

The Spread of Shi'ism in Kashmir during Chak Dynasty (1554-1586 A.D.)

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Abstract

Kashmir had a deep rooted historical tradition. It remained under a number of Hindu dynasties in succession till 1339 AD, when a Muslim dynasty named Shahmiri came to power. It is obvious that without sufficient indigenous backing no dynasty could have remained in power for a long time. So, before the establishment of Muslim rule here, either there were surely the followers or supporters of Islam or the subjects were in trouble because of internal conflict of the ruler of this reign. Thus, Muslim power got an opportunity to establish its reign. In the subsequent period, the Chak dynasty came to power in 1554 and ruled over Kashmir till 1586. Their reign is a landmark in the history of Kashmir because it was the first Shi'a dynasty in the northern India. The rulers of this dynasty had played a significant role in spreading Shi'ism in Kashmir; because of their encouragement and patronage, a number of people professed this faith. Before the establishment of the Chak dynasty, there were also people whose inclination would have been towards Shi'ism due to the impact of Sufism. In this paper an attempt is made to see how Shi'ism gained ground in Kashmir before the Chak's reign by the influence of Sufi saints and became dominant in the period of Chak's rule.

Keywords: Twelver shiaism, Chak rulers, Shamsuddin Irani, Propaganda

It is very difficult to date when and by which way Shi-ism entered into Kashmir. According to H. A. Walter, Shamsuddin Iraqi was responsible in bringing Shi'ism and its ideals into Kashmir in 1486ⁱ; however, it was present in Kashmir before the arrival of Shams Iraqi.

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A prominent Sufi named Sayyid Sharfuddin Bulbul Shah came here during the time of Suhdev (1301-20). He converted a number of Hindus to Islam. The most prominent among them was Rinchan (1320-23), the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. It is not sure but Bulbul Shah was believed to be a Shia saint by the Shias of Kashmir; however it is largely contested by Sunnis who in turn claimed him as their own saint. We can say that all the converts made by Bulbul Shah along with Rinchan were Shias. After Bulbul Shah we see a series of Sufi saints who came to Kashmir. In the reign Hindal Qutbuddin (1373-89), two fugitives Sayyid Ali Hamdani and his son Mir Muhammad Hamdani- came to Kashmir from Hamadan (a centre of Shi'ism in Persia); both were responsible for the promotion of Shi'ism in Kashmir. However this statement is also contested from different vantage points of view. It is largely argued that they had to leave their homeland for life on account of Timurs' religious zeal for Shi'ism; a fact that is still in dispute. The compilation of Sayyid Ali Hamadadi named '*Al- Muwaddatul Qurba*' shows much love for Ali like the Shias through the following statements, 'obedience to Ali is obedience to Allah', keys of paradise and hell are in Ali's hand'. This book posits that these immigrant Sayyids were Shias either of the *Ismaili* or the *Imami* branches.ⁱⁱ

With the arrival of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, the spread of Shi'ism received a further momentum in Kashmir. He was a *Nurbakhshia* saint. Here it may be pertinent to know about the practices of *Nurbakhshia silsila* (order) and up to what extent, its inclination was towards Shi'ism. They, like the Shia, have love for the *Ahl-i-Bait*ⁱⁱⁱ and emphasized on the doctrines of *twelve Imams*.^{iv} They also observed *Muharram*.^v On the other hand, they like the Sunnis accepted the *Ijma*' (*the principles of agreement among Muslims giving legal sanction*), but with the passage of time they gravitated towards Shi'ism. As Shah Ismail (1501-1524) had declared Shi-ism or the doctrines of the *Twelver Shi'ism* or *Ithna Ashariya*(those Shias who recognise only twelve Imams) as state religion in Persia, the *Nurbakhshia sect* also declared themselves as Shias in Kashmir.^{vi}

