

## KASHMIR AND CENTRAL ASIA: REGIONAL LINKAGES

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### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the relation between region and religion in Kashmir historically. The section is followed by exploring the historical underpinnings of the Kashmir region and religion vis-à-vis the social, cultural, religious and economic aspects linked with the region of Central Asia. It resorts to a historical approach in its analysis.

**Keywords:** Region, Religion, Trade, Syncretic.

### INTRODUCTION

To know Kashmir through the spectrum of region and religion raises a question, what is Kashmir and what it constitutes of?. Zutshi states 'the answer depends on the historical moment, since the geographical extent of what we call Kashmir has shifted throughout the centuries depending on political circumstances and the political entities that consolidated their rule over this region that lies at the cross roads between Central and South Asia. However, whether an independent kingdom, a province of the Mughal or Afghan Empires, a princely state in British India, or a state in India, the Kashmir Valley has remained at the heart of all these entities that have been referred to as Kashmir'.<sup>i</sup> Before working out the changing geographical boundaries of the region and its past history, a short introduction of the Kashmir region with regard to the present position is discussed.

### JAMMU AND KASHMIR: THE STATE

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is devised from three administrative divisions' □ Jammu region, Kashmir region and Ladakh region. The three regions are well defined from each other with regard to their history, geography, culture and ethnicity.

The three regions harbour followers of diverse religions like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Sikhs. Apart from the religious diversity the state also is a haven for diverse ethnic and lingual groups. The multiple languages are spoken in the state besides English which include Kashmiri, Urdu, Punjabi, Dogri, Gojri, Ladakhi and Paharri. The identities become multi layered and also witness overlaps of the identities in the three regions. And no single homogenous identity in the region can be easily separated from the other type of identity in the region. Balraj Puri in this context says: Another important fact about these diverse types of identities is that at places they overlap and at other places cut across one another. In fact, no single identity represents all urges of members of a community. Moreover the degree of consciousness of a particular identity did not remain constant and changed from time to time.<sup>ii</sup>

The Kashmir region with regard to religion, culture and language is diverse as well. The region also consists of 4% non-Muslim population, 10% of the population of the Kashmir region are non-Kashmiris, which include Gujjars and Paharis, who are linguistically related to the Jammu region and religiously connected to the Kashmiri region, however Islam is the religion of the majority.<sup>iii</sup> As far as the language is concerned, the other languages spoken in the region are Gojiri, Pahhari, and Dard languages namely Shina, Kohistani, Purkhi and Balti, but 89% of

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