

**Media and Religion in Contemporary Kashmir:
A Case Study of Anantnag & Srinagar**

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24/07/2017

DECLARATION

I, Abdul Raof Mir, hereby declare that this PhD thesis entitled "Media and Religion in Contemporary Kashmir: A Case Study of Anantnag & Srinagar" is my own original work carried out as a doctoral student at the Centre for Media Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, under the supervision of Dr. Chitrlekha Dhamija.

All the sources used for the dissertation have been fully and properly cited. This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree at any institute.


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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this PhD thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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To

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Purpose of Study

In the last decade and half, there has been a surge of interest amongst scholars to understand religions in their relationship with different media practices (Mitchell and Marriage, 2003; Rajagopal, 2001; Starrett, 1998; Gillespie, 1995; Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Lövheim and Lynch, 2011; Meyer and Moors, 2006). This increasing scholarly attention to conceptualize religious practices in the backdrop of media technologies has been termed as a *media turn* in the study of religions (Engelke, 2010, p. 371). While in the context of various other societies, vast amount of literature has been devoted to the theme of religion and media, a study on this theme in the context of Muslim society in Kashmir¹ has not been undertaken. With few exceptions, scholars of media in South Asia have more than often treated religion and media as separate spheres or entities.

Hent de Vries, in the essays in *Religion and Media* (Vries and Weber 2001) extrapolates from Jacques Derrida's contribution to the specified volume which argues that communication media and religion are both mediations, both bridging the interior and exterior, though in different ways (Vries and Weber, 2001, p. 20). But this has customarily not been the case while studying religion and media in South Asia. While scholars such as Barbara Metcalf and Francis Robinson have recognized the importance of print in the Islamic academies of 19th century colonial India, not much scholarly work has been undertaken so far to study the relationship between religion and media. This study is therefore an attempt to critically engage with several questions addressed by

¹ Kashmir Valley, also referred to as Kashmir, is one of three administrative divisions of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

social scientists about the relation between religion and media by taking Anantnag and Srinagar districts of Jammu and Kashmir as an example.

The purpose of this study is to examine religious practices of Muslims in Kashmir in the changing contexts of communication. Initially the endeavor is to arrive at an understanding of the historical relationship between religious practices among Muslims in Kashmir and the dominant modes of communicating these religious practices. The historical approach adopted by this study is influenced from the rallying call of ‘Always Historicize’ by Fredrick Jameson in the opening of his book *The Political Unconscious* (1981). This historicization of the relationship between religion and media in Kashmir is thus a means to indicate that no true picture of contemporary religious practices of Muslims in Kashmir can be established without making references to the past.

With the context set through the historical method, this study on media and religion in contemporary Kashmir then takes a ‘cultural studies turn’ in order to understand how Muslims in contemporary Kashmir use media as materials for constructing their religious understanding. This study looks at the ways in which religion and media intersect in the spaces of political, social and cultural practices in the Muslim society of Kashmir. Taking Kashmir’s Anantnag and Srinagar districts as sites of ethnographic inquiry, this study aims to understand how Muslims in Kashmir use media to construct religious meanings, and how these religious meanings relate to many other aspects of their lives.

2. Research Problem and Objectives

Like various other societies in the world, religion permeates almost into all spheres of social, cultural and political life in Kashmir. In Kashmir Valley, where Muslims are in majority and constitute nearly 97% of the total population (Census, 2011), a distinctive religious public sphere has emerged in last three decades. This religious public sphere to a large extent is facilitated by flow of new media practices involving the processes of digitization. The proliferation of media and means of communication have multiplied the possibilities of creating new religious communities and new networks within the Muslim

population of Kashmir (Eickelman & Anderson, 1999). The contemporary religious public sphere in Kashmir is distinctively unique as access to new media technologies have altered the ways in which religious knowledge was produced and consumed in the past.

The proliferation of new media technologies has facilitated the entry of many new actors to join the religious marketplace and disseminate their religious ideology. In the process of this multiplication of diversified opinions on religion through new media platforms, there has been a veritable discursive explosion on the concept of religious identities (Hall, 2000, p. 15). How religious identities have become an organizing principle and sources of social renewal for Muslims in Kashmir is reflected through the changes in patterns of religious discourses, mushrooming of number of mosques, *madradas* and increase in the percentage of Muslims performing Hajj (pilgrimage). In these conditions, it is the media which serves as a mirror or a site to locate and reflect on the discourses produced around religion in Kashmir.

It is to be noted here that this upsurge in the intense focus of religious identities is not entirely confined to the region of Kashmir. Many scholars have termed this trend as a global phenomenon, tied to the consequences of globalization (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1997; Tomlinson, 2003; Bauman, 2004) and policies of liberalization in the 1990s. The proliferation of new media technologies have been interpreted as catalysts in accentuating the processes of globalization (Appadurai, 1990; Giddens, 1991). In Kashmir, the new media technologies have allowed the Muslim population to actively participate as social actors to reproduce, circulate and articulate their versions of social, religious, cultural or political realities. Unlike television or radio, situated largely within the formal state control, new media technologies such as mobile phones, internet, audio and video CDs, cassettes, computer multimedia etc. have created counterpublics (Warner, 2002), where the Muslim groups invent and circulate discourses that undercut the authority of media controlled by the government and the corporate media. The significant purpose of this study is to therefore document the religious patterns that have emerged in contemporary Kashmir in the backdrop of the proliferation of new media technologies. The attempt is to

look closely at how religious discourses, practices, and forms of organization change as new media practices are adopted.

The renewed interest in the scholarship on the relationship between religion and media resulted due to the emergence of phenomenon of televangelism in North America, however, much of the recent scholarly attention on the relationship between religion and media has shifted to studying religious practices in the backdrop of digital technologies. Stephen O’Leary, one of the earliest scholars to focus on communicating religion on computer networks has suggested that a better understanding of religion in the era of electronic world can be best accomplished by attending to historical contexts (O’Leary, 1996, p.783). This study, following O’Leary, aims to accomplish more by attending to a historical context.

Hence, one of first objectives of this study on media and religion in contemporary Kashmir is to begin with an excursus into historical narrative by reflecting on whether the transition from one mode of communication to another contributes in refiguring a particular religious practice. The attempt here is to trace the links between religion and media since the advent of Islam in Kashmir. To explore whether the transition from one mode of communication to another contributes in refiguring a distinctive religious practice, this study looks at media forms such as orality, manuscript tradition, printing technology, radio, television, cassettes and new media technologies. Secondly, the study reflects upon the religious landscape of Kashmir, examining the ways in which religious groups in Kashmir organize their activities in relationship with the media. Thirdly, the study will look at the ways in which meanings are constructed by individuals through their engagement with the media that is religiously significant. The focus here is to explore how people participate in wide range of social, cultural and religious practices while engaging with the media.

3. Context: Religion and Media in Kashmir

Scholars such as Walter Ong, Marshal McLuhan, Harold Innis, and Jack Goody have divided the history of communication largely as a play of three acts: orality, literacy and electronic consciousness (Sterne, 2011, p. 208).² The society in Kashmir was exposed to the technology of writing much before the advent of Islam in Kashmir and the prowess to understand written word was limited to the domain of the priestly class and the administrative apparatus. Majority of the population depended on orality as a means to transmit mores of the society. Many historians on Kashmir Valley drawing from local and non-local sources trace the earliest contacts of the Muslims with Kashmir Valley from as early as the eighth century. However, it is not until the establishment of first Muslim Sultanate in 1339 in the form of Shah Mir dynasty that for the first time Islam as a religion started receiving political patronage (Wani, 2004, p. 55; Khan, 1994). In the beginning of the 14th century, Hinduism was a mass religion in Kashmir Valley and by the end of the 16th century; Islam replaced Hinduism as the mass religion in the Valley.

Much of the literature on conversions (Hangloo, 2008; Khan, 1994; Wani, 2004) to Islam in Kashmir has identified two trends for communicating Islam to masses in Kashmir. One trend of communicating Islam to masses in Kashmir has been attributed to the role of highly literate *Kubravi Sufi* missionaries from Central Asia and Persia. The second trend which explains mass conversions to Islam has been attributed by the scholars to the role of local *Rishis* in communicating the local variant of Islam in Kashmir Valley. This study is of the view that both these trends intersected, shared the same space however, at the same time, participated in quite different cultural worlds (Dewey, 1995, p. 2). These two modes of religious thought were distinctive, yet flowing into and out of the each other. These settings prepared a ground for the interplay of oral and written scribal culture in Kashmir Valley and thereby starting a communication process which contributed in defining the religious landscape of Muslim society in Kashmir Valley.

² This study is aware of the problems in employing orality and literacy theory for studying cultures. The scope of this study makes it impossible to delve into the nuances of this debate. For criticism of orality literacy theory see the works of Jonathan Sterne (2011) and John Halverson (2012).

The introduction of Islam to the Valley of Kashmir is often attributed to the role of Kubravi Sufi missionaries from Central Asia and Persia. These missionaries from Central Asia and Persia succeeded in winning the admiration and political patronage of the Muslim rulers. Kubravi Sufi's in Kashmir Valley were not satisfied merely with ritualistic conversion of locals to Islam. They largely insisted on preaching a code of Islam in Kashmir Valley which could discern Muslim practices from non-Muslim practices. Kubravi Sufi's not only tried to distinguish Islamic practices from non-Islamic practices, the latter were sometimes firmly repudiated (Khan, 1994). Richard M. Eaton (2005) in the context of conversions to Islam in South Asia has said that this trend was accompanied by "greater attention given to the all-encompassing power of one Islamic agency in particular, the supreme god of Allah, who assumes the function and powers of all the agencies in the former pantheon" (p. 111).

In medieval times, Kashmir was valued for its art in paper making. Historian Ishaq Khan (1978) writes that the paper produced in Kashmir was distinguished for its fine gloss, its evenness, its wax-like color and its appearance and was considered by those who used it as a means to "impart dignity to their correspondence" (p. 72). One Kubravi Sufi missionary, whose power wielded the most extraordinary influence in the spread of Islam in Kashmir Valley is said to be Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani. He is considered to have authored more than one hundred religious manuscripts (Rafiqi, 2003, p. 50). This study relates the role of manuscript tradition in granting power to those who had the authority to access, interpret and understand the written word. The study argues that those who controlled the written word wielded great power in interpreting religious texts. Their monopoly over this literate form of knowledge tended to polarize the society into a mass of the ignorant and the knowledge elite. The study attributes this trend to the role of Kubravi Sufi missionaries, whose knowledge of the written word allowed them to become the part of religious aristocracy and the administration.

On the other side, the masses which depended on oral mode of thought formed a distinctive religious Islamic tradition. This religious tradition was exposed to the thought of literate religious tradition represented by Kubravi Sufi's but did not completely

internalize it. This study argues that it was the local Rishi tradition within the fold of Islam which performed a decisive role in accommodating Islam as literate religion with the transcendental aspirations of unlettered masses. This aspect of religiosity thereby fulfilled the social, psychological and survival needs of the traditional society of Kashmir Valley. The masses in Kashmir Valley were distinct from the literate few as in their dependence on oral mode of thought and knowledge. Oral tradition has been the major source of the preserving culture and tradition in Kashmir Valley for unlettered masses. Oral tradition has remained the method in Kashmir Valley in which stories, folktales, history and religious beliefs are passed on from one generation to another.

The poetry of Nuruddin Nurani, regarded as the patron saint of Kashmir, has been accorded the status of *Kashmiri* (local language of Kashmir Valley) Quran or Koshur Quran by the locals. Yoginder Sikand (2004) has written that the verses of Nuruddin Rishi are still on the lips of Kashmiris, and are treasured by both Muslims as well as Pundits. On such characteristics of oral cultures, Eric Havelock has observed, that “the poetry, proverbs, metaphors serve as mnemonic devices to help storing traditions to be passed on for future generations. Poetry is first and last a didactic instrument for transmitting the tradition” (p. 43). According to Havelock, a collective social memory, tenacious and reliable, is an absolute social prerequisite for maintaining the apparatus of any civilization (p. 42). The role of Nuruddin as a seer, a prophet resembles the role of minstrels in Homeric Greece captured by Havelock in his work. The prevalence of oral tradition in the Kashmir Valley suited the prerequisite nature of social and cultural requirements of the Muslim masses in the Valley of Kashmir. This observation falls in line with what Clifford Geertz (1973) has called ‘cultural dimension of religious analysis’ or ‘religion as a cultural system’ i.e., a system of symbols which synthesizes a people’s ethos and explains their worlds (p. 89).

The balance between the interplay of oral and written religious thought in Kashmir as explicated above began to alter only when for the first time British intervened into the political and socio-cultural affairs of the state during the Dogra rule in Kashmir. The development of transportation facilities and establishing of first modern schools in the

19th century contributed to the transition of old medieval institutions of Kashmir valley into modern ones (Khan, 1994). These institutions, though modern, were determined at least partially, by the existing nature of medieval institutions in Kashmir. Through the contact between arrival of the conditions of modernity and the local institutions, a new pattern of religious and political society began to emerge in Kashmir. For the first time, the local Muslim elite by responding and reacting to the Christian missionaries began to form a new set of new socio-religious groups aiming to address the Muslim society in Kashmir. One of the earliest and noted of these socio-religious organizations founded by the Rasool Shah in 1899 was *Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam*.

The spread of modern education in Kashmir facilitated the growth of printing press in Kashmir in the first half of 20th century. Until the adoption of printing press by Muslim religious elite in Kashmir, it was the manuscript tradition that formed the basis for circulation of written word. The study then looks at the role of printing technology in creating a new wave of religious assertions in Kashmir. The use of printing press led to the circulation of religious content in abundance. Muslim religious reformists in Kashmir were the early adopters of printing technology in Kashmir. The printing technology adopted by the new religious reformists altered the traditional equation of oral and literate transmission of Islam in Kashmir. Print emerged as a platform for the new means of religious practice. Print came to be the main forum on which religious debate was conducted. It was an era of pamphlet wars and of religiously partisan newspapers and magazines (Robinson, 1993). Chitrleka Zutshi has observed that at the turn of 20th century, the political exigency of locating and defining an identifiable Muslim community on the Kashmir political and religious landscape led to an intense focus on Islam and definitions within the literate sections of the society (Zutshi, 2004, p. 120). The study links this development to the increasing use of printing technology by the educated section of Muslims in Kashmir. The study argues that printing became central to the proliferation of the new religious reformist assertions by groups such as *Jamiat-i-Ahli Hadith*, *Deobandis* and later on *Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK)*. These religious reformist movements since their birth used printing technology to spread the religious content.

Though printing technology contributed to the flourishing of various religious reformist groups in Kashmir, due to the limited literacy levels, the influence of these religious reformist groups remained on the periphery of society in Kashmir. The study, therefore, sees printing as a medium which did not satisfy the religious sensibilities of the Muslim majority who could not read and write. It is in this backdrop that the radio becomes the first mass medium in Kashmir which could resonate with the cultural requirements of the masses in Kashmir. The study, therefore, argues that unlike print media, the inherent power of radio is located in its orality and its ability to reach people without intermediation. The radio in Kashmir reinforced the folk/oral story culture of Kashmir as it ideally suited the context of the society in Kashmir. The inauguration of *Radio Kashmir Srinagar* itself started with the recitation from Quran by Begum Akbar Jahan in 1948. This highlights the role of communication technologies in mediating religion in Kashmir.

The study then attempts to look at the ways in which television came to dominate the ways of articulating religion in Kashmir. The proliferation of private television broadcasters for the first time catapulted the entry of channels by Muslim individuals or organizations devoted entirely for religious purposes. The privatization of media allowed Muslims in Kashmir for the first time to use television as a space to witness variety of ideological views, positions and projects concerned with their religion (Echaibi, 2014, p.191). In this background, the study discusses the role of well-known tele-Islamicist, Zakir Naik, in the context of his interpretation by the Muslims in Kashmir. The arrival of digital television in Kashmir in 1990s, the study argues, revolutionized the ways in which religion is mediated. The content viewed through television by the Muslims in Kashmir facilitated the transition of Kashmir from place to Kashmir as a space. The intensification of cultural transactions through television contributed to shape local happenings in Kashmir by events occurring many miles away (Giddens, 1990; Appadurai, 1990). The cultural transactions between Kashmir and other regions up until the advent of television were largely restricted, sometimes by the facts of geography, and at other times by minimal accessibility to means of communication (Appadurai, 1990).

