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OPINION

Turning Off Shankaracharya's Beacon



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Around 800 AD a young monk came on a visit to Kashmir. Kashmiri historians who were overly preoccupied with the machinations of the ruling class did not notice him. However, the visit proved to be a transformational one. There was a glorious sangam of Advaita Vedanta with Kashmir Shaivism within the young monk. He rose in his transformation and the Kashmirians saw his ascent spiritually and physically when he entered the Southern facing door of the Sharadapeeth temple, a door which until then had never been opened. The monk honored the Kashmiri *puranvisis* by becoming a lifelong devotee of Sharada and Sri Chakra. In his ecstatic descriptions of the Devi he sang about the dancing ear rings or *tatankas* which only married Kashmiri pandit women wear, in lieu of the *mangalasutra* worn by *sumangalis*, as an outward symbol of their marriage.

The Kashmirians in return honored the monk. They named one of the two hillocks located in the heart of Srinagar after him as Shankaracharya hill and at its top the temple was named after him. This hillock was rich in its sacred history. The temple was originally built by King Sandhiman of the Gonanda dynasty around 2600 BC. He named it Jyeshtheshwara and the hillock Sandhiman Parvat. King Gopaditya repaired the temple around 400 BC and the hillock was renamed as Gopadari hill for his noble act. He donated two villages, the present Gupkar and Buchwara for the maintenance of the temple. King Lalitaditya, perhaps one of India's greatest emperors, repaired it again around 700 AD but did not change the name. Today a controversy has broken out that there is a move afoot to give greater legitimacy to giving the name Takht-e-Suleiman to the hill. Omar Abdullah has tweeted "Here is the sign with the name & history clearly laid out. Where exactly is the plot to change the name???" Well in order to understand the plot and the new normal that has been established one needs to see the pattern of facts and draw one's own conclusions on how insertion occurs (as is clear in the plaque), then expansion and ultimately absorption with history being erased or eradicated.

When Kashmir was taken over by political Islam around 1330 things changed, some with immediate and extremely painful consequences for the Kashmiri Pandits and others with longer term significance. One of these changes was the concerted and sustained effort by Islamists to rename the entire map of Kashmir which has accelerated with the formation of the Indian state. Around 1400, Shah E Hamdan, who was a missionary from Iran, came to Kashmir. He was the first one to rename Kashmir as Baghe-Suleiman given that the Koran recognized King Solomon as one of the earlier prophets. The changes began to pick pace with *Gaurimarg* being changed to Gulmarg. According to Sir Aurel Stein *marg* is derived from the Sanskrit term *mathika* which means 'cairn' or small hut. Shepherds would seek shelter here as they would graze their flock. Yusuf Shah Chak who surrendered to Akbar was the one who instituted this change from Sanskrit to Persian, from Gauri to Gul, destroying the link with the Shaivite history of the location. When Abul



Islamist fundamentalism has been growing in Pakistan

Fazal wrote the Akbarnama it is the first time that we see mention of the hill as Koh-e-Suleiman. Over time the local Muslims changed it to Takht-e-Suleiman. Notwithstanding efforts on the part of the medieval Kashmiri Muslims to fabricate an Abrahamic Jewish connection (this was prior to the contemporary Israeli Palestine conflict because of which manufactured history has now run into violent collision with modern reality) and recognizing that Kashmiri Muslims were oblivious to the fact that there are at least six hillocks named Takht-e-Suleiman around the world, with the most prominent one located in Iran, (none of which King Solomon could have visited), Kashmiri Pandits have steadfastly resisted this attempt to manufacture history and retained the Shankaracharya hill name in its pristine glory.

Kashmiri Pandits saw Shankaracharya's hill as a beacon which could be seen from anywhere in the Valley, a beacon of a pan Indic Hindu renaissance and a lighthouse of consciousness. They shrugged off the dark shadows of the psychopath King Sikandar who among other heinous acts destroyed the original Shiva lingam along with over three hundred precious idols in the temple. They would sing the *Gauri Dashkam* with its connection to Shankaracharya. Listen to it on YouTube under the title *Leela Rabada aarti* which unites Kashmir to Kanyakumari and you will see why in their eyes they were the Masters of the Universe and Emperor Jahangir was no more than a thief. His sin was to dismantle the finely sculpted stone staircase which connected the Shankaracharya temple with the river Jhelum near the temple of Devi Tripurasundari known as Shudashyar Ghat. The stones were used by his queen Noor Jehan to build a huge mosque known as Pathar Masjid.

Belgaon with a historical connection to Nandi and Amarnath yatra became Pahalgam but worst of all Devi Panchala mountains became Pir Panchaal. The historical connection with Sita the original Panchala princess and the visit by Ram, Lakshman and her to the region was stripped away. It is hard to imagine why any Pir would have the name Panchaal and no Panchala has stepped up and identified himself as a Pir yet so this juxtaposition has no authenticity to it. Yet photographs of the train chugging through the new tunnel were titled with this impostor name. Over five hundred villages have been legislated new names. Anantnag has now become Islamabad; Hari Parvat is now renamed Kohi Maran according to the plaque that is placed there and Srinagar is now routinely referred to locally as Shehar the Iranian name for the city. If you doubt this go and buy the very expensive two volume sets called *Shehar-i-Kashmir* which interestingly was funded by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural heritage (INTACH) J&K Chapter. This

exercise which was conducted post exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 carries the imprimatur of UNESCO and carries the title that it is an inventory of Historic Properties. The general rule of naming landmarks and buildings is simple. First honor goes to the founder, second to the party that makes substantial additions to it and third to the party that gives it the greatest fame and prominence. Try to see how many names of Kashmiri Pandits you can find in the glossy books and you will find ones and twosies. Yet Kashmiri Pandits probably founded up to 15% of the homes and in some localities were near 100% of the residents of Srinagar. So much for a most successful religious cleansing whitewash as the appropriators of distressed properties have now been given recognition and legitimacy by Indian tax payer funds and rubber stamped by UNESCO!