Shamsuddin Iraqi was a man of letters. It is believed that he wrote a treatise on Shi'ism entitled *Fiqh-i-Ahwat*.^{vii} According to Ferishta, he was a Shia of Twelver group.^{viii} He was sent to the court of Hasan Shah, Sultan of Kashmir in 1481 as the envoy of Hussain Mirza Baiqara (1469-1506), Sultan of Herat.^{ix} Behind it Mirza's purpose was more religious than political; he wanted to propagate the *Nurbakhshia* sect in Kashmir.^x Shams Iraqi stayed there for about eight years. Being an envoy, he could not carry on his missionary activities openly during this period. He mainly preached through informal ways and succeeded to convert Baba Ismail Kubravi and Baba Ali Najjar to Shi'ism.^{xi} However, this came to the

notice of royal authority and he was eventually expelled from Kashmir.^{xii} After some years, he arrived in Kashmir for second time in 1501.^{xiii} At this time, Ali Najjar handed over to him all his disciples^{xiv}. After this, Shams Iraqi started to propagate his faith with enthusiasm. He was successful in convincing Musa Raina to embrace Shi'ism. Musa Raina gave much needed support to carry out his missionary activities with fervour and alacrity.^{xv} He also gave land at Zadibal to build a Khanqah.^{xvi} This helped Shams Iraqi to reach out a large number of non-Muslims who became followers of Shi'ism.^{xvii} In the course of time, Musa Raina and Shams Iraqi showed interest in adopting hardcore means to advance the cause of Shi'ism through the length and breadth of Kashmir. This culminated in the destruction of religious structures and other ecclesiastical institutions. Suka writes, "On the advice of Shams Iraqi, Raina arrested men belonging to temples and destroyed them; confiscated lands of the Brahmins and gave them to Iraqi's servants."^{xviii} This process of forced conversion could not be carried out for a long time as Sunnis began to resist. Sayyid Muhammad Baihaqi, Muhammad Shah's prime minister, was known for his Sunni faith, forced Shams Iraqi to leave Kashmir for *Baltistan* where Iraqi was successful in converting Buddhist monks to Shi'ism.^{xix} The death of Sayyid Muhammad in 1505 gave an opportunity to Iraqi for returning to Srinagar.

With the elevation of Musa Raina to the position of Prime Minister after the death of Shams Chak created a favourable condition for the promotion of Shi'ism across Kashmir with state support. The supporters of Shams Chak among them Kaji Chak, Sarang Chak and Mir Chak were prominent, came under the influence of Shams Iraqi and subscribed to the ideals of Shi'ism without showing resistance.^{xx} Besides political and economic compulsions, they also found themselves closely associated with the sect of Ismaili group of Shi'ism whose influence had already reached Kashmir.^{xxi} With the passage of time, these Chaks became inclined towards Twelver Shi'ism by the courtesy of Iraqi.

The conversion of Chaks had contributed to the growth of Shi'ism in the region and they also wielded great deal of political influence in carrying out their religious mission. After the death of Shams Chak, Kaji Chak emerged as a prominent leader who was also a strong supporter of Iraqi. According to Birbal, "Kaji Chak was highly honoured by Shams Iraqi who prayed for his better future and put his own cap on his head, forecasting about his royal future."^{xxii} As a wazir of Shahmiri's Sultans, Kaji Chak helped Shams Iraqi to establish Shi'ism firmly. All the prominent nobles had embraced Shi'ism.^{xxiii} He made his best to impose the Shia doctrine on his subjects and had a book *Feqah-i-Ahwat* for them^{xxiv}. In the meanwhile Sheikh Fatahullah, a prominent Sunni saint, attempted to advance the cause of his