At the time when television was not very popular as a medium in Kashmir, there was also a proliferation of a cassette market in Kashmir. The beginning of 1990s saw the proliferation of cassette recording industry in Kashmir. Peter Manuel has said that though Kashmir did not host a particularly dynamic regional cassette industry, cassette tapes of separatist songs circulated widely, mixing calls for Islamic jihad with appeals to Kashmiri nationalism, reconstituting the religious public sphere in Kashmir (Manuel, 1993, p. 250). The control of state over the production and circulation of discourses in case of radio and television made cassette technology a medium which could be used to challenge the discourses under the formal control of the state (Eickelman, 2003). The proliferation of cassette industry contributed to a formation of religious space in which the local citizens deliberated about their religious, political and cultural affairs (Hirshkind, 2007). The religious space created through the use of cassettes, therefore, became an arena of discursive interaction about the matters of religious, political and cultural aspects.

Up until the beginning of 1960s, the literacy levels of Muslim population in Kashmir continued to remain abysmally low. The government schools were the only means of imparting modern education. By looking at the transition of society in Kashmir to mass literacy, this study highlights the role of Muslim religious organizations for facilitating the transition of society in Kashmir to mass literacy. The massification of education in Kashmir in the past three decades has contributed to restructuring of the religious, political and cultural consciousness of the Muslims in Kashmir. With the increased levels of literacy, new formations of religious and political imaginations came into existence. The changes brought by mass literacy merged with changing political conditions, onset of conditions of globalization and resulted in giving a distinctive shape to the religious discourses in Kashmir. Mass literacy in Kashmir contributed in reshaping conceptions of self, religion, nation, and politics.

In these settings, it is the explosion of digital media technologies which has contributed significantly in catapulting the information on religion to its public prominence. The ability of new media technologies to place the religious content in circulation has enabled

increased access to information about religion by all sections of the society. This has contributed in creating a new generation of Muslims grown up with mass marketing and demographic targeting of modern advertising. The use of media (publishing, CD/DVD, TV, mobile phones, internet) for religious purposes, the study argues, has contributed to the intensification of already existing divisions within the Muslim society in Kashmir. In order to explain how digital technologies have contributed to the formation of renewed religious identities, this study takes a cultural turn by looking at the ways in which Muslims individuals or Muslims groups in Kashmir use new media technologies to construct religious meanings.

Before 1970s virtually all the studies on media and religion were attempts to explain the *effects* of media on religious patterns (White, 2007, p. 3). The cultural studies analysis has now become a dominating paradigm of communication research on media and religion in past three and half decades. The central question of the cultural studies approach is concerned with how individuals in groups use media to construct religious meaning in life and how this religious meaning relates to many other aspects of human life. Like cultural studies, the ‘Media, Religion, and Culture’ tradition takes media as a text revealing the culture (White, 2007, p. 12). Culture here is mostly seen as a “tool kit,” a pool of explanatory resource symbols that one might draw upon to make sense out of puzzling situations (White, 2007, p. 15).

This study also approaches media and religion through the cultural studies approach by looking at the ways in which Muslims in Kashmir make meanings in their engagement with media they use for religious purposes. This aspect of looking at the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir is borrowed from the constructivist, interpretive or ‘culturalist’ methodology of Stewart Hoover. This culturalist approach tends to employ more humanistic, ethnographic, observational and interpretive methods (Hoover, 2002, p. 5). Using this method, this study looks at how people make meanings of mediated religion in contemporary Kashmir. One of the advantages of approaching the study through this perspective is to stay away from any claim for the universalistic understanding of the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir. It is therefore

important to note that this study simply intends to be judged as one of the ways to describe the certain nuances of a much complicated, paradoxical and ambiguous society.

4. Key Research Questions

- What has been the historical relationship/s between religion and media in Kashmir? Can they be seen as separate realms? Or, did they occupy the same spaces and serve many of the same purposes?
- How do religion and media interact in the contemporary spaces of social and cultural practices in Kashmir?
- How do Muslims in Kashmir negotiate with media used for religious purposes and how do they construct and interpret meanings from this engagement?
- How does looking at the shifts in relationship between religion and media in Kashmir help in adding an additional perspective in understanding the society and polity of Kashmir?
- What is the relationship between theological viewpoints of different religious groups in Kashmir and the media which they use?

5. Methodological Influences

The question concerning theoretical frameworks for approaching religion and media plays a fundamental role while attempting to assess any relationship between media and religion (Lundby, 2012, p. 225), also influencing the methods employed and questions explored in this study. In this section, the attempt is delineate the influences of theoretical approaches on methodological framework undertaken during this study. In the beginning this study aimed to understand the relationship between media and religion primarily through the cultural studies approach, however during the process of the study, it became

important to integrate cultural approach with the various other approaches that have been undertaken towards studying media and religion. This learning process shares much in common with the observation that theory evolves during the research process and is a product of continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). Many scholars in the past, by often depending on a specific theoretical approach, have attempted to explore the connection between religion and media. However, an extensive study on the relationship between media and religion not only should link the disciplines of religious and media studies, but also involve methods which are more multidisciplinary and complex (Kellner and Durham, 2006).

Kellner and Durham (2006) have argued that multiplying theories and methods aid in grasping diverse dimensions of an object, in making more and better connections, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural artifacts or practices under scrutiny (p. xii). In this backdrop, the present study on the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir also tries to draw from various methodological approaches in order to explain the dynamics and ambiguities of social, cultural, religious and political fabric of the society in Kashmir. This approach has allowed the present study to view media not as a foreign element but as a part and parcel of the religious and cultural life in Kashmir. This is perhaps a significant departure from the scholarship which has in the past attempted to study the history of media in Kashmir. Almost every study on history on media in Kashmir unanimously traces the origins media in Kashmir with the launching of the first newspaper named *Ranbir* (1924) in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (Hassan, 2014; Mufti, 2011).

This approach of equating media with the means of mass communication such as newspapers, television, radio etc. with media can be attributed to the functionalist understanding of media, within which, media are simply seen as external apparatuses performing the role of society. This view which dominates the current understanding of media even today in many mass communication schools of South Asian subcontinent views media just as a carrier, container, and a disseminator of messages. The present study therefore distances itself from looking at media simply as a tool to perform the task

of society. While studying the relationship between religion and media in Kashmir in a historical context, the study views media as something that has been always essentially an integral component of the social and cultural fabric of the society in Kashmir. From the study of oral attributes of religious patterns to the permeation of digital technologies into the day to day affairs of daily life, media has occupied and continues to occupy a vital function in the lifeworld of the Muslim society in Kashmir.

Hoover and Clark in *Media, Home and Family* have argued that in order to search for meaning and survival, humans integrate many elements around their existence (2004, p. 53). In the process of integration each element comes to occupy a vital function. Media is one of many such ingredients. This study on the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir move ahead and not only view media as a kind of mirror to the society or a cultural forum, as Hoover and Clark suggest (p. 45), but to see media also as an ontological phenomenon (Heidegger, 1977). Through this approach, the study does not simply see media as an element to be integrated, but something with which humans don't have an external relationship (Heidegger, 1977). This in no way should imply that there is a linear history of relationship between media and society. By looking at the relationship between media and Islamic traditions in Kashmir in a chronological order, the present study proposes that the transition from one mode of communication to another has 'contributed' to a particular form of religious practice in Kashmir.

With the help of this wide-ranging or assimilatory definition of the media, the study tries to propose an understanding of religious patterns in the Muslim society of Kashmir in their relationship with the processes of mediation. In order to arrive at an understanding of religion, the study is influenced by the definition of religion submitted by Clifford Geertz, which sees religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). One of the significant advantages to approach the understanding of Islamic traditions through Geertzian framework in Kashmir allowed the study to distance from many approaches

which see Islam simply as a religion dealing with the question of theological and moral underpinnings in the light of foundational texts such as Quran and the Prophetic traditions (*hadith*). Understanding religion as the system of symbols helped the study to see Islam not only a religion practiced by Muslims in Kashmir but as a cosmological order which also operated through the conventions of social, cultural and political codes of the society in Kashmir.

This study does not in any sense argue that that religion is to be singularly viewed vis-à-vis media. Instead through the multi-perspectival approach outlined above, this study consistently tries to show that religious traditions in Kashmir have always proliferated through many other forms of social, political and cultural conditions. In this broader framework this study tries to explore how different modes of communication integrate with various other socio-cultural and political factors to influence religious practices. Therefore this study locates itself in the framework of various debates (Gillespie, 1995; Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Lövheim and Lynch, 2011; Meyer and Moors, 2006; Mitchell and Marriage, 2003; Rajagopal, 2001; Starrett, 1998) which in the past two decades have tried to study religion and media, and the significance of their interaction for social, cultural and, political change in contemporary societies.

One of significant tasks throughout the study is to arrive at an understanding of the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir that could link it to the other studies on the theme of religion and media. This pattern of thinking as explained in the beginning is inspired from the suggestion by Stephen O'Leary (1996) who has said that a better understanding of religion in its relationship with media can be accomplished by attending to historical contexts and comparisons (p. 783). This type of formulation facilitated to connect this study with the larger framework of theories dealing with the question of modernity, globalization and social transformations.

6. Research Methods

This study primarily is an ethnographic study where an attempt is to go and ask people what they do with media that is religiously or spiritually significant. Ien Ang in *On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research* writes that ethnographic method is recognized by many as one of the best ways to learn about the differentiated subtleties of people engagements with media (2006, p. 174). For this study, “ethnographic methods are those that have been traditionally used by anthropologists, such as secondary data analysis, fieldwork, observing activities of interest, recording field notes and observations, participating in activities during observations (participant observation), and carrying out various forms of informal and semi-structured ethnographic interviewing” (Whitehead, 2005, p. 2). After referring to existing data available on Islam in Kashmir and other scholarly work on the theme of religion and media, this study began to collect primary data through fieldwork in Anantnag and Srinagar districts of Kashmir Valley. Fieldwork is a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed personally in the lifeworld of the respondents (Whitehead, 2005, p. 3).

This study takes Anantnag and Srinagar districts of Jammu and Kashmir as ethnographic sites for exploring the relationship between religion and media in Kashmir. The aim is to ask inhabitants of these two regions about their *accounts of media* in relation to religion. The fieldwork for this study has been conducted in two districts of Kashmir namely Srinagar and Anantnag. The rationale for selecting Srinagar as one area is that Srinagar as a capital has had been a cultural centre of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The history of Srinagar and its evolution as a city in the contemporary times is the reflection of the transition of Kashmiri society from earlier times to now. In addition, whenever any innovation or experiment has had been carried out, Srinagar has been majorly remained the source of that. In the last two decades Srinagar has seen the phenomenal transformation in terms of its negotiation with the consequences of globalization and the ramifications brought by the engagements with globalization.

While on one side, Srinagar is more urban, Anantnag represents Kashmir by being the place where majority of the population live in rural areas. Kashmir still is an overwhelmingly agricultural and rural society, where majority of the population live in villages. This sets Anantnag as an example to study the cultural pattern of rural Kashmir. Anantnag provides an important opportunity to look at the ways in which rural population in Kashmir have adapted to the challenges of modernity. The aim is to understand whether people represent the social and cultural contexts³ that they inhabit (Hoover, 2006, p. 86). Can there be any parallels drawn by looking at the different sections of a society vis-à-vis the question of religion and media?

This study is largely based on in-depth interviews with the participants. In these interviews people recount the pleasures, irritations, satisfactions, boredom, revulsions while describing media. In their work on religion and media, Stewart Hoover and his colleagues refer these stories of media as ‘social and cultural constructions’ that reveal important things about the nature of meaning and identity (Hoover, p. 91). According to Hoover these self-descriptions should be seen as identity statements or the narratives of the self, which in the context of an inquiry into religious and spiritual meaning, values and symbols can enable us to connect with the larger understanding of the society. Narratives according to Hoover are a process where we humans weave together sometimes disparate, contingent elements of life into a story that at least aspires to coherence. Identity narratives are the stories we tell ourselves and tell about ourselves (Hoover, p. 92).

Hoover has said that these narratives of self provide an opportunity to understand how all of the elements of life experience are drawn into these narratives, how they relate, what is struggled over, what is negotiated “in” and what is negotiated “out” (p. 94). The in-depth interviews conducted with individuals in both Anantnag and Srinagar are based on semi-structured interviews arranged during the process of the field work. By using in-depth interviews as a method to assess the media and religion intersections in the private and

³Socio-cultural context here refers to the idea that religion, rather than existing in isolation, is closely linked to the culture and society in which it develops.

public domains of life, the study tries to weave together disparate, contingent elements of religious life into identity narratives about self and society in Anantnag and Srinagar. To arrive at an understanding of the relationship between religion and media in a holistic sense, this study selected a set of respondents which could reveal maximum information about religious patterns in the backdrop of media.

The study identified different religious groups existing in Anantnag and Srinagar and then selected individuals on the basis of their affiliation with these religious groups. This process was conducted by visiting locations that reflect the religious structure of society in Kashmir. These locations included shrines, mosques, religious conferences, cassette shops, mobile shops etc⁴. Most of the individuals interviewed in this study have been identified primarily through snowball sampling method. Through snowball sampling the study identified potential respondents on the basis of the sampling criteria and then through these respondents it connected to chain of other respondents.

The study was required to take a departure from the approach of Stewart Hoover which largely looks at how individual seekers articulate their religious experiences in relation to media. This emphasis of Stewart Hoover on the accounts of media by individual seekers probably emanates from a fact there is a tendency in cultural studies to celebrate the notion of active audience. In these accounts of cultural studies approach an individual is given a supreme power and responsibility for the direction of their own spiritual quests. According to Hoover, people today are taking more responsibility for their own faiths, spiritualities and religious identities. Along with the decline in public confidence in institutions in general, religious institutions have also lost their prominence and their clerical authority is less important in determining what people believe and the way they live their lives (Hoover, 2008, p. 5). Religious authority in Kashmir has undeniably undergone through a drastic transformation in Kashmir, however individuals do not have the absolute authority to believe the way they believe in terms of interpreting the religious texts. The established religious institutional practices and community consensus continue to play an important role in any interpretation of the religious texts. While

⁴ See photographs from the field.

individual seekers in Kashmir are in position to access religious information as never before, however this access to the religious information don't make them the authors of the text.

In the process of this realization, it became important to look at the relationship between religious institutions and the place of individuals in relation with these religious institutions. For this purpose, this study in addition to in-depth interviews with the individuals depends also on the case study approach. Case studies are usually carried out to generate findings when a large variety of factors and relationships are involved. The case studies as research tools to explore the relationship between religion and media indicate that no basic law exist to determine which factors and relationships are important (Fidel, 1984, p. 273).

This study therefore moves beyond individual seekers and also focuses on how different religious organizations in Kashmir approach media for circulating their discourses. Through the case study method, this study came under the influence of theoretical approach of social shaping of technology. Heidi Campbell, who is the leading scholar to approach the question of religion and media through social shaping of technology (SST) approach, has observed that the 'moral economies'⁵ of religious communities make them unique in their negotiations with media (Campbell, 2010, p. 58). The study shows that the moral economies or theological viewpoints of religious groups such as Jamiat-i-Ahle Hadith, Jamat-i-Islami, Tablighi Jamaat, Barelvis etc. in Kashmir also play a role in giving distinctive meanings to media technology.

⁵Moral economy refers to the capacity of groups to actively engage with the products and meanings of the public, formal, commodity and individual-based economy and to produce something of their own as a result of that engagement. In the context of the present study, moral economy implies how communities or individuals incorporate media technologies into the patterns of their day to day affairs to construct their moral economies or economy of meanings (Silverstone, 1994, pp. 45-48).

