

Externally, nothing but a huge and ever-growing spiritual and intellectual acquisitiveness induced grand propagandists and over-enthusiastic zealots of the Hindu and Buddhist civilizations to undertake, successively, a systematic voyage to explore fairly adequate and socio-religiously temperate zones for bringing them within their fold and sphere of influence. Kashmir being the most highly developed Asiatic esse; a cordial and peaceful entity and; a picturesque land with bewitching beauty and too enticing a climate appealed them more than other places, notwithstanding its geographical hitches.

After benefitting from the achievements of Hindu civilization, the Kashmiris began entreating the Buddhist civilization to awash their land with the monasteries, *vihars* and *stupas*, and a platoon of *Bikshus* to accelerate the schismatic movements of *Hinyana* and *Mahayana* Buddhism. But it botched to ensure any societal renovation or take tangible steps to replenish Kashmir's spiritual stocks with humanism, simplicity, compassion, moral ascendancy and philanthropy which were badly needed by the Kashmiris to get through the complexities bequeathed to them by its precursor. Nor could it be in command of the unbridled disposition of its servants, cohorts, monks and *Bikshus* whose characteristic behaviour and corrupt practices ultimately dragged this civilization out of Kashmir; leaving behind the Valley to rot, once again, under the nasty hands of murderers and ruffians who in the garb of *Purohits*, *Kayasthas* and *Sadhus* exploited its resources heartlessly to become more wealthy, powerful and influential to the detriment of society; undermining, thus, the whole fabric of Kashmirian civilization overwhelmingly.

The wheels of both these civilizations, however, completed full circle finally to pave the way for Islamic civilization to enter Kashmir and reshape its ethos on healthy basis by massive overhauling of its spiritual, cultural, economic and intellectual institu-

tions, and by rectifying the snags it had developed over a period of time owing to waywardness of its kings and queens, the drunken revelries and compulsive gambling errands of its nobility and landed aristocracy and a life of gross self-indulgence of its self-seeking and self-proclaimed 'gods' and 'goddesses' and their intermediaries: the *purohits*, who had spread, almost like spiders, the web of their languid sensuality, debauchery and sin to trap their prey for fulfilling their carnal desires and, thereby, turn the Valley into a sinkhole of depravity; a gigantic brothel, steeped in animal lust with syphilis as its offshoot.

It is pertinent to mention that Islam got into Kashmir, not directly from the midst of Arab deserts, the place of its birth, but via Central Asia, where it had come into contact with an overwhelmingly vibrant and symphonic culture, art, literature and architecture; absorbing freely and naturally, but without diluting its fundamentals: the aroma of agrarian civilization. While living harmoniously with the rich mosaic of meadows, woods, fertile lands and rivers of this alpine region for quite sometime, Islam had, thus, brought together two streams of civilizations to create a strong and coherent mutual bond and confluence of ideas and institutions; an amazing cultural coalescence which descended upon Kashmir to expose it to a lovely row of the great spiritual wisdom of Islam on the one hand and a torrential showers of agrarian civilization on the other.

But unlike the earlier civilizations—the political patriarchs, especially Nila Naga, Miharakula, Ashoka and Kanishka, extended state patronage to Hinduism and Buddhism for their propagation— Islam did not enjoy any imperial support or power to embark on Kashmir wide diffusion yet still succeeded to reach the pinnacle of fame and popularity. It was proclaimed a religion of the masses amid loud shrieks of public excitement. And, thus, to an enthusiastic and tumultuous welcome, the crescent was supplanted as a socio-

religious leader of the Kashmiris not to elbow, *Trshul*, *Lingam*, *Yoni* or *Bikshus* out of the way but to ensure the welfare of the most vulnerable sections of society and encourage the development of the sentiments of brotherhood and co-existence so that the ossified socio-economic system and the evils of the past, more particularly the racial hierarchy, social dichotomy, ecclesiastical tyranny, economic anarchy, peasant unrest and land grabbing did not return to pollute the atmosphere anymore.

This was amply indicative of a dramatic and sudden break in Kashmir history; a qualitative and comprehensive break from nebulous concepts of antiquity and antiquated conditions. It facilitated its smooth transition from ancient to medieval period; marking, thus, the beginning of a new era of agrarian prosperity, irrigational network, industrial growth and commercial morality. Fairly keeping in with the principles of: *Alqaşib-i-Habibullah* and with what is known as *halall* in Islamic terminology; this morality encouraged:

- (a) The rise of peasantry, which was till then suppressed by the ferocious *Damaras*, a class of land grabbers;
- (b) The flowering of arts and crafts through the establishment of *Karkhanas*;
- (c) The institutionalization of marketing system;
- (d) The development of merchant's capital and;
- (e) The growth of import and export trade.

