in one of the sections in this paper has been built by drawing upon the migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley of Kashmir in the 1990s and relating it to the intercommunity relationships. The rupture in the social relationships between Kashmiri Pandits

and other communities happened gradually over centuries which only was witnessed in a violent spurt in 1990 by the dominant groups when Pandits had to move out en masse from Kashmir to different parts of India and abroad. As has been demonstrated the primary reasons lay in the deeply unequal hierarchical structures that reshaped themselves into newer forms during the monarchical and colonial period.

At the same time, the hierarchical relationships between Pirzadas, Syeds, Shahs and other graded Muslim castes have played an increasingly significant role in the making of the current social fabric. The impact of the structural components of the society is reflected in every institution that constitutes the social life in the Valley ranging from political institutions to religious organisations with emancipatory agendas. This article establishes that there are various ways in which the primary structure of socio-material inequality can be missed out. Sectarian identities and religious groupings constitute competing labels that have sketchily defined the Kashmiri population. This paper has foregrounded the processes that define the internal hierarchical structures of the sects and religious organisations. The hierarchy is informed by caste oriented divisions. It concludes that the position of a social group or individual in a larger religious group or sect is determined through a complex process in which caste/tribal identity of individuals plays a prominent role cutting across religions and sects in the region called Kashmir.

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