7. Chapter Scheme

The chapter scheme of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter One, **Introduction**, gives an overview of the main points of this thesis. This chapter explains the relevance of the study, and states the major objectives of the study. It also includes methodology and theoretical approaches which have been employed in the course of this study.

Chapter Two, titled **Communicating Islam in Kashmir: An Overview** provides a historical review of relationship between different modes of communication with the religious patterns in Kashmir. One of the basic arguments of this chapter is that each form of media has contributed to the shaping of Islamic traditions in Kashmir Valley in distinctive ways. The chapter in no ways suggests any sort of media or technological determinism, but merely tries to establish how intersection of media and religion in combination to various other factors have always contributed to the circulation and spread of particular forms of religious discourses in Kashmir Valley. The initial purpose of the chapter is to look at communication forms such as orality and literacy and their interplay with Islamic traditions in Kashmir Valley. The chapter then subsequently attempts to explore the intersection of media technologies such printing, radio, television, computer mediated communication technologies with the religious patterns in Modern Kashmir.

Chapter Three, titled **Rural Media Spaces: Communicating Religion in Anantnag** of this study focuses on the ways in which individuals and religious organizations in Anantnag articulate their religiosity in the backdrop of different modes of communication. Anantnag district popularly known by the locals as Islamabad is, as per the census of 2011, the third most populous district of Jammu and Kashmir. The historical sites located in Anantnag district complements the understanding of the larger historical evolution of Kashmir valley from ancient times. This chapter begins by looking at the role of shrines in Anantnag for communicating religion. Taking examples of two

popular shrines in Anantnag district, this chapter looks at shrines as cultural and religious symbols which have played a significant role in transmitting emotions and meanings connected with the fundamental aspects of oral Muslim thought and culture in Kashmir. The study also has interviews or self-narratives of individuals who explain how they construct meaning from their relationship with shrines. The chapter then focuses on the role of Jamat-i-Islami in circulating the discourses about religion through its foray into the education sector. The chapter reflects on how those who came under these settings began to articulate their notions of self. The chapter then looks at how new media technologies such as cassettes, television and digital media have played a role in placing the religious discourses in the public sphere.

Chapter Four, **Media and Religious Practices in the Urban Spaces of Srinagar** examines the relationship between media and religion in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir. Srinagar as the capital city, administrative base, religious Centre and commercial zone, has mostly functioned as a laboratory for new religious and spiritual movements in Modern Kashmir. This chapter therefore attempts to explore the intense and complex interplay between media and religion in Srinagar. With focus on the contemporary religious configurations in Srinagar, this chapter predominantly tries to bring the role of new media technologies to the fore while assessing the relationship between media and religion in Srinagar. This chapter argues that the relationship between media and religion in Srinagar and the countryside of Kashmir has never been mutually exclusive. At the same time, experiments with media and religion in Srinagar have contributed to the emergence of different set of actors in relation to the process of production and consumption of media for religious purposes. The chapter includes the case study of tele-Islamicist Zakir Naik, where an attempt is made to understand the ways in which Muslims in Kashmir interpret the persona and work of Zakir Naik.

Chapter Five, the **Conclusion**, includes the summarization of the findings of this study. By studying the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir in historical context, this study concludes that it is not possible to fully understand either media or religion in the region without reference to the each other. Religion and media have come

together in fundamental ways (Hoover, 2006, p. 9). This is particularly evident in the context of digital technologies, which are contributing in intensifying the social, religious and cultural changes taking place in Kashmir. These media the study argues circulate the content about religion in Kashmir which has become the source for the ideas and symbols in creating religious identities in new ways. The new means of electronic communication has enabled the society in Kashmir to develop flows of exchange with geographically remote and temporally distant contexts. The conclusion therefore looks at key themes which have emerged in the process of studying relation and media in Kashmir. This chapter considers some of the common overarching themes which have appeared within studies of religion and media (Campbell, 2006). These include the themes of media ambiguity and religion, theology, religion, morality and ethics, religious traditions, community, identity, authority or power.

Chapter 2

Communicating Islam in Kashmir: An Overview

Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.

(Walter J. Ong, SJ. 1986, p. 24)

1. Introduction

The exploration of the relationship between Islamic traditions and media in Kashmir can potentially open new perspectives for understanding of the religious patterns in the Kashmir Valley. The foundation of this perspective is built on the premise that the “systems of communication are clearly related to what man can make of his world both internally in terms of thought and externally in terms of his social and cultural organization” (Goody, 1987, p. 3). One of the formative tasks required for this is to highlight the operational dynamics of oral and literate thought in the Kashmir Valley. Kashmir Valley has largely been an oral society, where the modes of communication and dissemination of information for masses were fundamentally through oral means. At the same time Kashmir Valley has the distinction of having a literate tradition dating back to antiquity. Kashmir Valley is often credited by chroniclers (Lawrence, 1895; Zutshi, 2004; Rai, 2004) as a unique region in South Asia, which possesses an uninterrupted series of written records of its history. The oldest historical narrative of Kashmir Valley that has survived to the present day is a metrical historical chronicle in Sanskrit titled *Rajatarangini* (River of Kings) written by Kalhana in the 12th century.

Before the establishment of the rule (1339) by the Muslims in Kashmir Valley, the society was exposed to technology of writing however this technology was not fully interiorized by the entire population. The literates and non-literates shared the same space

and, at the same time, participated in quite different cultural worlds (Dewey, 1995, p. 2). These settings prepared a ground for the interplay of oral and written scribal culture in Kashmir Valley and thereby starting a communication process which contributed to defining the religious landscape of Muslim society in Kashmir Valley. The nature of the interplay between written scribal tradition and orality in Kashmir continued to remain almost invariable up until the introduction of modern education by the British in late 19th and early 20th centuries. This change also indicates the transition of Kashmir from medieval to modern institutional settings.

In order to assess the relationship between media and Islamic traditions in Kashmir Valley from a historical perspective, it becomes crucial to revisit some of the questions previously raised by scholars ((Bamzai, 1994; Hangloo, 2008; Khan, 1994; Rafiqi, 2003; Wani, 2004) who have worked on the theme of conversions to Islam in Kashmir Valley. The questions on conversions to Islam in the Kashmir Valley have generally attempted to explain how and through which channels Islam made a way into the pre-existing socio-political and religious landscape of Kashmir Valley. How did the missionaries of Islam in Kashmir become successful in winning the new adherents to Islam? While assessing the historical relationship between communication and religion of Islam in Kashmir, this chapter further looks at how Kashmir Valley being largely a traditional, agrarian and non-literate society, responded to the message of a religion characterized by its literate aspects.

In the beginning of the 14th century, Hinduism remained as a mass religion in Kashmir Valley and by the end of the 16th century; Islam replaced Hinduism as a mass religion. According to the census of 2011, about 97 % of the population of the Kashmir Valley identify themselves as Muslims. The questions related to Kashmir Valley's transition to Islam have been fiercely debated and contested among historians working on history of Islam in Kashmir Valley. There are multiple and sometimes contradictory explanations that have been postulated by the historians (Bamzai, 1994; Hangloo, 2008; Khan, 1994; Rafiqi, 2003; Wani, 2004) to explain the question of mass conversions to Islam in the Kashmir Valley. Many historians drawing from local and non-local sources trace the

earliest contacts of the Muslims with Kashmir Valley from as early as the 8th century. However, it is not until the establishment of the first Muslim Sultanate in the form of Shah Mir dynasty (1339) that for the first time did Islam as a religion started receiving political patronage. The establishment of the rule by Muslims in Kashmir Valley, even though accounted for the light incidence of conversions to Islam in Kashmir Valley, this however in no ways explains the massive conversions to Islam in Kashmir Valley.

While perusing through the scholarly works (Hangloo, 2008; Khan, 1994; Wani, 2004) on conversions to Islam in Kashmir Valley, two major trends of communicating Islam can be identified to explain the process of mass conversions to Islam in Kashmir Valley. One trend can be attributed to the role of highly literate Kubravi Sufi missionaries from Central Asia and Persia. These missionaries held that there ought to be clear distinction between communicating religion to the masses and to the ruling class. The strategy of these missionaries was based on the idea that common people imitate the behaviour and culture of their rulers (Khan, 1994). The strategy of Kubravi Sufi's to win over the rulers and the nobles made them as an important part of the power circle. The chapter argues that it was the control of these missionaries from Persia and Central Asia over the written word which made them an indispensable component of the ruling political and religious ideology.

The second trend which explains mass conversions to Islam has been attributed by the scholars to the role of local Rishis in communicating the local variant of Islam in Kashmir Valley. After the arrival of Islam in Kashmir Valley, towards the end of 14th century, *Rishism* emerged as a movement of mystics within the fold of Islam. The popularity of Rishism in Kashmir Valley goes with the thought that people practice religion according to their socio-cultural requirements. This trend performed a decisive role in accommodating Islam as a literate religion to the transcendental aspirations of unlettered masses. This aspect of religiosity thereby fulfilled the social, psychological and survival needs of the traditional society of Kashmir Valley. The defining character of this trend was its dependence on oral means of communication. The following section of this chapter explains how manuscript tradition and orality contributed to influence the

Islamic traditions of Kashmir Valley in distinctive ways. It needs to be highlighted here that “these two currents of thought and action however should not be seen to be mutually exclusive, but distinguishable and yet flowing into and out of each other” (Redfield, 1956, p. 72).

2. Manuscript Tradition, Religion and Culture in Kashmir Valley

The spread of Islam to the Valley of Kashmir is often attributed to the role of Kubravi Sufi missionaries from Central Asia and Persia. These missionaries from Central Asia and Persia succeeded in winning the admiration and political patronage of the Muslim rulers. One missionary, whose power wielded the most extraordinary influence in the spread of Islam in Kashmir Valley is said to be Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani. According to various historical sources (Khan, 1994; Rafiqi, 2003), Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani is known to have visited Kashmir Valley on three different occasions (approximately 1373 to 1384 AD). Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani is also said to have been accompanied by his 700 disciples. In order to convert whole populace of Kashmir Valley, Sayyid Ali Hamdani parcelled out the Valley into different zones and assigned his disciples for launching a sustained movement of promoting conversion in their respective areas. Most of the historians on Islam in Kashmir Valley acknowledge the strategies of Sayyid Ali Hamdani and his disciples in winning adherents to Islam in the Kashmir Valley (Rafiqi, 1962).

According to three of the biographers of Sayyid Ali Hamdani, Sayyid Ali Hamdani is considered to have authored more than one hundred religious manuscripts (Rafiqi, 2003, p. 50). Sayyid Ali Hamdani considered it productive and advantageous to concentrate on the city in opposition to the villages by recognizing cities as catalysts of change (Khan, 1994). This should not however establish in any sense that these preachers from Central Asia and Persia remained confined to city; there are several disciples of Sayyid Ali Hamdani, who took abode in different parts of the Valley. Disciples of Sayyid Ali Hamdani established community kitchens (*langar*) at many places in Kashmir which served as centres for propagating Islam to people of the Kashmir Valley.

The emphasis of Sayyid Ali Hamdani on winning the loyalty of the rulers and the court in Kashmir Valley was considered as a pre-requisite for spreading Islam. It was also held by Sayyid Ali Hamdani and other Central Asian missionaries that there ought to be clear distinction in their approach to communicate religion to the masses and to the ruling class. The emphasis of Sayyid Ali Hamdani and his disciples was based on the view that common people imitate the behaviour and culture of their rulers (Khan, 1994). This approach of the missionaries ensured their well-being and it was by winning the admiration of the rulers that many institutions such as madrasas, legal schools, mosques and *khanqahs* (hospices) were built in Kashmir Valley.

The proficiency in Kubravi Sufi missionaries in written word empowered them to assume power in defining religion in Kashmir Valley. Kubravi Sufi's were not satisfied merely ritualistic conversion of locals to Islam. They insisted on preaching a code of Islam in the Kashmir Valley which could discern Muslim practices from non-Muslim practices⁶. As a religious scholar (*alim*) Sayyid Ali Hamdani addresses the '*amma*'-*i-khalq*' (common people) and expects them to obey the laws prescribed by the Ash'arite system of Sunni theology (Rafiqi, 1972). Kubravi Sufi's not only tried to distinguish Islamic practices from non-Islamic practices, the latter were sometimes firmly repudiated. Richard M. Eaton (2005) in the context of conversions to Islam in South Asia has said that this trend was accompanied by "greater attention given to the all-encompassing power of one Islamic agency in particular, the supreme god of Allah, who assumes the function and powers of all the agencies in the former pantheon" (p. 111).

The written word in Kashmir Valley up until the recent transition of society in Kashmir to mass literacy has always been the sphere of social elites. During the rule by Muslims in Kashmir, the understanding of written word guarded the religious orthodoxy of the priestly aristocracy. Written word was a tool of government and the empire. Ong (1992)

⁶ The appropriate example of this is the way in which Sayyid Hamdani convinced Sultan Shihab al Din to give up his un-islamic way of life. It was this influence which led Sultan Shihab al Din to dress himself after the Muslim fashion and to abandon visiting Hindu temples (Khan, 1994).

has said that “technology of writing tends to arrogate to itself supreme power by taking itself as normative for human expression and thought” (p. 293). The fixity of written word makes it more autonomous and more powerful. For Foucault (1980) those who control the word have the “power to subjugate the other forms of knowledge by disqualifying them as inadequate to their task and insufficiently elaborated, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (p. 82).

The Islamic traditions influenced by literary traditions in Kashmir established Islamic tradition which encouraged a direct relationship between a unique deity and the individual believer. The literate system of thought process in Kashmir Valley created an environment for teaching which was designed to cultivate rational thought processes, inspiring students to conceive of themselves as autonomous subjects capable of self-reflection and critical analysis. In this system of thought, Islamic tradition distanced itself from ritualistic performance of religion. This aspect of religion contained little magic and supernatural belief, characterized by heavily moralistic, scripturalist, puritan, monotheistic, and individualistic connotations (Gellner, 2000).

The monopoly over the text automatically rendered legitimacy to Kubravi Sufi’s in framing the dominant discourses on religion, polity and society. Through their control over written word, the Kubarvi Sufi’s wielded great power during Muslim rule in Kashmir Valley. Their monopoly over this literate form of knowledge polarized the society into a mass of ignorant and knowledge elite. Throughout history of Islam in Kashmir Valley, we see a pattern where religious traditions shaped by oral aspects of the society have been seen by literates as inadequate to perform the task of religion. The power to comprehend scriptures largely has allowed the literates to have the legitimacy in constructing the definition of ‘right’ Islam in Kashmir Valley.

The religious and cultural ties of Kashmir Valley with Central Asia and Persia resulted into the spread of Persian language in Kashmir Valley. Persian language replaced Sanskrit to become the official language of the administration in Kashmir Valley. With this shift, the political and religious elites started to participate in the reception and

circulation of Persian word. Kachru (2008) has said that the “Muslim rulers encouraged and patronized Persian scholarship, and Persian became the language of opportunity, prestige and elitism” (p. 24). With these changes, the learned missionaries from Central Asia and Persia became part of a tradition which Robert Redfield (1956) has famously termed as a ‘Great Tradition’ of societies. According to Redfield, the Great Tradition tends to be elite, urban, universal, textual, religious, orthodox, scholarly, refined, central, and, above all, consciously cultivated and handed down (Redfield, 1958). The influence of Persian language reinforced the impersonal relationship between the ruler and the ruled involving greater appeal to abstract ‘rules’ listed in a written code (Goody, 1977, p. 16). This affected not only the method of recruitment and occupations skills in Kashmir Valley, but also the nature of bureaucratic role itself.

Throughout the history of Islam in Kashmir Valley, the legitimacy to define Islam has mostly been the monopoly of those having the understanding of the written word. Those who monopolized written knowledge were also in a position to define what legitimate knowledge is (Innis, 1951). Muslims masses with no control over the production of written religious scriptures in Kashmir Valley on the other hand have always been criticized for their polytheistic practices by the literate *ulemas*. The literates were unwilling to associate with someone they considered to be an illiterate man (*nadan marad*) practicing austerities in the manner of the Hindus (Khan, 1994, p. 163).

