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Traces of Muslims in Early Medieval Kashmir: A Historical Survey

Mohammad Irfan Shah*

Abstract

The Kashmir valley, eulogised as the heaven on earth, has been, throughout its history, a place of great interest for saints, sages, Sufis, travellers, adventurers, and rulers. Unlike its neighbouring regions, the conquest of Kashmir at the hands of (foreign) Muslim rulers was suspended for a considerable period of time (i.e., up to 1586, when Mughal rulers of India annexed it) but could not escape the spiritually elite lot among Muslims (Sufis and Rishis), who conquered but not the land, rather the hearts of the people, receiving from them the unfathomable love and reverence for generations to come; thus, bringing forth the materialization of the prediction about Kashmir made by Kalhānā, the ardent Brahman and classical Sanskrit chronicler of Kashmir, who says, "That country may be conquered by the force of spiritual merits, but not by forces of soldiers. Hence its inhabitants are afraid only of the world beyond." Muslims were present in Kashmir centuries before the establishment of Muslim rule and large scale propagation of Islam there. This, historical fact substantiated with valid documents, depicts the broad-mindedness, welcoming, peace loving and tolerant nature of medieval society of Kashmir, that eventually sustained a multicultural and all-inclusive environment in Kashmir for a considerable period of time. The current paper endeavours to trace the presence of Muslims in Kashmir in the early medieval period i.e., much before the large-scale propagation of Islam and the establishment of Muslim rule there.

Keywords

Kashmir, Muslims, Cross-cultural intercourse, Hindu society / Buddhist society

Introduction

The magnetic attraction that the lush green valley, Kashmir, possess with an affluence of captivating natural scenery of alluring meadows and flower beds, water-falls, rivers and lakes, coloured saffron fields, fruit orchards, singing cataracts and rivulets has been highly talked about. The beauty and appealing scenery of Kashmir has received the attention of renowned local and foreign poets besides receiving a place in the age-old Geography of Ptolemy and Histories of Herodotus (Sufi, 1975, p.iv). 'Urfī Shīrāzī, the renowned Persian bard, thus eulogizes the valley as:

گر مرغ کباب است که بابل و پراید
بر سوخته جان که به کشمیر در آید

Any burnt creature entering Kashmir; Even if a roasted fowl, it shall grow feathers.
(Diddamari, 2011, p.xxix).
In the words of Abū al-Faḍl "the praises of Kashmir cannot be contained within the

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