

The Glory And The Exile

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As far as we can look back in the recorded history of Kashmir,
We see a river of Hindus flowing through thousands of years;
Even beyond the recorded history they are thought to have been there.
Five-thousand years of time is some weight for claiming their ancestral
Lineage in their land - a claim that now pierces like a dagger through their heart.

The name Kashmir is found in unbroken form in ancient Hindu texts:
Nilmatpurana, Ashtadhyayi, Mahabarta, Puranas, and Braht Samhitta.
We know of Gonandiya Dynasty's continuous reign over three-thousand years.
Legend has it that King Gonanda The First and his son Damodra
Lost their lives fighting in Kureva - Pandava war of Mahabarta.

After thousands of years of Hindu civilization,
Under the new Buddhist convert, King Ashoka,
Buddhism took over Kashmir for the next few hundred years.
It was then the city of Srinagri, later moved and renamed Srinagar, was founded.
Fourth international Buddhist Council was held in Kundalvan (Harwan),
In which five-hundred scholars from different countries participated.
Mahayana Buddhism was born there.
Kashmir become the preeminent center of Buddhism,
From where it diffused to Central Asia, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan.
Lord Buddha is himself supposed to have felt that Kashmir was the right place for
meditation.
In seventh century the renowned Chinese monk Hiuen Tsiang stayed here for two
years.

For two-thousand years Kashmir was an incandescent source of Sanskrit learning
and literature.
It had the intellectual culture to dwell on the deepest human connections
To God, immortality, consciousness, human values, and the mode of living.
It produced some of the most fecund and luminous scholars:
Kalhan, Bilhan, Acharya Bhamba, Udbhata, Acharya Kutanka, Mammata,
Anand Vardhana, Vamana, Rudrata, Kshemendra, Rojanak Shitianth.

A star would light in the firmament whenever Abhinav Gupta meditated alone on
Kashmir Shaivism.

The most tragic point in Kashmir Pandits' history came in 1339,
When Shah Mir founded the Shamiri dynasty paving the way
For seven-hundred years of Muslim rule in Kashmir.
Their torture and humiliation reached its peak under
The fifth Sultan Sikandar, who imposed a tax, jiziya,
On people who happened to be Pandits, and banned their use of tilak.
Brutally wounded and hounded, so many Pandits left Kashmir that a legend
That only eleven families were left behind was engendered.
As if they had not borne enough suffering they had to endure another
Cycle of torture and humiliations under Pathans and Sikhs.

With India's independence new hopes rose among the Pandits
That their better days were not far off.
In the beginning Naya Kashmir sounded a bugle of fairness and freedom,
Only to be dashed by the new wave of discriminations.
New Delhi heavily invested in keeping the Muslims happy,
At the huge deficit of Pandits' economic security and advancement.

Pakistan hungered for Kashmir from the first moment of its creation.
When the beloved did not return its suitor's attentions enough,
It used the ultimate weapon of religious unity and succeeded somewhat.
An insurgency much planned by Zia of Pakistan materialized in 1989,
Killing twenty-thousand Pandits and leaving them no recourse but to leave
Kashmir.
About forty-thousand of them still miserably languish in the refugee camps of
Jammu.
But Pandits' plight has still not moved the GOI -
Engendering a new expression: refugees in their own country.

The supreme irony of Kashmiri Pandits is that today they are asked who they are?
Being a minority in the present cycle of history,
Politicians wonder if it is absolutely necessary for them to live in Kashmir.
How would the architect of Taj Mahal have felt
If his name were omitted from the history of the monument?
Today's Kashmiri Pandit is a refugee trying desperately to hold on to his identity;
He is all over the world, trying to continue his ethos.

The community is like scattered leaves in search of the tree they were shaken off from,
Or the stones of a temple demolished by terrorists
Trying to join with each other to re-form the original shrine.

Pandits are beating their chest on what has happened:
They lived poorly in Kashmir but they were in their home;
They were heavily discriminated against but it did not matter.
But now out of their historical and cultural womb,
Exiled in their and foreign lands,
They feel the earth is shaking under their feet -
They see the signs of their civilization coming to an end.
Many efforts are being made to preserve their ethos
But the forces of diffusion are strong and they are on the wrong side of history.
It is still difficult to murmur the words that Kashmiri Pandit community is dead,
But their thoughtful are preparing for that.

When the history of Kashmiri Pandits is written fifty years from now,
It will be noted with irony and pain
That there was a community in the fabled land of Kashmir who
For five-thousand years there reached high levels of philosophy, religion, and literature;
Who were peace-loving and deeply immersed in religion;
And who were forced to leave their homeland for political reasons.
And their subsequent painful diaspora and diffusion all over the world
Thinned their original personality and culture so much
That their civilization became extinct.
And the history of a thousand-year tormented community came to a tranquil end,
But their story will inspire many a mind and warm many a heart.

But Pandits know that their end in this world, at this time, is not their end in the universe,
Because the universe has no beginning and no end,
What has been created by God once lives forever,
Their spirit is enshrined in eternity.

They will be reborn when the present cycle of Indian history is over,
They will reclaim their paradise and live there as they have always done.

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