While there remains no doubt that the Kubravi Sufi missionaries from Central Asia had a significant role in converting large number of people to Islam in the Kashmir Valley, but how did these missionaries from foreign land with different culture, language and experiences communicated a religion based on book to unlettered masses of Kashmir Valley? What was the nature of the interaction between these highly learned Sayyids from Central Asia and the non-literate masses of Kashmir Valley? In his book on the role of Rishi’s in spreading Islam in Kashmir Valley, historian Ishaq Khan, while examining the reasons for mass conversion to Islam in Kashmir Valley, points to the limitation to the mass level reach of Kubravi Sufi’s (Khan, 1994). Ishaq Khan describes two reasons for the limitations to the mass level reach of Kubravi Sufi’s. One reason Ishaq Khan cites is

the confinement of Kubravi Sufi's to the royal circles and their concentration more on 'in and around the capital'. The other reason Ishaq Khan provides for limited role Kubravi Sufi's in mass conversions is attributed to the "language barrier" (p. 224) between Kubravi Sufi's and non-lettered masses of Kashmir Valley. This brings into notice the role of local Rishi's within the fold of Islam to communicate Islamic traditions to unlettered masses in Kashmir Valley.

3. Oral Thought and Islamic Traditions in Kashmir Valley

The masses in Kashmir Valley have been different from the literate few as in their dependence on oral mode of thought and knowledge. Oral tradition has been the major source to preserve culture and tradition in Kashmir Valley for the unlettered masses. Oral tradition has remained the method in Kashmir Valley in which stories, folktales, history and religious beliefs are passed on from one generation to another. The foundation of Rishism in Kashmir Valley within the fold of Islam suited to the prerequisite nature of social and cultural requirements of the Kashmir Valley society. This is in line with what Clifford Geertz (1973) has called cultural dimension of religious analysis or religion as a cultural System i.e, a system of symbols which synthesizes a people's ethos and explains their worlds. How Rishis adapted to the message of Islam provides a fascinating account about the mechanisms of survival of traditions within oral societies.

Of the most important gratitude's which Muslims in Kashmir Valley owe to the local Muslim Rishis is their great contribution to the development of the Kashmiri language and literature. In contrast, the religious missionaries from Central Asia spoke and wrote largely in Persian and Arabic (Sikand, 2004). Muslim Rishis communicated religion in the language of the local masses, principally through the medium of poetry, using metaphors and similes drawn from the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. It is Nuruddin Nurani, the patron Rishi saint of Kashmir Valley, and his disciples, who played a fundamental role in circulating localized version of Islam in Kashmir Valley, called Rishi Islam. Nuruddin Nurani is the considered as the founder of indigenous order of Muslim mystics (*Rishi Silsila*).

The poetry of Nuruddin Nurani has been accorded the status of *Kashmiri Quran (Koshur Quran)* by the locals. Sikand (2004) has said that the verses of Nuruddin Rishi are still on the lips of *Kashmiris*, and are treasured by both Muslims as well as Pundits. The appropriation of Islam to the local conditions of Kashmir Valley by the Rishis strikes much in common with the characteristics of any oral Society. Why is it that the great thinkers/saints like Nuruddin composed their teachings in the form of poetic verses? In his work on the transition in Greek thought between Homer and Plato, Eric Havelock (1963) argues that for maintaining the apparatus of any civilization, somehow, a collective social memory, tenacious and reliable, is an absolute social prerequisite. Havelock has observed that “poetry, proverbs, metaphors serve as mnemonic devices to help storing traditions to be passed on for future generations. Poetry is first and last a didactic instrument for transmitting the tradition” (p. 43).

The role of Nuruddin as a seer, a prophet resembles the role of minstrels in Homeric Greece captured by Havelock in his work. In the Homeric times, Homer and Hesiod were venerated as the prophets, who had understanding of the cosmic truth. In Kashmir Valley, the morals, social mores were ingrained in the ‘poetic verses’ of the Nuruddin, which thus became a traditional encyclopaedia- a repository of cultural memory preserved and perpetuated by the entire populace (Havelock, 1963). The role of Nuruddin as a encyclopaedist is till today shared by majority in Kashmir Valley. The poetry of Nuruddin in Kashmir Valley composed in rhythmic form appealed in a special way to the sacral, to the ultimate concerns of existence. The poetry of Nuruddin manifests the voices of history and tradition in Kashmir Valley. This preserved word as a vehicle of general education acquired a survival power of many generations through memory. The miracles attributed in the oral tradition of Kashmir Valley to Nuruddin and his disciples illustrates how Kashmiri society entered into an unconscious conspiracy with itself to keep the tradition alive. The social pressure helped the living memory to be reinforced at every turn.

After the death of Nuruddin in 1439 AD, his disciples carried on teachings and practices of their spiritual preceptor. Numerous shrines and *khanqahs* (hospices) across the Valley were constructed to commemorate the death of these saints. The Valley of Kashmir Valley therefore abounds in a fairly large number of saintly memorials and therefore also termed as Valley of saints (*peer vaer*). These shrines have been essential components of the Muslim cosmological order in Kashmir Valley. Many scholars of Islam in Kashmir Valley have stressed on the importance of these shrines as social, cultural, religious, economic and political phenomenon in Kashmir Valley.

Historians (Bamzai, 1962; Khan, 1994; Wani, 2004) have also argued that no true picture of Kashmir Valley can emerge without taking into consideration the role of shrines in the broader social, political, religious and cultural context. Shrines in Kashmir Valley can be said to be the manifestations of oral character of Kashmir Valley society. Kashmir Valley is known for having numerous shrines, each shrine narrate the history of events that have passed on from one generation to another. Shrine culture in Kashmir Valley integrated perfectly with oral demands of the social and religious reality. This reason has made shrines of saints, both of Sufis and Rishis, in Kashmir Valley, as symbols of piety and sacredness. Talking about the efficacy of shrines in Kashmir Valley, Walter Lawrence (1895) writes that “the people believe that a visit to the shrines will secure the object of their desires, sick men will regain health, women will be vouchsafed children, and the litigant will win the case” (p. 289). This reason had made the foreigners to label Muslims of Kashmir Valley as saint worshippers (*pir parast*). The cultural performance of shrines as well as mosques established them as symbols of communicating religious thought in Kashmir Valley.

The shrines in Kashmir Valley have always embodied diverse local cultural identities. The pervasiveness of Rishis in Kashmir Valley dramatized the centrality of ‘*Rishi idioms*’ in religious life of Muslims. The believers in saints/shrines experienced the sacred through mediators. The saints buried at the shrines were not just mediators, but exemplars as well, their lives dramatized in the numerous hagiographic stories and tales inhabited the world of Kashmiri folktale. People gathered and communicated at these shrines and in

the words of Geertz (1973) the shrines as sacred symbols “functioned to synthesize a people's ethos- the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood- and their world view” (P. 89). The cognitive and emotional significance attached to shrines made these shrines as symbols impregnated with messages expressing religious experiences of people in Kashmir Valley.

The central role of shrines in the daily lives of people is assumed to be basic function of symbols. Symbolic forms and processes are the principal media of expressing inner and emotional feeling resulting from religious experience. Thus symbols arise in the subconscious such as imagination, memory and perception. The shrines in Kashmir Valley functioned as communicative symbols by communicating knowledge, information, concepts, ideas and emotions. Human beings have been described as cultural beings on the ground that they are symbol-using animals. All human behaviour consists of, or is dependent upon the use of symbols. Symbolic behaviour such as communication with articulate speech use of amulets, confession of sins, law-making, dreams, etc., are unique features which only man is capable of (Uyovwirume, 2013, p. 392). Shrines in Kashmir Valley have exemplified the symbolic behaviour of the locals in relation to their experiences with sacred. By welding the members of the community together, the shrines have always served as the agents of identification.

The oral aspects of religion in Kashmir however can be said to have made religious aspirations more flexible and contextual than written tradition, which in contrast has been termed by Harold Innis as rigid and impersonal (Innis, 1951). The oral aspects of religion in Kashmir were a component of tradition which Robert Redfield has defined as ‘little tradition’. Little tradition according to Redfield tends to be popular, peasant-based, local, oral, superstitious, heterodox, and folk (Redfield, 1958). What sets little traditions apart from great tradition is essentially their localized character. In Kashmir, this little tradition formed a central role in accommodating Islam as literate religion to the transcendental aspirations of unlettered, fulfilling the social, psychological and survival needs of the traditional society of Kashmir.

On the contrary, those who controlled the written word wielded great power. How religious education was perceived by literates as a means to wield power and control over masses can be established through this observation by Walter Roper Lawrence (1885) in his book titled '*The Valley of Kashmir*'.

“There are four Kazis in Srinagar who decide the more intricate cases relating to inheritance and divorce. They jealously keep their knowledge to themselves and their sons; the outside world is not allowed to learn the secrets of shara” (p. 296).

The oral tradition was as a form of knowledge which resonates with 'subjugated' or 'delegitimated' knowledge formulation of Foucault. By subjugated knowledges Foucault means two things: one refers to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization and second refers to whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated, naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the level of cognition or scientificity (Foucault, 1980, p. 81). It is in the second sense of subjugated knowledges explained by Foucault that throughout history of Islam in Kashmir, we see a pattern where religious traditions shaped by oral aspects of the society were seen inadequate to perform the task of religion. The power to comprehend scriptures allowed the literates to have the legitimacy in constructing the definition of 'legitimate' Islam in Kashmir. The social, religious and cultural pattern of society in Kashmir always confronted to the attempt for monopolizing the knowledge and religious discourse in Kashmir. Foucault (1980) has also noted that throughout history it is however life not theory that survives, not knowledge but reality (p. 81). Despite the monopolizing attempts of the literates to see Islam in a particular form, the presence of local cultural elements of Islam in Kashmir to this day continues to be an essential ingredient of religious structure in Kashmir.

As mentioned previously, the nature of the interplay between written scribal tradition and orality in Kashmir continued to remain almost invariable up until the introduction of modern education by the British in late 19th and early 20th centuries. The modern cultural, social, religious and political institutional structures of Kashmir began to develop only in

the last decade of the 19th century, prior to which the essence of the social, religious and political order in Srinagar was under the influence of medieval institutions (Khan, 1978). The flourishing of modern institutions in Srinagar has often been attributed by historians (Lawrence, 1895; Zutshi, 2004; Rai, 2004) of modern Kashmir to the changes brought by the direct colonial interventions of British in the Dogra ruled (1846-1947) Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

4. Modern Kashmir: Dogra Rule and New Religious Publics

Rule by Muslims in Kashmir lasted for nearly about 500 years (1320-1819).⁷ Muslim rulers constructed several centres of learning to impart education. Some Muslims rulers opened schools and colleges for the spread of Arabic and Persian languages. Sultan Shahabuddin, one of the Muslim rulers, is said to have established the first seminary for the study of Quran in the Kashmir Valley. Sultan Qutubuddin, another Muslim ruler, laid the foundations of a residential system of education by establishing a college in Srinagar where arrangements were made for the lodging of teachers for teaching Quran. When Sultan Sikandar built the *Jama Masjid*, he attached a college for the study of Islamic literature to it. This was known as college of Jama Masjid. These traditional educational institutions called as *Maktabas* (Islamic elementary schools) and *Patshalas* (seminary for imparting Sanskrit learning) often provided only religious instruction of a very limited type and they can't therefore be classified among institutions engaged in general education (Khan, 2007). This correlates with the observation of Eickelman (1992) in his work on *New Media in the Muslim World*. Eickleman writes that “in principle the traditional institutions (madrasas, legal schools) were open to all members of Muslim community, however in practice these institutions empowered narrow elite to interpret traditions and communicate authoritative interpretive techniques to others” (p. 11).

Up until 20th century we see masses nowhere in the picture excepting when they were used as canon fodder by the ambitious nobles struggling for power (Bazaz, 1945). By

⁷Muslim rule in Kashmir implies Kashmir Sultanate (1346–1580s), the Mughals (1580s–1750s) and the Afghans (1750s-1819)

observing the condition of people in Kashmir, British missionary, Tyndale Biscoe, who lived in Kashmir for many years, writes that “if the British had to undergo what tremendous atrocities had been inflicted on Kashmiris by successive invading groups, the British might have lost their manhood” (Biscoe, 1922, p. 79). Walter Lawrence in his book Valley of Kashmir positions the condition of Kashmiri masses worse than that of Tiers Etat before the French Revolution. Quoting Hazlitt’s Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, Lawrence comments of the plight of Kashmiri peasants as “the peasants were overworked, half starved, treated with hard words and hard blows, subjected to unceasing exactions and every species of petty tyranny” (Lawrence, 1895, p. 2). Walter Lawrence who came to Kashmir in 1889 comments that he found people sullen, desperate and suspicious. The Kashmiri masses according to Lawrence were taught for many years that they were serfs without any rights but with many disabilities (Lawrence, 1895, p. 2).

In 1819, Kashmir Valley passed from the four centuries of rule by Muslim rulers (Sultans, Chaks, Mughals, and Afghans) to the armies of Sikhs under Ranjit Singh of Lahore. The Sikhs continued to rule Kashmir until 1846. The Sikh rule in Kashmir came to an end with the battle of Subraon fought between the forces of East India Company and the Sikh Khalsa army in 1846. The Sikh rule in Kashmir was succeeded by ill-famed Treaty of Amritsar signed on 16th March, 1846 between British East India Company and Gulab Singh Dogra. Article 1 of the Treaty of Amritsar goes as “the British Government transfers and makes over, forever, in independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh and heirs male of his body, all the hilly or mountainous country, with its dependencies situated to the Eastward of the river, Indus and Westward of the river Ravi, including Chamba and excluding Lahol, being part of the territories ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State according to the provisions of Article IV of the Treaty of Lahore dated 9th March 1846 A.D” (Treaty of Amritsar).

The Treaty of Amritsar marks the beginning of modern history of Kashmir where the Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was created by the British sale of Kashmir to Gulab Singh Dogra of Jammu for 7.5 million Nanak Shahi Ruppes, along with other annual tributes. The state of Jammu and Kashmir under the Dogra rule was one of the 556

Princely states ruled indirectly under the aegis of British imperialism. The Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir consisted of three distinct areas of Kashmir Valley majorly being Muslim populated, Jammu being Hindu populated and Ladakh being populated equally between Buddhists and Muslims. The Muslim dominated area of Kashmir Valley continued to remain the focal area of Dogra Hindu rule. Historians have considered the history of the treatment of masses by Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rulers in Kashmir largely as the history of deception, manipulation, political subversion, thievery, oppression, enslavement, tyranny, persecution, cruelty, and war (Bazaz, 1945).

Dogra rule in Kashmir under the aegis of the British in Kashmir last for about a century (1847-1947). Prior to the establishment of Dogra rule, communications in Kashmir were primitive, country boats along the rivers being the only means of trade and commerce out the Valley. Under the Dogra period in Kashmir the construction of Jhelum Valley Road in 1890 allowed the wheeled traffic to enter Kashmir for the first time. This road connected Kashmir with Punjab. The other noteworthy road to be constructed during Dogra rule was Banihal Cart Road which connected Srinagar to Jammu more directly (Rai, 2004, p. 172). The construction of these roads facilitated the process of flowing in and flowing out of the people. One significant result of the construction of the Jhelum Valley road was the journey to Kashmir by British missionaries in addition to the pouring of other English travellers and officials. It must be noted however that the first instances of the appearance of British missionaries to Kashmir date back to mid-19th century.

This period of 1880's coincided with the introduction of modern education by Christian missionaries in Kashmir. Modern education does not seem to have existed in Kashmir until the advent of Christian missionaries in Kashmir when a changed outlook gradually came into being (Khan, 2007). This was for the first time that modern education was intended to be introduced among the masses. However despite the efforts of the British to popularize literacy in Kashmir, the benefits of education in Kashmir largely harvested by the tiny minority⁸. The Census of 1901 showed that only 2% of the population could read

⁸Persian introduced in Kashmir by the Muslim rulers continued to remain the official language till 1907, when it was replaced by Urdu. It was the makhtabs of Srinagar and of other parts of the Valley affiliated to

and write. The responses of Muslims to the educational opportunities provided by the British were rather complicated. The census of 1921 revealed that out of every thousand Muslims, 988 could not read and write.