There is one bright spot in this conversion of Kashmir into an Islamic land and that interestingly enough concerns Shalimar gardens where Zubin Mehta and Abhay Sopori held the world famous concert. Kashmir's capital city Srinagar was founded by Pravarsena II in the second century. He built a hunting lodge on the northeast end of Dal Lake along with a garden and named it Shalimar which stands for the jackals which were hunted there. Shaal corrupted form of *ShrRgaala* meaning Jackal, *mar* meaning kill. *ShRgaala* --> Shaal (being up-brmsha of *ShRgaala*). The modifications happened because of Praakrutization of Samskrutam and later further degeneration occurred because of the use of Persian and Urdu scripts. The Persian and Urdu languages do not have enough sound forms (Phonemes) to capture the Samskrutam or Kashmiri sounds. Emperor Jahangir of Shankaracharya ill fame expanded this ancient garden in 1619 and actually renamed it *Farah Baksh*, the delightful, which the common public rejected. Emperor Shah Jahan further extended it and again renamed it *Faiz Baksh*, the bountiful, but again nobody cared for the Iranian name and the ancient name has stuck even with the Kashmiri Muslims. Top down religious diktats do not work all the time!

Why does this matter to Indians generally and to Kashmiris specifically including especially Kashmiri Muslims? The answers lie in three areas- Nationality, Diversity and Identity. In this regard I will take the framework that the Kashmirians themselves developed on these issues a framework which Indian policy makers seem to be blissfully ignorant of or more likely deliberate violators of.

First, the Kashmirians believed that between History and Geography History would trump Geography. Those who myopically focused on retaining Geography by armed force and were willing to lose History would find one day that they had lost both. The Kashmiri

Pandits at peril of their existence never gave up on their sense of history. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is a gift to humanity. The enemies of the Kashmiri Pandits with a much better grasp of this point have followed a systematic and disciplined process to strip Kashmir's history away. The Indian state has been an impotent witness. To understand its grave implications there is no better point to illustrate this than to look at what has happened in Crimea.

Second, the Kashmirians were the ones who popularized the concept of *Vasudev Kutambakam* the world is one family. Pandit Vishnu Sharma expounded this to his pupils in the Panchatantra which was written around the 3rd century BCE in Kashmir. What is less well known is that the Kashmirian scholars had also clearly stated that the concept of Unity in Diversity only exists in the state of Vidya. It does not exist in the state of Maya or illusion. The failure of the Indian state in the last 60 years to educate Kashmiris to truth as opposed to what they have been fed by fanatics meant the inevitable death of Diversity within the Valley. Kashmiri youth are not growing up with an open mind, nor seeing that they are only one flower in a garden of many flowers where Nagas, Pisachas, Buddhists, Parsis, Jews, Vaishnavites, Shaivites, Shaktas, Muslims, Gujjars flourished in harmony and now Sikhs and Christians are seeking to exist. The logical end game was that today the Kashmiri Muslim bears the stain of having been complicit in the greatest religious cleansing of modern times in the Indian subcontinent.

Third the Kashmirians were the ones who propounded the doctrine and techniques of Know Thyself and you will know ultimate reality. This is what gave them universal connectivity. From Southern India to Tibet all the way to China and beyond to Korea and Macedonia they were welcomed. Today the identity that the Kashmiri Muslim has been implanted with is one where he has forgotten his roots, where he has created a huge trust deficit between himself and the world and instead of being the empowered being that his ancestors were is now reduced to a total state of dependency. He is unable to function in the global public square when a cricket game is being played and align his conflicted fundamentalist emotions with the reality of his universal existence. Last week in an announcement that did not get much coverage but has major ramifications Ladakh's legislative council voted that they wanted to have Union Territory status and independence from Kashmir. 60% of J&K Land belongs to Ladakh. Narrow identities are inevitably accompanied by a narrowing of the space that one can operate comfortably within and the Kashmiri Muslim's world has narrowed inexorably. More dangerously when one's extreme, narrow world view is at conflict with pluralistic reality then this can lead to an individual's mental and ego breakdown and sometimes violence. The most telling example of this was the Boston Marathon act of terror on the part of the two Tsarnaev Chechen brothers who were enjoying the freedom of America and especially when there is absolutely no evidence that the US has done anything but quietly support the Chechen people.

The way forward is crystal clear. Kashmir belongs to Kashmiri Pandits and nobody can deprive them of it. Kashmir's history belongs to Kashmiri Muslims and nobody should deprive them of it least of all the social engineers who are radicalizing them. Shankaracharya's hill belongs to Shankaracharya and the Indian public should demand that alter ego names without any foundation should not get any space. As for the Indian State it should introspect on its policy of social and cultural appeasement in Kashmir, nay abdication and whether it truly has been in the best interests of all of the Kashmiris.

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