faith as against the activities of Kaji Chak. Suharawardi and Kubravi saints and orthodox ulema also vehemently opposed the dissemination of Shi'ism in the region. They were not successful in their endeavour and Kaji Chak forced Fatahullah to leave Kashmir for Sialkot.^{xxv} When the Shi'ism was getting much ground in the valley through Kaji Chak's activities, many obstacles were created by Kazi Chak's opponent Regi Chak who with Magres requested for the help of Mirza Haider Dughlat.^{xxvi} Availing of this opportunity Mirza captured Kashmir in 1540 and ruled till 1551. His rule was the beginning of many misfortunes for Shi'ism. At first, Mirza Haider was liberal to the Shias. He even visited the tomb of Shams Iraqi at Zadibal and as a humble devotee paid his respect.^{xxvii} But, he became antagonistic on account of political reasons. Mirza faced resistance from Regi Chak who tried to change the nature of political rule by allying with Kaji Chak. As a matter of fact all his enemies were Shiites and therefore he wanted to chastise in consonance with his policy of political expediency.^{xxviii} The tomb of Shams Iraqi was demolished and desecrated by his order. Shams Iraqi's son Daniyal was caught and beheaded along with his supporters. Violence against Shiism was unleashed at every level by the state and many had to leave country for life.^{xxix} As Mirza says, "thank god at present time, no one in Kashmir dares openly to profess this faith but all deny it and give themselves out as good Sunnis."^{xxx} Mirza, however, could not continue his policy of vengeance against Shias as it became counterproductive in causing popular resistance against state. Mirza was killed through a conspiracy hatched by a group of Chaks. This enabled Ibrahim Shah to capture the seat of power along with Daulat Chak who became his wazir in 1552.^{xxxi} In due course of time the cascading influence of Chak began to spread across the state by leaps and bounds making Shia faith of Islam as popular religion of the region. Daulat Chak adopted a policy of restraint against persecuting the people of other faiths. He was a liberal in the matters of culture and tried to minimize religious antagonism.^{xxxii} He also continued his patronage to the practice of Shia faith and got constructed a mausoleum in honour of Sheikh Daniyal. The tomb of Shams Iraqi was given to his descendents and servants for maintenance.^{xxxiii} The practice of the reciting of Twelve Imams' name in the Friday prayer was brought again into public religious life^{xxxiv}. Through various measures and peaceful methods, Daulat Chak popularized Shia faith by generating positive opinion about its practice.^{xxxv}

With the establishment of power at Shrinagar by Ghazi Chak in 1554 opened up new vistas for the dissemination of the ideals of Shi'ism across the valley.^{xxxvi} As an astute ruler Ghazi Chak used his office for the expansion of Shi'ism through political expediency

and religious zeal. He was quick to expand his political sway by conquering far-flung fiefdoms in the region by military means. *Skardu, Gilgit, Kishtawar, Pakhli*, and *Mangli* were subsequently brought under the direct control of Chaks who also had wielded authority over tribal chiefdoms like Gakkhars. Simultaneously Ghazi Chak also had paid utmost attention in promoting Shia faith by all possible means but without taking recourse to military methods. Opinion among the scholars vary as for as his religious faith was concerned, Ghazi Chak was a conscientious ruler, continued his attention on the welfare of his subjects and also was contumacious in advancing the cause of Shi'ism with fervour and tenacity (*Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, held the view that he was not a fanatic. His wazir was a Sunni named Sayyid Mubarak)^{xxxvii}. But on the contrary, he was ruthless in spreading Shi'ism and did not spare any of his religious critics and executed Sayyid Hamid Raina and Sayyid Kamal since they were followers of Sunni tenets.^{xxxviii} Well known Sufi saint Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom was not allowed to share his religious ideals and was forced to leave country.^{xxxix} Makhdoom continued his religious activities once again after the death of Ghazi Chak.^{xl}

Husain Shah (1563-70) came to occupy the seat of power after the death of Ghazi, who was also lenient and never made contentious effort to thrust his faith upon his subjects; however this period witnessed a relentless religious dispute in regard to denominational difference between Shia-Sunni. This quarrel took place in 1568-69 between Yusuf Aindar, a staunch Shia and Kazi Habib, the imam of the *Jamia Masjid* who was prejudicial against *Ahl-i-Bait* and used to abuse Shias.^{xli} This dispute resulted in long drawn battle on account of the execution of Yusuf Aindar.^{xlii} It gave a chance to the Mughals to intervene directly in the affairs of Kashmir. It is true that communal riots took place around this period but, Husain Shah was not himself a fanatic Shia. He allowed the practices of *Hanafite*. In fact in the matter of Yusuf Aindar's execution, he was forced by circumstances to uphold the decision.^{xliii} His attitude towards non-Muslims was also liberal and gave religious freedom. He used to participate in their festivals.^{xliv} The subsequent Sultans of this dynasty like Ali Shah (1570-78), Mubarak Shah (1578-79), Lohar Shah (1579-80) and Yusuf Shah (1580-86) were also liberal.