A portion of Muslim clerics who represented the literate section of the population perceived education provided by the British missionaries as a recipe for moral and cultural disaster. The Dogra rulers in Kashmir were also suspicious and averse to the presence of Europeans in Kashmir. Some historians of modern Kashmir attribute this aversion of Dogras rulers to the Europeans presence to the fact that the Dogras never desired the British India to have the knowledge about the pitiable condition of Muslim subjects in Kashmir. The suspicion of Dogra ruler as well as educated sections of the Muslims over the intervention of foreigners into the socio-religious and political landscape of Kashmir created a platform that saw the mushrooming of societies for religious and social reform.

The socio-religious organizations formed by the Muslims carried with them the strict provisos that they would require prior state sanction for their establishment and the explicit abjuration of any intent to engage in political activity. Taking advantage of even this constricted space conceded by the Kashmir state, there was a proliferation of socio-religious reform organizations (Rai, 2004). Since the beginning of the 20th century there was a unique rise in the number of reform movements which aimed at socio-religious transformation of Kashmir society. It was these movements which brought Kashmir on the anvil of modern age more especially exposed the Muslim community to influences of the larger religio-political scene in the subcontinent. The most active of the Muslim societies formed in the valley was the Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam. Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam under the leadership of Mirwaiz⁹ of Jama Masjid, Rasul Shah, was the expression of the initial meeting between Muslims in Kashmir and the dawn of modernity.

the mosques which were the major sources of imparting religious education to Muslims. The courses of study included vernacular languages, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit.

⁹ The title of Mirwaiz had been used at least since 1901 and the position had gradually become a hereditary one. Mirwaiz family of Srinagar in Kashmir continues to have a prominent voice in articulating the voice of a modest percent of Muslims in Kashmir (Rai, 2004, p. 235).

The rationale of founding Anjuman-i-Nusratul-Islam was twofold, one to deter the ‘designs of the Christian missionaries’ in making inroads into the Kashmir Valley, and second to provide an alternative to Muslims for having an education which could integrate religion and sciences. This understanding of religion was deprecatory of oral aspects of religion in Kashmir and therefore aimed to purge local Islam of Kashmir from its polytheistic practices. This early initiative of Muslim religious elite to approach modern education was grounded on a reaction to the changing patterns of society in Kashmir (Dar, 2015). Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam was the earliest socio-religious organization by the Muslims in Kashmir.

The emergence of Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam and later on many such organizations brought the initial debates on purity and corruption among Muslims in modern Kashmir. Earlier in the Medieval Kashmir it was the literate Persian missionaries who questioned the religious practices of the locals in Kashmir. With a mission to educate Muslims not only in religious aspects but also in secular western form of education, one of the primary objectives of the institution was to eliminate innovations and ‘ignorant religious practices’ practiced by the commoners. Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam developed into Islamia High School by 1905 (Rai, 2004, p. 236). The new religious reformists were dissatisfied with the laxity demonstrated by the valley’s Muslims in the performance of their religious duties. Rasul Shah was often heard publicly denouncing the worship and deification of saints and other holy personages from the pulpits of the Jama Masjid (Rai, 2004, p. 238).

The early spread of literacy in Kashmir at the turn of 20th century contributed to an intense focus on Islam and definitions within the literate sections of the society (Zutshi, 2004, p. 120). These new discourses on Islam were circulated through the use of printing. The early religious reformists used printing as tool to propagate their ideas. In fact these Muslim reformists were early adopters of printing technology in Kashmir. The connection between printing press and religious reformation has been debated vigorously by scholars like Elizabeth Eisenstein, Lewis W. Spitz, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean

Martin and many others¹⁰. Being appreciative of the transformation of the religious life of Western Christendom, Martin Luther once said, “printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one. Indeed, by means of it God wants to spread word of cause of true religion to all the earth, to the extremities of the world”. To McLuhan, printing technology was one of the great revolutions in human history involving a basis shift in what McLuhan terms the ratio of the senses (McLuhan, 1962, p. 60).

5. Print, Modernity and Islamic Traditions in Kashmir

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir there was neither any independent privately owned printing press nor any newspaper before 1924. The politics of Kashmir however always retained the important space in newspapers outside Kashmir. The mention of the attitude of Dogra rulers towards Muslim subjects is abundantly found in the newspapers of 18th century British India. Muslim newspapers in British India particularly looked at the plight of Kashmiri Muslims as an issue which required attention and sympathy of Muslims across the globe. This example establishes the notion of imagined community before the emergence of Kashmiri nationalist movement in Kashmir. Here the ‘horizontal comradeship’ did not get formed on the basis of national boundaries however on the basis of religious identities. However these newspapers were not allowed to enter in the dominion of the ruling Dogra regime. The mere idea of bringing out a newspaper in the extremely autocratic atmosphere during the Dogra rule had been near to impossible as there was stiff opposition during the prevalent days to any efforts towards establishing a credible and independent newspaper.

In Kashmir, Lala Mulk Raj Saraf holds the distinction for starting first private newspaper named *Ranbir* and also first Printing Press named Public Printing Press in 1924. *Ranbir* was a daily published from Jammu in Urdu. Urdu was by this time the official language of Jammu and Kashmir. Saraf had to negotiate and struggle for over more than three

¹⁰ For details see Elizabeth L .Eisenstein *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Volumes 1 and 2), (1980) , Lewis William Spitz *The Protestant Reformation, 1517-1559* (2003), Lucien Febvre -, Henri-Jean Martin *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* , 3rd edition (2010).

years with Maharaja Pratap Singh, the ruling Dogra at that time, to start Ranbir. The first issue of Ranbir was published on 24 June, 1924. According to Lala Mulk Raj Saraf, after the years of struggle the chief reason for Pratap Singh to accept his plea for starting a newspaper was to “test whether a subject under his dominion could discharge a public responsibility”. Saraf had to seek the political patronage of the ruler and the permission for the newspaper was granted with the condition that only a man of Mulk Raj Saraf’s capabilities could run the newspaper (Saraf, 1967, p. 89).

It took eight years after the publication of Ranbir to see the first newspaper of Kashmir Valley to get underway. It was Prem Nath Bazaz who published the first newspaper in Kashmir Valley called *Vitasta* (*Vitasta* is the Sanskrit name for river Jhelum) in the year 1932. During this period a great awakening and momentous changes were taking place across Indian subcontinent and the educated people of Kashmir could not remain unaffected by them. This period saw the Kashmiris launching their open fight against Maharaja. *Vitasta* was published in Urdu from Srinagar. Bazaz later on also published *Hamdard*. Soon several Kashmiris took over the reins of these newspapers and they flourished for several decades while the press dominated public opinion. Newspapers like *Desh*, *Khalid*, *Zulfiqar*, *Jamhoor*, *Roshni*, *Uplift* and *Inquilab* also became popular for the quality of their reportage and commentary. The Urdu Press witnessed a prolific growth. Between 1924 and 1947 it is reported that about 48 newspapers and periodicals came to be published (Bazaz, 1954).

The role of printing press in Kashmir constructed an imagined Muslim community that altered the equations in the territorial and extra-territorial affiliations. Kashmiri Muslims who had migrated to Punjab maintained their emotional links with their homeland. The writings in Punjab Press about the pitiable conditions of people in Kashmir had mobilized some Muslims of Kashmiri origin in Punjab to form organizations and bemoan the merciless treatment meted out to their ‘horizontal comrades’ in their native land (Jalal, 2012). There was profound influence of these papers on the educated community of Kashmir. Printing made it possible for the new educated sections from Kashmir to ‘think about themselves, and to relate themselves with others, in profoundly new ways’

(Anderson, 1991). The newspapers of Punjab, as a matter of fact, were organs of local Kashmiri opinion. If the rulers in Kashmir constructed a specifically Hindu sovereignty, Muslims resorted to Islamic idiom in articulating their resistance by forging connections with politics of their co-religionists in other parts of India notably Punjab. The horizontal comradeship in the case of Punjab-Kashmir nexus is however located outside the binaries of state and nation. Religion here is not necessarily a conservative force but as a form of resistance to oppression and force for change (Raines, 2002).

Muslim religious reformers in Kashmir were amongst the very first groups to use printing press in Kashmir. In Kashmir, the newly formed religious societies such as Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam used pamphlets, booklets, magazines and other printed materials to propagate their ideas. It was Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf Shah, one among Mirwaiz Rasul Shah's successors, who set up first printing press in order to broadcast the views of Deobandis. Two weeklies named *Al-Islam* and *Rahnumna* were launched to combat what were seen as the un-Islamic practices of the Kashmiri Muslims (Sikand, 2002). Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah is credited for being the first individual to translate and publish the first Kashmiri translation of and commentary on the Quran, so that ordinary Kashmiris could understand the Quran themselves. The aim here was to lessen the dependency of Muslims in Kashmir on the custodians of shrines for their religious instruction.

However, the majority who were not literate could not make use of this attempt by Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah. Yusuf Shah was a product of the reformist *Darul-Ulum Madrasa* at Deoband. Yusuf Shah returned to Kashmir on completion of his studies in 1924, he set up a branch of the Khilafat Committee to popularize the cause of the Ottoman Caliphate among the Kashmiris. Later, he played a central role in bringing many reform-minded Kashmiri *ulema*, mainly Deobandis opposed to popular Sufism, onto a common platform named the *Jamiat-Ulema-i-Kashmir* [The Union of Ulema of Kashmir] (Sikand, 2002).

The adoption of printing technology by Muslims in Kashmir changed the traditional equation of communicating Islam existing between orality and literacy in Kashmir. Until

the adoption of printing press by Muslims in Kashmir, it was the manuscript tradition that formed the basis for circulation of written word. It was the use of printing press which led to the mass reproduction of religious knowledge. The printing technology adopted by the new religious reformists by breaking the traditional equation of oral transmission of Islam in Kashmir and literate transmission of Islam emerged as a platform for new era of religious experiments. Print came to be main forum on which religious debate was conducted. It was an era of pamphlet wars and of religiously partisan newspapers and magazines (Robinson, p. 246). The result was rapid circulation of sectarian polemics. Some Muslim thinkers delved with increasing vigour into the recourses of both the Islamic tradition and western civilisation, now made freely available by print, to find answers to contemporary challenges (Robinson, 1993).

The arrival of printing press and its use by religious reformists coincided with the emergence of two significant reformist religious movements. These movements since their birth in Kashmir have played a significant role in shaping the religious landscape of Kashmir. The use of printing press by these organizations has been closely intertwined with Muslim religious reform in Kashmir. This religious reformism has been accompanied by whole series of religious changes associated, to a greater or lesser degree, with the use of print. The first set of these changes is primarily the result of the mass productions effects of print. One among these religious organizations/movements making its presence felt in Kashmir in the first half of 20th century is Jamiat-i-Ahli Hadith. Founded by Sayyid Husain Shah Batku, the Ahli-Hadith movement emphasised strict adherence to teachings Qur'an and the hadith (Prophetic Traditions). One of the major objectives of Ahli Hadith movement has been purging Islam of its accretions, customs, practices, superstitions, ceremonies, etc. with a view to restoring its pristine purity. It also stood for a strong affirmation of the unity of God (*tawhid*), the rejection of (innovations (*bidah's*) and polytheism (*shirk*). Ahli-Hadith was the first reformist movement of its kind in Kashmir since the arrival of Islam in Kashmir (Khan, 2007).

In 1923 *Anjuman-i-Ahli Hadith* was founded in Kashmir. To spread its views, Ahli Hadith brought out the *Tawhid* (oneness of God), in 1936, its first official publication.

The publication of Tawhid stopped after four years and it was in 1940, the Anjuman-i-Ahl-i-Hadith started out another publication, *The Muslim*. The Muslim mostly dealt with socio-religious issues facing Muslims and continues to focus on issues such as tomb-worship, saint-worship, and lavish spending on the occasion of the birth and death of Muslims (Khan, 2000, p. 147). The emergence of Ahli Hadith movement in Kashmir created fissures in the traditional religious leadership. The age old monopoly over religion by traditional elites was challenged by the newly literate classes. This resulted into a battle which was largely fought on the pamphlets and booklets.

The literature of this time produced both by the *Hanafis* (religious school of thought followed by majority of Muslims in Kashmir) and the Ahli-Hadith reflects this war. The Muslim not only devoted itself to religious issues, but occasionally focused on social and political problems. The Muslim also wrote against the religious convictions of *Ahmadiyahs*, another religious movement founded near the end of the 19th century in Punjab, British India. The content of Tawhid and The Muslim mostly touched the issues aiming to educate Muslims in Kashmir about the ‘correct’ Islamic belief. The questions generally revolved around what is authentic Islam versus inauthentic Islam, who could be deemed to be called an authentic Muslim versus who could not.¹¹

After the emergence of Ahli-Hadith movement in Kashmir, a cadre based religio-political movement that emerged and used print extensively to propagate its ideas in Kashmir was Jamat-i-Islami (JI). The Jamat-i-Islami is a major Islamic organisation formed in undivided India by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi. Maududi saw Islam as a complete ideology and code of life (*nizam-i-hayat*), covering all aspects of a Muslim’s personal as well as collective existence. According to Maududi, for Islam to be enforced in its entirety, it is necessary for Muslims to struggle for the establishment of an Islamic state or states, ruled by the Islamic law (Sikand, 2002). The prolific writings and indefatigable efforts of the Jamat-i-Islami, first in India and later in Pakistan, have disseminated his ideas far and wide (Nasr, 1996, p.3).

¹¹ For example the issue whether or not the *Khutba* (religious sermons) should be given in Arabic became the subject of much controversy between the *Ahli Hadith* and the *Hanafis*.

Maududi poured his energy into writing books, pamphlets and delivering more than thousand speeches, dealing with a variety of issues of interest the Muslim world. These written works were then sent to all major Muslim educational centers in India. Vali Nasr in his work on Maududi writes that this process of circulating the religious tracts written by Maududi led to the “systematic propagation and dissemination of textual material” helping to institutionalize Maududi’s view of Muslim identity in the Indian sub-continent (Nasr, 1996, p. 38). After Partition, the Jamat -i- Islami was trifurcated into Jamat-i-Islami Pakistan (JIP), Jamat-i-Islami Hind (JIH) and Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK). Jamat-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir took roots in middle of 1940’s (Sikand, 2002).

One of the earliest activists of Jamat-i-Islami from Kashmir was Saaduddin Tarabali. His association with the Jamat-i-Islami began in his youth, when he came across Maududi’s journal, the *Tarjuman al-Quran*. Yoginder Sikand writes that “so impressed was he with Maududi’s analysis of the Muslim situation in India in his *Musalman Aur Maujuda Siyasi Kashmasksh* (Muslims and the Present Political Turmoil), that he wrote a letter to Maududi. Maududi wrote back, and this was the beginning of a long and close relationship between the two” (Sikand, 2002, p. 717). The formal unit of Jamat-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir, Jamat-i-Islami Jammu Kashmir (JIJK) was formed in 1953 and Saaduddin was elected it first president. It was through him and others¹² that the writings of Maududi were been copiously circulated in Kashmir. Jamat-i-Islami Jammu Kashmir has a vital role in the current religio-political structure of Kashmir.

In an effort to propagate its ideology in Jammu and Kashmir, Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir started its magazine *Azan* (Islamic call to worship). In Jammu and Kashmir, *Azan* was the official mouthpiece from 1948 till 1975. In 1975, Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir was banned when Indra Gandhi, the Prime Minster of India, declared emergency. This resulted in closure of the publication of *Azan*. Jamat-i-Islami Jammu

¹² The founders of this organisation include Molana Ghulam Ahmad Ahrar (Shopian), MolanaSaad-ud-Din Tarabali, Moulana Mufti Mohammad Amin Shopiani, Molana Hakim GulamNabi (ChetragamShopian), QariSaif-ud-Din and MoulanaSuliman.

and Kashmir was for the second time banned in 1990 when people of Kashmir Valley started armed struggle against the presence of India in Kashmir. After Iran's revolution in 1978, JIJK changed its course to turn to political activism and came, eventually, to spearhead the struggle for the 'liberation of Kashmir'. In 1980 the leader of the student wing of the JIJK called publicly on Kashmiri youth to work for the advent of an 'Iranian type Islamic revolution in Kashmir in order to achieve independence from India (Grare, 2001). It was in 1998 when Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir reopened its headquarters in Srinagar and in 2010 Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir started a weekly, *Momin*, to popularize its views.¹³ As per the constitution of JIJK, the objective of the organization is establishment of God's religion (*Iqaamat-e-Deen*) in Jammu and Kashmir.