The prime movers of this extraordinary alteration were, undoubtedly, the common native people themselves. But among the people only those come in the full glare and under more focus of history who successfully groped their way along the most difficult corridors and down the tormenting cliffs and across the length and breadth of the Valley to lead a tranquil life amidst its serene

environs far away from the serpentine course of the *Timurid* persecution and implacable hatred permeating the whole Central Asia on account of ideological differentiation of its society; and, subsequently, engaged themselves wholeheartedly in the service of Islam and in the process sacrificed everything to accomplish the noblest job of shaping the destiny of the Kashmiris. Among these the most distinguished are Bulbul Shah, Bilal Shah, Jalal-ud-Din, and, above all, Hazrat Mir Ali Hamdani whose vast contribution not only far outweighs those of the great monarchs of medieval times but also continue to outstrip the ongoing saga of sagacious and people friendly deeds due to its inherent perennial and potential benefits.

That **Shah-i-Hamdani** was the facilitator of Kashmir's transition to Islam and the principal architect of its Muslim identity goes without saying. He built the edifice of this identity brick by brick with a smooth and stable paste (made of :*Shariah, Hadith, amal, aqida* and *aiman*) and cultivated, nourished and crystallized it into a definite attitude in accordance with all other ingredients of Islam so meticulously that it ultimately enabled the Kashmiris to step out the desert of despondency, hypocrisy, idleness, and wilderness of ignorance and get rid of backwardness and deceit and, subsequently, embark upon a more progressive and effervescent pathway of nation building and come forward for assiduous performance of their national duties, their societal commitments and for their self-assertion.

The most remarkable feature of this rising identity was that it pushed to the vanguard a creative minority of dauntless people to fill up the leadership deficit Kashmir was so agonizingly manifesting for the last so many centuries. These ingenious creatures welded together widely disparate view points that characterised pre-medieval Kashmir and fruitfully fashioned the edifice of its new religious and cultural ethos not by coercion or

choice of conversion or death, but by love, affection, humanity and equality. They inspired the formation of a burly and splendid people's coalition and a united-front against the evil effects of notoriously disreputable primitive socio-economic configuration. They did a lot of social engineering and economic planning to ensure total eradication of grisly remains of the archaic pattern of our preceding identity and building up a new Kashmir. They imbibed a great deal of knowledge at their Central Asian well-wisher's knee and promptly adopted their economic and industrial model to reorganize their economy. Kashmir became, thus, more luminous than its mountains, pastures, lakes, rivers, streams and springs; a real paradise with no traces of agrarian, fiscal and industrial backwardness and ignorance and savage vices in sight.

Equally important is the role played by the native intellectual and spiritual geniuses, especially Shiekh-ul-Alam Noor-ud-Din. With his thoughtfulness, compassion, piety, virtue, meditation and love, he persuasively and virtually demonstrated what Islam stood for. His fierce denunciation of the *mullahs* and *pirs* was to all intents and purposes aimed at preventing Islam falling into their lap to become their private property and a subject of their deliberate prevarication and a source of their gratuity.

His endeavours were fairly rewarded by bringing about, ultimately, reconciliation between the old and the new; richly strengthening, thus, a new Kashmiri identity which is both Kashmiri and Muslim in its essence, expression and assertion.

Incredibly enough, no other civilization had earlier thought of bringing into operation such a wonderful social engineering than Islam did in Kashmir. Bedecking its identity with spaciouly designed and sociologically sustainable jewels and diamonds and decorating it with invaluable ingredients, refinements and potentialities to make it presentable—in both its Kashmiri and Islamic dimensions—before the world and potent enough to declaim against all the ills

and irrational and unjust attitudes, the sudden appearance of the brightening crescent on Kashmir's horizon, in the wake of Asiatic Civilization's overland mission, was, thus, an epoch-making event. With its profundities and imponderable impact, it enabled the Kashmiris to stand on their unequivocal intentions and serious aspirations for an honourable and dignified life full of surplus than the deficit they had slowly but surely suffered previously; throwing open, thus, the golden gates of prosperity and plenty to all irrespective of sharp differences in their creed, colour, caste and sex, besides encouraging the gradual procreation of great and creative vibes of Lal Ded's rationalism to fortify this infant and emergent social ecology against vandalism, insanity and virus. That the humanism of this women saint was not in the least incompatible with the Muslim ethos is beyond any dispute.

But this identity was not destined to have cheery and sunny moments always. It came to face a period of huge tribulations, tremors and despairs too. Which was chiefly owing to the native naïvety that became its worst enemy in course of time; making it, ultimately, subservient to the avarice of the progeny of those very grand missionaries who were the real progenitors of this identity formation and who had left no stone unturned in weaving its success story. They were the *Mawalis*—a motley crew of *Sayyids*—who, for satiating their ever increasing lust for power, pleasure, wealth and women steadily built up an incorrigible morass of sectarian confusion in the Valley. It was a very discomforting spectacle of the *Sunni-Shia* disdain, bickering and dichotomy which they spread over a large canvas of history to outdo the rise of collective opinion and movement in Kashmir; pushing the people, thus, into the lap of aliens to surrender their own independence, individuality and autonomy at their feet simply to protect their sectarian interests, complexes and ways of personal aggrandisement and dominance.