Ascendance of Yaqoob Shah (1586) to the throne was a turning point in the history of Chak dynasty. He was a fanatic and his main purpose was to propagate Shi'ism. Reversing his predecessors' policy, he re-imposed *Jizyah* on non-Muslims.^{xlv} Each one of the subjects was forced to pay 40 para per annum on account of the religious persecution. Many had left the country and substantial number of the subjects toed the official line and sought to gain

favour by submitting to Shi'ism.^{xlvi} Not only non-Muslims but Sunnis also met with the same treatment by Yaqoob Shah. He dismissed Qazi Musa as he did not obey to royal order. Qazi was asked to insert *Ali-yun-wali-ullah* (Ali is the friend of Allah) into the traditional call to prayer which he did not do. Considering this as an act of religious revolt, Yaqoob Shah locked him in a political case and got him executed eventually. In the place of Qazi Musa, Mulla Ganai was appointed as a Qazi of Srinagar who was a well known Shia.^{xlvii} This incident caused a revolt by the Sunnis who appealed to Akbar to intervene on behalf of them which eventually led to the annexation of Kashmir to the Mughal Empire.

The Shia rulers of Kashmir adopted a number of popular techniques and methods of propaganda to spread the message of their faith in the countryside. ManaqibKhwan, one of the leading singers of the initial expansion of Shi'ism, was successful in conveying the message of Ali and his descendants to common people through popular songs.^{xlviii} Similar method was adopted by the Shia rulers of Kashmir to capture the imagination of common people by appealing to sentiment and emotive feelings. *Tabarra*^{xlix} (reviling) was also brought into practice with the view to establish the claim of Ali and his descendants as the legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad. The celebration of *Eid-i-Ghadir* was also introduced during this period in order to popularize the custom and practice of Shia faith through public function. It was believed that on the 18th of *Dhual-hijjah* the Prophet formally declared, Ali to be his heir apparent after him in carrying the faith, marked the celebration of *Eid-i-Ghadir*. These methods not only created opportunity for the dissemination of Shi'ism but also provided the much needed social affinity with their religious identification.

In summing up, it may be argued that Shi'ism was introduced and spread in Kashmir by Sufi saints especially by Nurbakhshia saints. Among them Shamsuddin Iraqi was instrumental in laying foundation for the expansion of Shia faith particularly *Ithna Asharia* sect which gained much ground in Kashmir during Chak dynasty. Shi'ism came to Kashmir in the beginning of fourteenth century and grew over the period with the state patronage. However, it was a history of chequered development with the intermittent resistance from Sunnis. Chak dynasty throughout its course of reign consistently patronized and promoted Shi'ism. The annexation of Kashmir with the Mughal Empire checked the growth of Shi'ism eventually leading to its steady decline; however the widespread practice of Shi'ism remained as, writing in sixteenth century, Ferishta says that during his own time, the army of Kashmir had more Shiites than any other group in its roster.¹ The king of little Thibet, contiguous to Kashmir, was putatively known for his religious zeal, who did not permit any non-Shias to

enter his kingdom.^{li} But in due course of time, Shi'ism began to wane yielding place to the resurgence of Sunni reign.

Notes and References

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- ⁱ H. A. Walter, *Islam in Kashmir*, Muslim World, Vol. IV, 1914, p.348.
- ⁱⁱ J. N. Hollister, *The Shia of India*, London, Second Ed. 1979, pp. 13, 143.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Literally the people of the house i. e., the immediate family of Muhammad which includes beside the Prophet , Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain. J. N. Hollister, Op. Cit., p. 413.
- ^{iv} Nurullah Shushtari, *Majalisul –Muminin, Tehran, 1882*, p.31; *Tuhfatul-Ahbab*,(Anonymous), Research and Public Library, Srinagar,pp.20-23.
- ^v NurullahShushtari,Op.Cit., p.317.
- ^{vi} Mohibbul Hasan,*Kashmir under the Sultans* , Calcutta,1959,Appendix ‘A’
- ^{vii} *Tuhfatul-Ahbab*,p.13;Mirza HaiderDughalat, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, Eng. tr. E. D. Ross and N. Elias,London, 1895, p.435.
- ^{viii} Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng. tr. *As history of the rise of Mahomedan Power in India till the year 1612*, by J. Briggs, Vol. IV, London, 1829, p.261.
- ^{ix} *Tuhfatul-Ahbab*, p. 13.
- ^x N. K. Sing, *Islamic Heritage of Kashmir*, Vol. I, Srinagar, 2000, p. 23.
- ^{xi} Muhammad Azam,*Tarikh-i-Azami*, Urdu tr. by Munshi Ashraf Ali, As *Tarikh-i- Kashmir*, Delhi, 1946, pp.67-75.
- ^{xii} *Tuhfatul-Ahbab*, p. 4.
- ^{xiii} Baharistan-i-Shahi, (Anonymous), Research and Public Library, Srinagar, p.729.
- ^{xiv} Muhammad Azam, Op. Cit., p.75.
- ^{xv} *Tuhfatul-Ahbab*, p. 29.
- ^{xvi} Ibid, p. 64.