Other than Jamiat-i-Ahli Hadith and Jamat-i-Islami, many other religious groups also used the printing technology as a means to propagate their ideology in Kashmir. However even then the printed word was confined to the small but powerful section of the Muslim population in Kashmir. Even though newspapers and other printed material impacted those who could not read and write, the printing technology didn't offer the direct access to those masses still depending on oral means of communication for their religious knowledge. Given the power associated with the literacy, the print technology did create a public opinion that shifted the nature of religious discourse in the Valley in favour of reformist Islam. However those who indirectly attained the understanding of this religious change, print media didn't affect the ratio of their senses (McLuhan, 1964).

Majority in Kashmir continued to depend on oral modes of communicating religious traditions in Kashmir. Therefore printing technology in Kashmir valley never came to become a mass medium in Kashmir. It was eventually the appearance of radio as a mass medium which echoed cultural and religious needs of unlettered in the Kashmir Valley. If printing press in Kashmir can be said to have extended the scribal cultural in Kashmir, the radio in Kashmir can be said to have multiplied the cultural and religious aspects of oral communication in Kashmir. However, the orality informed through radio in Kashmir

¹³ My Interview with Aashiq Kahmiri. Aashiq Kashmiri was the editor of Azan from 1978-1990). During the tenure of his editorship, Azan was a daily newspaper.

in the words of Walter Ong was both like and unlike the orality of medieval Kashmir. This is a kind of orality which according to Ong's is a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print (Ong, 2002, p. 133).

"I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge or writing or print, 'primary orality.' It is 'primary' by contrast with the 'secondary orality' of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality" (Ong, 2002, p. 10-11).

6. Radio and Religion in Kashmir

For the first time radio station in Kashmir known as Radio Kashmir was launched in Srinagar on July 1, 1948 with an aim to counter the propaganda of Azad Kashmir Radio which operated under Pakistan (Luthra, 1986, Ch.20). Keeping in view the strategic importance of Kashmir Valley, Kashmir was one of the first places to have radio station after Indian independence. The main aim of Radio Kashmir Srinagar was to carry out the propaganda against Azad Kashmir Radio operating under Pakistan. For example, *Jawab-i-Hamla* (counterattack) on Radio Kashmir was presented by Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki to reply the programme *Zarb-e-Kaleem* (The Rod of Moses) from Azad Kashmir (Hyderi, 2001, p.48).

At the time when radio was introduced in Kashmir, the literacy rate among Kashmiri Muslims was still abysmally poor (less than 2%). It was therefore radio which provided a platform that could meet the requirements of those not acquainted with the written word. Unlike print media, the inherent power of radio is located in its orality and its ability to reach people without any skill in literacy. Such qualifications of Radio as a medium made it the first mass media of Kashmir valley in the real sense. The radio in Kashmir reinforced the folk/oral story culture of Kashmir as it ideally suited the context of the society in Kashmir. Radio in Kashmir gave the people a sense of identification and

cultural affinity. From the very beginning radio became a very popular mass medium in Kashmir.

By broadcasting traditional stories of Kashmir such as Yusuf Zulekha, Wamiq Azra, Saiful Malook- Gulrez and Aknandun, tuning to Radio Kashmir became people's daily activity (Mufti, 2012). The religious requirements of Muslims in Kashmir played a significant role in shaping the radio programming of Radio Kashmir. The inauguration of Radio Kashmir in Srinagar itself started with the readings from religious scriptures, particularly with the recitation from Quran by Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah in 1948 (Luthra, 1986). Radio Kashmir continues to broadcast religious programmes on all important festivals, commemorated and celebrated by Muslims. Special programmes on the occasion of Muharram, Eid Milad, Eid ulfitr, Eid ul Zuha, Shab e Qadar and Urs Shah i Hamdan, Sheikhul Alam, Ghusul Dastageer are broadcasted from Radio Kashmir. Radio Kashmir holds the distinction of being a radio station that broadcasts special mourning programmes for three consecutive days during Muharram, the first month of Islamic Calendar (Hyderi, 2001). For many in Kashmir especially the old generation who could not read and write, radio became a source of religious knowledge. Radio Kashmir aided the propagation of cultural ingredients of Kashmiri folk culture by encouraging broadcasting of programmes in the form of folk formats of storytelling (called *dastan goee*), drama, devotional music etc.

Other than Radio Kashmir, the role of Azad Kashmir Radio and Radio Tehran in appealing to religious needs of the Muslim population in Kashmir can't be neglected. Both Radio Tehran and Azad Kashmir Radio broadcasted religious programmes especially on the occasion of Muslim festivals. Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, who at the time of partition fled to Azad Kashmir, would recite Quran with translation and commentary from Azad Kashmir Radio. His programme which would run probably for half an hour could manage to draw many people in Kashmir tuning to Radio Azad Kashmir. For many Muslims in Kashmir, listening to Azad Kashmir Radio was also a political act. How people construct meanings out of their interactions with the religious content they listen from radio will be elaborated further in the following chapters.

7. Globalization, Television and Religion in Kashmir

Television redefined the nature of intersection between media and religion in Kashmir. It must be cited here that religion and media as a distinct academic inquiry owes its origins to the thorough reflection on religious broadcasting by televangelists in US. Few of the scholars who studied television in relation to religion in US saw television as a medium which was able to provide an alternate worldview to the old reality, and to the old religious view based on that reality, for millions of viewers. Stewart Hoover (2008) has noted that where prime-time television once carried few programs with religious or spiritual themes, religion has become a staple of commercial television in the US since 1990s (p. 3). To compete with Christianity, people from other religions of the world also began to unveil their own religious television channels so as to disseminate their respective worldviews. The curious case in this competition has been the astounding response from the Muslim televangelists in articulating their faith through television.

When television was introduced there were concerns among Muslim scholars about its potential social, cultural, and moral impact on the society (Baig, 2011). However over the last one decade many Muslims have started to draw on tradition pioneered by Christian televangelists. Manuel Castells (1996) sees this public articulation of Islam as a reaction against the insecurities arising when the world becomes too large to be controlled and concerns an attempt of people to shrink it back to a manageable size so as to ground themselves in a delimited place and have a history (Meyer and Moors, 1996, p 5). If Castells sees this Muslim reaction as emerging in reaction against globalization and the proliferation of mass media, Eickelman and Anderson (1999) propound a different perspective. In their investigation of the emergence of a new Muslim public sphere, they argue that the easy accessibility and proliferation of media facilitates the constitution of a new Muslim public able to challenge both the state and conventional religious authorities, build civil society, and engage in transnational relations. Here Islam is shown to thrive and develop not in reaction against but instead along with information technology (Meyer and Moors, 1996, p. 5).

To compete with Christianity, people from other religions of the world also began to unveil their own religious television channels so as to disseminate their respective worldviews. The curious case in this competition has been the astounding response from the Muslim televangelists in articulating their faith through television. With the satellite television there was proliferation of religious channels focussing virtues, vices, and codes for the new generation of Muslims. At present there are literally hundreds of television channels exclusively devoted to telecast religious teaching of Islam which are viewed by the Muslim across the world. These Islamic television channels are viewed as an alternative source of religious information on Islam.

Television in India much like several countries in Europe was built of the model of public broadcasting systems. Before the introduction of television in India, it was radio which had a mass appeal in the Indian socio-economic context. The print media mostly catered to the literate abilities of the educated section within India. In the existing socio-economic and cultural settings of India, it was the broadcasting media such as radio and television, which catered to the demands of mass audiences in India. The broadcast media in India, which were under state monopoly for a longer period, formed a tentative bridge between different sections of the society (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 7). Since the introduction of television in India in the year 1959, the television viewers in India could only watch one television channel called Doordarshan until 1991 (Mehta, 2008). Srinagar was one of the first few places to have a television broadcasting Station in India. In fact Doordarshan Srinagar was the third television station of India set up on 26th January, 1973 (Rasool, 2012).

To realize the success of Doordarshan in Kashmir, the programme content was developed to satisfy the local cultural attributes of the society in Kashmir. In an attempt to popularize Doordarshan in Kashmir, a regional language channel named Doordarshan Kashmir was launched in the year 2003. Doordarshan Kashmir broadcasts many programmes in the form of serials, music etc. touching upon the aspects of religion in Kashmir. The peculiarity of the content with religious connotations telecasted through Doordarshan in

Srinagar has usually meant to highlight the culture and heritage of the society in Kashmir. The monopoly of state over the airwaves in India ended only when in 1995 the Supreme Court of India came up with a judgment that the airwaves and frequencies were a public property. The economic reforms and policies initiated in 1991 by the Congress government in India facilitated the entry of many private television broadcasters. The number satellite networks in India rose to more than 30 from 1995 to 2007 (Mehta, 2008). In the terms of revenue, India is at present one of the top fifteen global media and entertainment markets (Mehta, 2015, p. 50).

The availability of privately produced satellite television according to Robin Jeffrey meant that people discovered new ways to think about themselves and to participate in politics that would have been unthinkable a generation before (Jeffrey, 2003, p. 1). The proliferation of private television broadcasters for the first time catapulted the entry of channels by Muslim individuals or organizations devoted entirely for the religious purposes. The privatization of media in India afforded Muslims for the first time to use television as a space to propagate variety of ideological views, positions and projects concerned with their religion (Echchaibi, 2012, p. 191). It was in this backdrop that the well-known tele-Islamicist, Zakir Naik, made inroads into the religious settings of Muslim society in Kashmir. Any understanding of the current flow of religious discourses in Kashmir can't be complete without making reference to Zakir Naik. To study relationship between religion and television in contemporary Kashmir can't therefore be completed without understanding Zakir Naik, his television channel (Peace TV) and his audiences.

Muslims in Kashmir for the first time came to use television as a space to witness variety of ideological views, positions and projects concerned with their religion. The content viewed through television by the Muslims in Kashmir facilitated the evolution of Kashmir from place to Kashmir as a space. The intensification of cultural transactions through television contributed to shape local happenings in Kashmir by events occurring many miles away. Some of the television channels devoted entirely to Islamic content and watched in Kashmir are Peace TV, QTV and ARY. Most of these channels operate

outside the Kashmir valley. The popularity of such channels has also influenced the burgeoning of local cable TV channels telecasting religious content. Many local preachers from Kashmir have started to appear on these different channels and mediate the values of Islam to the larger audiences.

8. Cassette Culture and Religion in Kashmir

When satellite Television was appearing on the scene in Kashmir, there was at the same time a parallel evolution of the cassette recording industry market in Kashmir. The beginning of 1990s saw the proliferation of cassette recording industry in Kashmir. Cassettes in Kashmir became the platforms through which culture, politics and religion of Kashmir was mediated. The growth of cassette recording industry in Kashmir however was spasmodic and therefore it becomes difficult in drawing a coherent narrative which could explain the systematic development of cassette recording industry in Kashmir. The content circulated through cassettes in different parts of Kashmir differed on the basis of the local patterns of socio-cultural contexts. It can be however argued that content largely comprised of Hindi songs, Kashmiri folk songs, the performances, and speeches related to religion in Kashmir. One of the significant suppliers of the religious content remained the tapes of Kashmiri separatist songs mixed with calls for armed resistance against India from religious clerics (Manuel, 1993, p. 250).

In addition to the political message combined with religion, the cassette recording industry in Kashmir also helped to recreate an aural environment where people could consume the content which was part and parcel of the religious aspects of folk culture in Kashmir. For example the cassette about story of Prophet Yunus sung in Kashmiri language by a local singer named Ghulam Nabi Bhat needs to be highlighted here. The cassette titled *Yunus Nama* (story of Prophet Yunus/Jonah) became the popular cassette containing religious content. Yunus Nama is the story of miraculous endurance of Prophet Yunus (Jonah) after being swallowed by whale. Soon after the success of Yunus Nama, the largest cassette distributor of Kashmir Ravimech Studios run by R K Bhan realized the potential of cassettes addressing religious sensibilities in Kashmir. Ravimech

Studios was the first studio in Kashmir equipped with multi-track, digital recording facilities and video post production facilities. Realising the business prospects of recording and selling religious filled content, R K Bhan, a Kashmiri Pandit recorded *Khwab Naama* of Hazrat Khatija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad. Khwab Naama of Khatija is a story about her dream in which sun descended from the heavens into her courtyard and radiating her home. Khwab Naama was sung also by Ghulam Nabi Bhat.

According to Peter Manuels, although Kashmir may not host a particularly dynamic regional cassette industry, tapes of separatist songs circulate widely, mixing calls for Islamic jihad with appeals to Kashmiri nationalism. Such tapes are evidently produced both in Pakistani Kashmir as well as in India (Manuel, 1993, p. 250). One of the most famous preachers whose voices reverberated across the valley in 1990s was Qari Hanif, from Pakistan. The Qari Hanif phenomenon contributed to the transformation of art of preaching in Kashmir. For the Muslim population of Kashmir, listening to the speeches of Qari Hanif became a practice of ethical self-discipline (Hirschkind, 2006).

It can be said that what Zakir Naik meant for local religious trends in Kashmir in relation to television, Qari Hanif carried similar influence while preaching religion in Kashmir. Post 1990s Kashmir witnessed the circulation of cassettes of local sermon preachers whose who came to be regarded as important sources of Islamic knowledge. The local sermon preachers from Srinagar like Mirwaiz Farooq and the local preachers in Anantnag such as Dr. Nisar Qazi became the new celebrities in Kashmiri Muslim households. While the content of the sermons of Qari Hanif was limited majorly to the aspects of Muslim eschatology (issues concerning death, Day of Judgment in Islam etc.), the local Muslim preachers amalgamated their religious sermons with the changing political scenario of Kashmir in 1990s.

The sermon preachers from Kashmir with the homiletic techniques came to be regarded as exemplary practitioners of communicating Islamic ideals in the valley. The tonality (voice quality in terms of emotion, smoothness) of the preachers became a wide subject of discussion for many in Kashmir. The cassette technology in Kashmir allowed the

freezing of religious performances by the preachers into a reproducible object physically separable from those who produce it, thereby removing it from its original context and making its communicative potential universally accessible through playback and broadcasting technology (Qureshi, 1998, p. 140). Other than listening to the cassettes containing the religious sermons, the cassettes of devotional music and Qawalis became the ideal choice of the majority of Muslims in Kashmir.

With the cassette technology, the sermons of well-known Muslim orators in Kashmir spilled into the street from loudspeakers in tea hotels, the shops of tailors and butchers, the workshops of mechanics and TV repairmen. The religious content of the cassettes accompanied passengers in taxis, minibuses, and most forms of public transportation. Outside most of the larger mosques, following Friday prayer, thriving cassette markets were crowded with people looking for the latest sermons from the renowned preachers (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 7). The popularity of cassettes in Kashmir created an alternate public constituted by circulation of its own discourse. Owing to the fact that the cassette recording industry in Kashmir remained the first medium of mass communication outside the control of the state apparatus, the cassettes facilitating in creating a discourse around politics and religion which led to a new phenomenon of articulating faith and various forms of religiosity in Kashmir.

9. Religion and Digital Technology in Kashmir

Manuel Castells has noted that the diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software in the last two decades have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time (Castells, 2007, p. 249). Before the explosion of mobile phone technology, computer mediated communications and increasing internet access, the information about religion circulated through mass media was largely in the control of state apparatuses. With the increasing use of digital technologies coupled with access to internet, a new sense of public shaped by increasingly open contests over the authoritative use of symbolic language of religion has emerged. Situated outside the

formal state control, this distinctively Muslim public sphere in Kashmir exists at the intersections of religious, political and social life (Eickelman and Anderson, 1999, p. 1).

The facilitation of unlimited interactivity through digital technology is allowing the Muslims in Kashmir to share, communicate and produce content on religion in way never witnessed before. Gary R. Bunt, one of the very first researchers who started to systematically analyze the impact of the Internet and information and communication technology (ICT) on Islam and diverse Muslim communities has observed that the digital technologies have a profound contemporary impact on how Muslims perceive Islam and how Islamic societies and networks are evolving and shifting in the twenty-first century (Bunt, 2009, p. 1).

In Kashmir although many religious sects made their inroads in Kashmir prior to 1990s, it is only in the context of booming digital technology, increasingly literacy levels and many other corollaries of globalization, that these religious sects are able to make a distinctive mark. The digital technologies have become a source of meaning for articulating sectarian identities by these religious groups. The access to contemporary forms of communication has allowed the existing religious groups in Kashmir to have more rapid and flexible ways of building and sustaining contact with the people. These new ways of communicating religion through digital platforms however can't be in isolation from the past and are therefore a reflection of how traditional ways of communicating religion can be integrated with the demands of digital technology. At the same time it becomes important to acknowledge the extraordinary social change represented by new information technologies. Eickelman and Anderson (1999) have argued that the publicly shared ideas of community, identity, and leadership take significantly new shapes in such engagements, even as the users of the new technologies claim an unchanged continuity with the past (p. 2).

Through the digital technology meanings produced around religion in Kashmir collide and circulate and therefore make these new technologies as a resource or a forum to locate and understand new religious patterns in Kashmir. There is often a distinction

made while understanding the penetration of digital technology in rural and urban spaces. The digital divide that is sometimes attributed to the rural-urban divide does not hold true while understanding digital technology in Kashmir. According to the annual report released by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in 2015-2016, unlike in rest of India where large percentage of subscribers to internet concentrate in urban areas, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir there are more internet subscribers in rural areas. This can attributed to the fact that Kashmir is largely a rural territory. The tele-density in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as per the same report as was near to 80 percent (Mirani, Dec. 2015, Greater Kashmir).

With the increasing use of digital technologies, there are significant changes taking place in the ways in which these technologies are influencing the Muslims in Kashmir to practice and mediate religion. By appropriating new forms of communication tools such as mobile phones, social media, file sharing methods, there has been a rise of new form of socialized communication, termed as mass self-communication by Manuel Castells. According to Castells is “multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many” (Castells, 2007, p, 248). Through the mass self-communication facilitated by the user generated content function of digital technologies, more and more number of Muslims in Kashmir are participating in religious and various other forms of discourses. The new digital technologies allow Muslim individuals in Kashmir a choice to choose, reflect and interpret the religious content from the multiple claims made available through digital spaces.

One of the significant changes brought by the increasing access to digital means if communicating religion in Kashmir has been penetration of religious discourses about religion from religious actors distantly located from Kashmir. It is a common site nowadays in Kashmir to see the digital CD's, memory cards filled with the religious content sourced from outside Kashmir. The speeches of the sermons of major

international Muslim preachers such Zakir Naik, Tareeq Jameel, Nouman Ali Khan, Yusuf Estes, Abdur Raheem Green are to be found abundantly available in Kashmir. The relentless flow of religious content originating from local context and non-local contexts have led to what Anthony Giddens has referred as disembedding of social systems. According to Giddens, disembedding refers to "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space (Giddens, 1991, p 21). Therefore Kashmir as a place in the age of digital technologies has increasingly transformed into phantasmagoric, which according to Giddens as a condition of modernity implies when "locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene" (p. 19).

Prior to the usage of smart phones and access to internet, it was only few local religious organizations which would dominate the Muslim religious public sphere in Kashmir. The pervasive nature of digital technology has meant new opportunities for those religious groups whose voices were marginalized. Most of the existing religious groups in Kashmir have their own websites and social media pages that allow the user to interact frequently with the ideas propagated by these groups. Although the ways in which internet allows to access information on religion is new and innovative, much of its content has a basis in classical Islamic concepts. In addition to the websites maintained by the local religious groups, there are countless websites on Islam available for searching desired Islamic information. Mostly this customised presentation of Islam allows audiences to feed themselves with the information that satisfies their cognitive consonances. However these new opportunities are readily embraced by some, but met with skepticism by others.

The access to digital means of communication has led the creation of realms where many new actors participate in creation and distribution of the religious content. Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube etc. mirror the differences and diversity in the religious patterns among Muslims in Kashmir. The religious cyber-practices of Muslims in Kashmir are an extension to the offline Muslim practices. In the past, the spread of religious knowledge was limited by a lack of communication tools in Kashmir. The

ability to convert any information about religion into the digital forms generally has allowed the Muslims to store the information about religion in their mobile phones, flash drives, computers etc. In the process many individuals while accessing the information about religion become co-creators of the religious content. How Muslim individuals construct their meanings from the interactions with the digital media they use for religious purposes will be elaborated at length in the following chapters on media and religion in Anantnag and Srinagar.

Chapter 3

Rural Media Spaces: Communicating Religion in Anantnag

1. Introduction to Anantnag

The world has changed considerably and rapidly over the past couple of decades. Many studies have been carried out by scholars to document this rapid transformation of the world, and concepts such as globalization, post-modernization, liquid modernity, liberalization, post-secular age have been employed to interpret these changes. Anantnag district of Jammu & Kashmir has not been impervious to the changes at the global level, and the last two and a half decades have seen profound transformation in its economy, society and culture. These societal changes have coupled with the socio-political environment created by armed insurgency in Kashmir. The rapid transformation of Anantnag in the last two and half decades due to various factors has in many ways changed the way of life of its inhabitants.

Traditionally, agriculture has played a central role in the social, political and economic life of the district. However, with changing times, there has been transformation in the agrarian structure. Though agricultural economy continues to play a dominant role in Anantnag, the traditional rice cultivation is being increasingly substituted with the transplanting of commercial crops/plants. The increasing impact of urbanization and literacy levels in Anantnag in the recent past has also seen a significant shift in the occupational pattern of the people. Anantnag is famous for the export of handicrafts, handloom products, saffron, apples, apricot and walnuts besides various other rural products. Out of the total population of Anantnag, 73.77 percent live in rural areas, while as 26.23 percent live in urban locations of the district. With an urban population of 2, 82, 887, among the twenty-two districts of Jammu and Kashmir, Anantnag has the third highest urban population in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The sex ratio in urban

Anantnag is 902 as per 2011 data census while as the sex ratio in rural Anantnag according to the same census data is 941.

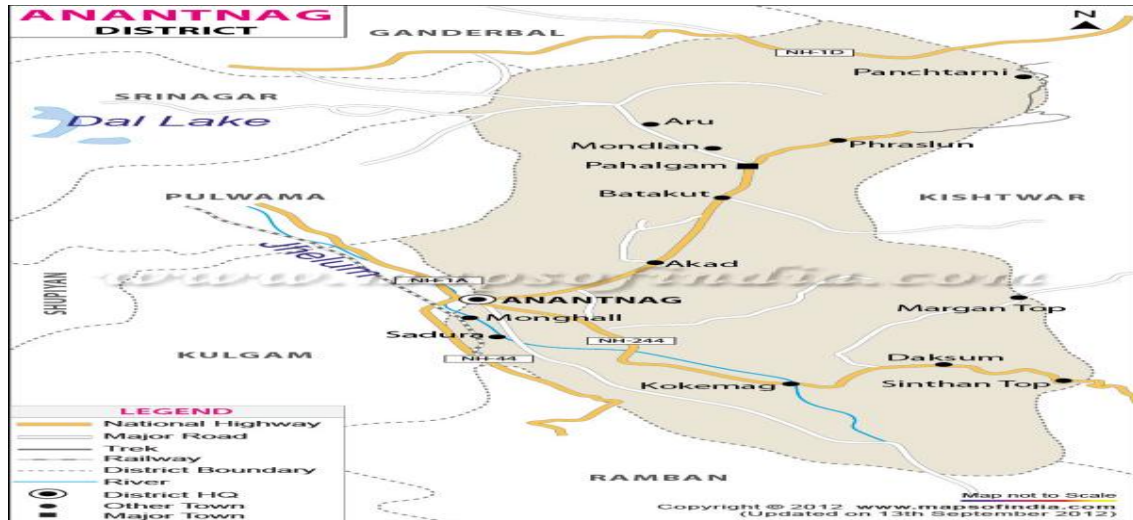


Figure 1: Anantnag- Source: www.mapsofindia.com

Anantnag district popularly known by the locals as Islamabad is, as per the census of 2011, the third most populous district of Jammu and Kashmir. With a population of 1,078, 692, it holds the distinction of being one of the two “towns of export excellence” of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) (Economic Times, 2010). The district has a geographical area of 3574 square kilometres and constitutes 342 villages, 8 Community Development Blocks and six tehsils. Anantnag district is also intersected by a national highway that connects Kashmir valley to Jammu province by Jawahar Tunnel, causing Anantnag to be termed as the gateway of Kashmir Valley. Anantnag district is located approximately about sixty-five kilometres away from the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir named Srinagar. Anantnag is the southernmost district of Jammu and Kashmir and is bounded by Srinagar in the North, Kulgam in the southwest, Poonch in the west, Kargil in the North East and Doda in the East; Pulwama in the North West and Rajouri and Udhampur districts surround Anantnag in its South and South East respectively.

1.1 Study Area

The name of Anantnag district is derived from Sanskrit term *Anant* and *Naga*, implying 'land of countless springs'. Anantnag district derives its name from the main town or headquarters. The bazaar in Anantnag main town is the economic backbone of the district and is the bustling centre for its social, economic, religious, cultural and civic activities. The Anantnag town and its bazaar is increasingly however a disordered space as a result of bumpy roads, rapid construction of new buildings and opening of new shops. These developments have happened in an unplanned manner and have almost transformed Anantnag town into an unorganized marketplace. The lanes that lead to different locations within the town are squalid and narrow. The grossly inadequate municipal facilities in Anantnag town are unable to cope with the ever-increasing population and traffic influx. The appalling road conditions plague the town.

Despite these drawbacks, Anantnag town continues to be a central marketplace, where most of the activities mill around the production and consumption of goods and services. This characteristic of the town persuades rural populations of Anantnag to travel to the main town. The structural relationship or the socio-economic and cultural connections between rural population and main town defines the essence of Anantnag district. The bus stand at Anantnag facilitates the connection between main town and the rural areas of Anantnag district. This increasing accessibility of Anantnag town has over the years made it an important component of the daily lived experiences of the district's rural population.

If the urban areas of Anantnag district have gone through such transformation in the past two decades, the morphology of villages in Kashmir has also been altered by the changing socio-political and economic conditions. With the increasing literacy, introduction of modern lifestyles and changes in the occupational patterns, the traditional collective forms of living are changing. The houses are no longer made of unburnt bricks set in wooden frames. The general traditional lifestyles of the village folks have changed with the increasing impact of urbanization. In the post liberalization era, the commonly

prevalent *Kaccha* (earthen) houses in rural Anantnag have been replaced by concrete houses. The earlier open-pit, overflowing public toilets in villages have been replaced by private, flush toilets. The traditional *chulhas* (earthen stove) largely have been reinstated with LPG gas-cooking. One important characteristic that has remained approximately constant is the unparalleled beauty of typical village in Kashmir.

A typical village in Anantnag district, as Walter Lawrence writes in Valley of Kashmir, is shaded by unrivalled plane-tree, by walnut, apple, and apricot, watered by a clear sparkling stream, the grass banks of which are streaked with the coral red of the willow rootlets, surrounded by the tender green of the young rice plant, or the dark, handsome fields of the *Imbrzal* and other rices of the black leaf, the Kashmiri village is rich in natural beauties (Lawrence, 1895, p. 247). The historical sites located in Anantnag district complements the understanding of the larger historical evolution of Kashmir valley from ancient times. The ruins of Martand Sun temple at Mattan in Anantnag continue to remain the one of important archaeological sites of Jammu and Kashmir. The temple is believed to have been built in the 8th century by Lalitaditya Muktapida, third king of Karkota dynasty. Anantnag district is also known for the Amarnath cave near Pahalgam. The cave attracts adherents of Hindu religion from all over India. Amarnath cave is known to contain ice stalagmite or Shivling (the phallic symbol of Lord Shiva). If the presences of multiple numbers of historical architectural sites represent the remnants of the antiquity of Anantnag district, the numerous Sufi/Rishi shrines in Anantnag district signify the tale of Islamicate culture of Anantnag district. These shrines of the Muslim Rishi and Kubravi Sufi saints form a culturally potent and aesthetically fertile reservoir of religio-cultural aspects of Muslim history of Kashmir.

As per the Census data of 2011, Muslims in Anantnag constitute 98% of the entire population of the district. Most of the Muslims in Anantnag district like rest of the Kashmir valley are Sunni Muslims and identify themselves with Hanafi school of thought. There also is the infinitesimal percentage of Shia and Ahmediya (Qadiani) population in Anantnag district. The present chapter analyses the processes of communicating Islam in Anantnag district. It seeks to understand how Islam as a religion

in Anantnag district has maintained its relationship with several media symbols and media forms, and how Muslims in Anantnag construct meanings of religion from their interactions with different media forms.

2. Communicating Islam in Anantnag- Beginnings

The beginning of the processes of Islamization in Anantnag holds the potential for making a case for explaining and understanding conversions to Islam in entire Kashmir Valley. As explained in the previous chapter, the highly learned Kubravi Sufis from central Asia played a significant role in introducing Islam to Kashmir. The Kubravi Sufis won the admiration and following of the Muslim rulers of Kashmir, which played a key role in the successful propagation of their missionary activities. One of the earliest Kubravi Sufis deputed by Sayyid Ali Hamdani to Kashmir to assess the socio-religious milieu of the Valley was Sayyid Hussain Simnani. Sayyid Simnani was helped by the Muslim ruler of Kashmir, Sultan Shihabuddin (1354-1374), to manage a community kitchen at Kulgam (Khan, 1994). This marks the beginning of the process of Islamization of Anantnag district and also of the Valley. The first person who converted to Islam at the behest of Sayyid Simnani was Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani's father Salat Sanz. It is Nuruddin, the patron Rishi saint of Kashmir, who later played a fundamental role in circulating localized version of Islam in Kashmir called Rishi Islam. This example from Anantnag's first contact with Islam explains the combined role of Muslim rule, Kubravi Sufis and local Muslim Rishis in Islamizing¹⁴ Kashmir.

The poetry of Nuruddin represents the dynamic interaction between literate aspects of Islam represented by Kubravi Sufis and the oral and local aspects of traditional Kashmiri society. Nuruddin who was a founder of Rishi movement within the fold of Islam in Kashmir communicated his ideas in local language to the masses of Kashmir. He travelled throughout the valley to spread his message of devotion and succeeded in blending Islam comfortably with local customs and practices. Though the new converts to Islam entered into a new cosmological order, they at the same time, continued to

¹⁴Islamizing here implies the conversion of inhabitants of Kashmir to the religion of Islam.

adhere to the practices of pre-Islamic religious culture. Since the arrival of Islam many individual reformists in Kashmir particularly literate Kubravi Sufis have intended to reform Islam in Kashmir and decontaminate it from its 'accretional' aspects (Khan, 1994, p. 60-70). These reformative endeavours envisaged a Muslim community that is not only socially distinct but also repudiates the pre-existing cosmological order.

After the death of Nuruddin in 1439 AD, his disciples carried on teachings and practices of their spiritual preceptor. After the deaths of Nuruddin and subsequently his disciples, numerous shrines and *khanqahs* (hospices) were constructed across the valley to commemorate these saints. The valley of Kashmir therefore abounds in a fairly large number of saintly memorials and is often termed as valley of saints (*peer vaer* in Kashmiri). These shrines have been essential components of the Muslim cosmological order in Kashmir. Many scholars of Islam in Kashmir have stressed on the importance of these shrines as social, cultural, religious, economic and political phenomenon in Kashmir. Some historians have also argued that no true picture of Kashmir can emerge without taking into consideration the role of shrines in the broader social, political, religious and cultural context. Shrines in Kashmir can be said to be the manifestations of oral character of Kashmir society.