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- ^{xvii} *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, P.80; PirHasanKhulhami, *Tarikh-i-Hasan*, Urdu tr. by Muhammad Ibrahim, Research and Public Library, Srinagar, 1957, p.199.
- ^{xviii} Suka, *Rajatarangini*, Eng. Tr. J. C. Dutta, *As kings of Kashmira*, vol. III, Calcutta, 1898., p.339.
- ^{xix} *Tuhfutul-Ahbab*, pp .63-64.
- ^{xx} *Ibid*, p. 899.
- ^{xxi} A saint named Sadruddin had been appointed as the head of the Ismailis of Sindh, Panjab and Kashmir in 1421. See, J. N. Hollister, *Op. Cit.* 145
- ^{xxii} Birbal Kachru, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir, Research and Public Library, Srinagar*, p.70.
- ^{xxiii} Sayyid Ali, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir, Research and Public Library, Srinagar*, p.24.
- ^{xxiv} Mirza Haider Dughlat, *Op. Cit.* p.435.
- ^{xxv} Muhiuddin Miskin, *Tarikh-i-Kabir, Research and Public Library, Srinagar*, p.148.
- ^{xxvi} Mirza Haider Dughlat, *Op. Cit.*, p.482.
- ^{xxvii} *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, pp. 1099-1106.
- ^{xxviii} AbulFazl, *Akbar Nama*, Eng.tr. H. Beveridge, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1902-39, pp.484-85.
- ^{xxix} *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, pp. 112-13; Haider Malik Chadura, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir, Research and Public Library, Srinagar*, pp. 122-23.
- ^{xxx} Mirza Haider Dughlat, *Op. Cit.*, p.436.
- ^{xxxi} *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, p. 199,; Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Op. Cit.*, p.723.
- ^{xxxii} *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, p. 121.
- ^{xxxiii} *Ibid*, pp. 221-222.
- ^{xxxiv} *Ibid*
- ^{xxxv} Nizamuddin Wani, *Muslim Rule in Kashmir (1554-86)*, Delhi, 1993, p.26.
- ^{xxxvi} Nizamuddin Wani, *op. cit.*, p.288.
- ^{xxxvii} *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, p. 123.

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- xxxviii Pir Hasan Khulhami, Op. Cit., vol. II, p.277.
- xxxix Muhammad Azam, Op. Cit. p.91, Hassan, Op. Cit., vol.III,p.209.
- xl Hassan, Op.Cit.p.209.
- xli Sayyid Ali, Op. Cit., p.28; Mohd. Azam, Op.Cit., p.151.
- xlii *Baharishtan-i-Shahi*, p. 127.
- xliii Ferishta, Op. Cit., p.297.
- xliv Suka, Op.Cit., pp.292-93
- xlv Suka, Op.Cit. p. 420; Abul Fazl, Op. Cit., p. 763.
- xlvi Suka, Op.Cit., p.420.
- xlvii Haider Malik, Op. Cit., p.161, Abul Fazl, Op. Cit., p.763. Mohd .Azam, Op. Cit., p.175, Hassan, Op.Cit.pp.270-71
- xlviii Manaqibkhwān had been existed in Iraq and Iran since Buyid period (923-1055). See J.A. Boley (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. V, P.293.
- xlix Revile or curse against the first three caliphs whom Shias consider as usurpers of Ali's rights. J.N. Hollister, Op. Cit. p.188
- ¹ Firishta, Op. Cit., p.261
- ^{li} Ibid