Walter Ong (1982) has said that the persons in oral cultures live in close, intimate connection with their environment and with each other. Ong argues that people living in oral settings tend not to think in distanced or abstract ways about their world and their lives. All thinking is concrete and operational (p. 42). This observation of Ong corresponds with the observation of historian and greatest scholar of medieval Islamic era, Al-Biruni. In his famous text *Tahqiq ma li-l-hind...* on Indian society and culture, Al-Biruni maintains that people in oral cultures tend to be impressed by concrete (*mahsus*) things and fail to appreciate the abstract (*maqul*). Al-Biruni further emphasises that for those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth which they call *sara*, are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone, and would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him (Sachau, p.111).

The construction of shrines and hospices for commemorating the death of saints in Kashmir, lead a phenomenon of Muslim saint veneration which has also been referred as maraboutism by some scholars (Gellner, Geertz) in other contexts. In this phenomenon, a saint bestowed with divine blessings (*baraka*) is the central figure. Clifford Geertz (1968) in *Islam Observed* defines maraboutism as the classical religious style in which some holy men (marabouts) are “attached, bound, tied or shackled to God” (p.43).

3. Shrines as Symbols of Meditation and Mediation

Anantnag district much like elsewhere in the Kashmir valley is also bestowed with numerous Muslim shrines. For the purpose of this study I am taking examples of two popular shrines in Anantnag district. One of these two shrines is the shrine of Baba Hardi Rishi located in the main Anantnag main town. As per the available sources, Baba Hardi Rishi was probably born in 1504 AD in a village called Dantar, of Anantnag district. According to the popular belief, Hardi Rishi performed great miracles all through his life. One miracle attributed to him is that Hardi Rishi turned a heap of dung into money in order to liquidate the debt which his deceased disciple owed to people (Khan, 1994, p. 149). According to another legend attributed Hardi Rishi, he is said to have been in correspondence with God. Hardi Rishi is credited with bridging the gap between Hindus, Rishis, Suhrawardis, Shias etc. All his life Hardi Rishi practiced pure vegetarianism and also abstained from onions.

Hardi Rishi was initiated in the *Suharwardi Sufi* order by Sheikh Hamza Makhdum. Despite his initiation into Suharwardi order, Hardi Rishi continued to follow the path of Rishis with the consent of Sheikh Hamza Makhdum. The acceptance of Hardi Rishi in influential circles of Suharwardis and his immense popularity among the commoners is supposed to have been pivotal in earning him a popular name, Rishi Moul (Father Rishi). After the death of Hardi Rishi in 1568 AD, shrine was constructed to commemorate his death (Khan, 1994, p. 149-50). The shrine of Hardi Rishi in Anantnag town is located at Rishi Bazar; a market characterized by squalid lanes, eroded footpaths, blocked traffic, but is nevertheless a vibrant bazaar. The shrine has an enclosed chamber where Hardi

Rishi and his twenty-one disciples are immortalized. The shrine continues to attract number of devotees not only from Anantnag but across the Valley.



Figure 2: Devotees circumambulating around Hardi Rishi Shrine at Anantnag



Figure 3: A female devotee praying near to the grave of Hardi Rishi

Another popular shrine in Anantnag district that this study tries to highlight is the shrine of Baba Sheikh Zainuddin Wali situated on a hill lock at Aishmuqam, Anantnag. According to the hagiographical accounts, Zainuddin came from a royal background and belonged to ruling Rajas of district Kishtwar of Jammu and Kashmir. He was known as

Zia Singh before his conversion to Islam. Zainuddin is known to have held an eminent position among the disciples of patron saint of Kashmir, Sheikh Nuruddin. The conversion of Zia Singh to Islam is replete with a common legend in Kashmir. Zia Singh is believed to have been suffering from a grave illness with no probability of recovery. At that Sheikh Nuruddin, who travelled across Valley to spread his message, is said have passed through Kishtwar. Known for his miraculous deeds, Nuruddin is said to have been approached by Zia Singh's mother and she begged the saint for the recovery of her son.

Sheikh Nuruddin agreed the request on one condition which was that Zia Singh would meet him in Kashmir valley after his recovery. Zia Singh is said to have recovered but failed the promise by not visiting Kashmir. This breaking of the promise to Nuruddin cost Zia Singh a relapse into the state of his previous condition. This ailing condition of Zia Singh caused Zia Singh's mother to go through unfathomable pain. This continued until she had a dream in which Nuruddin appeared and reminded her about the promise. In her dream, Zia Singh's mother pledged to Nuruddin that she would fulfil the condition once her son was restored to good health. Immediately, Zia Singh's health was restored and it was then that Zia Singh with his mother took a journey from Kishtwar to Bumzu, a village approximately six kilometres from Anantnag main town. The interaction of the mother son with Nuruddin led them both to embrace Islam and from here onwards Zia Singh became Zainudin and her mother was named as Zoon Ded (Khan, 1994).

Like Hardi Rishi, there are many miracles attributed to Zainuddin. Zainuddin chose a cave on the top of the mountain, at Aishmuqam, for the purposes of his worship. The influence of Zainuddin on the people has been recording by the historians. Abu Fazl, vizier of Mughal emperor Akbar, and the author of Akbarnama leant a credulous ear to stories attributed to the Zainuddin and wrote that "for twelve years he (Zainuddin) occupied his cell (at Aishmuqam) and towards the end he closed his mouth with a huge stone and never went forth again and no one has even found trace of him" (Khan, 1994, p. 184). Similarly, Walter Lawrence in Valley of Kashmir writes about the shrine of Zainuddin: "this shrine is much respected by the boatmen of Kashmir, who take their children to the shrine and cut off their first lock of hair" (Lawrence, 1895, p. 288). The

piety and austerities of Zainuddin impressed Nuruddin, his spiritual preceptor to an extent that Nuruddin extolled the saintliness of Zainuddin as following:

My Zaina is the fountainhead of the nectar;
Such is his devotion to God that he surpasses his preceptor.

(Khan, 1994, p. 184)



Figure 4: Shrine of Zainuddin, at Aishmuqam.

The shrine of Zainuddin at Aishmuqam as per the claims of the locals attracts nearly twenty thousand devotees on the day of anniversary (urs) of the saint. The anniversary of the saint is celebrated on 25th of April annually. The Khanqah (hospice) attached to the shrine besides being used for prayer also contains many relics of the saint, displayed to the public occasionally. The most important relic safeguarded at the shrine is of the wooden bread, which as per the legend Zainuddin licked to satisfy his appetite. Saints such as Zainuddin have been perceived by the local population in Kashmir as the recipients of divine blessings and therefore making them symbols possessing magical power. The significance of saints, shrines and their relations with the inhabitants of Anantnag district has historically been the essence of the religious life of Muslims in Anantnag district.

The legends attributed to the saints in Kashmir and in Anantnag corroborate with some of the characteristics listed by Ernst Gellner in his work on social and political organization of Berber tribes in Middle East and North Africa. According to Gellner, venerated saints have following characteristics 1) being descendants of Prophet Muhammad 2) being a visible recipient of divine blessings, *Baraka* 3) being a mediation between God and human beings and simultaneously being an arbitrator of two parties on the occasion of conflicts 4) dispensing God's blessings among people 5) being a possessor of magical power 6) being a good, pious man 7) being a man observing Quranic precepts 6) being a hospitable and rich man 9) not participating in conflicts (Gellner, 1969, p. 74). Gellner has referred these holy men or the saints as 'Marabouts'. The practices involving Marabouts and their veneration have been termed as maraboutism, a term first coined by the French and taken from Arabic word *murabit* meaning posted for or stationed and referring to a man connected to ribat (hospice, retreat or fortress) (Rausch, 2000, p. 101).

It is true that the role of saints has been central to the practice of shrine culture in Anantnag; however, it is the relationship of the people and the narratives/meanings constructed by people concerning saints that plays a crucial role in understanding maraboutism in Kashmir. The key point lies not in whether the miracles attributed to saints happened, but acquiring an understanding of constructed reality even in fictitious forms by the people. It is the ex post facto social recognition of the saints in Anantnag that has created the platform for transmitting the divine blessings of Hardi Rishi and Zainuddin. The veneration of Hardi Rishi and Zainuddin by the people turn their shrines into sites of spectacle. The festive occasions on these shrines have historically provided a rare opportunity for the people to come out of their stagnant social environment and interact with the devotees from different areas of Kashmir (Mir, 2016, p. 43).

The shrines of Zainuddin and Hardi Rishi facilitate large gatherings and congregations of people on festive occasions. On the day of a festival shrines are adorned with lights and the streets next to the shrine are swarmed with shops selling colourful articles and eatables. Those members of the family which get an opportunity to visit these shrines on the celebratory occasion make it sure that they procure an article from the shrine premises

for the rest of the family members or neighbours. The article purchased from the shrine holds a sacred relevance and is therefore also termed as a *tabaruk* (gracious gift). The shrines of Zainuddin and Hardi Rishi like other shrines of Kashmir have performed the role of theological and transcendental symbols, which has defined the religious and cultural life of Muslims in Anantnag. The shrines of Zainuddin and Hardi Rishi represent a significant component of repository of symbols which in turn gave articulation to the transcendental aspirations and cravings for the masses. Leslie A. White (1940) has argued that all human behaviour originates in the use of symbols. And it was the symbol which transformed our anthropoid ancestors into men and made them human (p. 451).

The shrines as symbols consciously or unconsciously have historically served the purpose of communication between the members of Muslim community in Kashmir. Shrines as cultural and religious symbols in Kashmir have played the role in transmitting emotions and meanings connected with the fundamental aspects of Muslim thought and culture in Kashmir. These shrines as emotional symbols have always provided an expression to those going through hard time in their lives. The shrines thus have provided psychological mechanisms to the people in solving their everyday problems of the world. The significance of these shrines as symbols to avert natural disaster makes these shrines motivationally powerful and emotionally indelible.

This identification of shrines as emotional symbols led Walter Lawrence (1895) to write that “Musalmans from all parts of the valley flock to Chhrar-e- Sharif¹⁵, and when scarcity is imminent, where calamities such as earthquake, cholera, and drought occur, thousands gather there and sit silent on the hills around, confessing their sins and begging pardon” (Lawrence, 1895, p. 288). Because of the pervasiveness of the practice of saint worshipping among Muslims in Kashmir, Muslims in Kashmir have often been termed as *pir parast* or saint worshippers. One of the ways in which it is possible to understand the religious significance of shrines for the Muslim population in Anantnag is to look at the

¹⁵ The shrine at Chhrar-e-Sharif is where the mortal remains of patron saint of Kashmir, Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani are buried.

ways in which people construct meanings in relation to the shrines where the saints are entombed.

4. Cultural Construction of Religion and Orality in Anantnag: Khatija and her religious weltanschauung

To understand the ways in which meanings are attributed to the shrines in Anantnag, this study looks at narratives about self identity as important 'resources or reservoirs' for illustrating the religious landscape in Anantnag. Narratives about self have been conceived by many scholars as social and cultural constructions that reveal important things about the nature of meaning and identity (Hoover, 2006, p .91). Paul Ricoeur (1992) has defined self understanding as "an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of autobiographies." (p. 114). The self narratives or identity narratives in this study also highlight Pierre Bourdieu's claim that the social scientists have tended to treat lay people as sociologically naïve (Mesny, 1998, p. 6). In this context the examples of self narratives here onwards are an attempt to bring to light the voices of lay people based on the exploration of their life stories.

In an attempt to describe the dynamics of the oral aspects of religion and culture in Anantnag, following pages try to weave together the story of Khatija, an octogenarian, from Anantnag. The self-narrative of Khatija, in particular, concerning her religiosity, is an exemplar for elaborating on the oral dynamics of religion in Anantnag. The knowledge, information and the perspectives Khatija holds about the world are entirely based upon the oral transmission of thought. On reminiscing about the past, she remembers almost all the details of her life. She remembers the poetry of almost all the Kashmiri poets including the poetry of Nuruddin Rishi, Lala Ded, Habba Khatoon etc by rote. Unlike the educated population of Kashmir, Khatija knows only one language, which is Kashmiri. She can explain in detail the miracles and the history attributed to

most of the saints of Kashmir. While comparing the written accounts of hagiographers of Kashmir and the oral accounts of Khatija on saints in Kashmir, one can hardly discern any discrepancy between the two. What is stunningly remarkable about Khatija is her incredible memory and art of narration. Her technique of narrating the folk tales of Kashmir is worth preservation.

Khatija was born to Karim and Zeba in a village called Zodder, located in the district of Anantnag. Her earliest religious memory is of when she started offering *namaz* (ritual prayers). While recollecting her first experiences with *namaz* Khatija remarks “It was a strange experience.” Khatija was married as a child to Majeed. She does not remember the exact age at which she was married. According to her, those were not the days when age was recorded. But she guesses that she must have been approximately 16 years old by then. It was after her marriage when Khatija prayed for the first time. She was satirized by her husband by this act of hers. “Those days’ people seldom would offer *namaz*. Only when people would visit shrines, they would offer *namaz*. I blushed, felt shy and hid myself when I was seen praying by my husband” says Khatija with a smile. Although Khatija offered *namaz* for the first after her marriage, her relationship with shrines of Kashmir developed as a child.

Khatija does not consider her relation with shrines as a child a proper religious experience. It is because she thinks there was no understanding of things as a child. But she recollects that as children she along with her friends would visit the shrines of Rishi Maul (Hardi Rishi), Zainuddin, Nuruddin etc. This experience is an experience of joy and celebration in the memory of Khatija. Khatija and her friends would wear new clothes, purchase items like bangles, necklaces, sweets at the premises of the shrine and return back with *Tabaruk* (gracious gift) for the rest of the family members. Khatija also visited shrines with her parents. It was the time when, according to Khatija, every family would make it to the shrine and take blessings from the saint entombed at the shrine. The devotees to the shrines would make offerings (*niyaz*) at shrines. These offerings could have been in the form of small share of crops (mostly rice) set apart from the total cultivated crops by the families. Walter Lawrence writing in 1895 remarks “up to quite

recent times every cultivator in Kashmir set apart a small share of his rice crop as an offering to the shrine, and one walnut tree in every village was devoted to saint.” (p. 289). According to Khatija it is only because of the power of saints in Kashmir that Kashmiri society has survived its many catastrophes.

After marriage Khatija was ridiculed for instance on offering namaz. This experience made her feel too self-conscious to continue with the practice of Namaz. Khatija gave birth to four sons and two daughters. She became widow in her late thirties and raised her children single handedly. Her role as a mother made her a frequent visitor to the live saints (*pirs*) and shrines of Kashmir. To see her children well, she frequented to the shrines. At shrines she made offerings (*niyaz*) and sought the blessings from the saints. The shrines gave her a platform to pray and devote. These collective prayers at shrines founded a base for her religious inclinations. When she had to face a problem in the family, Khatija would ensure to communicate these problems to the saints. According to Khatija, her profound belief in shrines and God always has been a panacea (*halla mushqil*) for most of her troubles in life. Finally, it was only when a custodian at a shrine (*rishi*) asked her to offer namaz regularly that she started performing namaz at home. Since then Khatija has never missed a single namaz in her entire life.

The single exception that Khatija thinks did not work for her so far is her inability to trace her son. Twenty years before Khatija lost her son, Gulzar, to the Kashmir conflict and his disappearance from her has haunted her every single day since then. This tale has been the tale of thousands of mothers in Kashmir. As per the estimates of Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) around eight thousand to ten thousand men have disappeared in Kashmir in the past two and half decades. These disappeared men are believed to be dumped in thousands of unidentified mass graves in Kashmir. Khatija still has a picture of her son in her wallet, and every night before going for sleep, she would kiss the picture. In her effort to find traces of her son, Khatija has visited nearly all shrines and *pirs* across the valley. Her inability to trace her son has not weakened her unbounded faith in shrines. She continues to visit nearby shrines to seek the blessings of the saints and carries on with the hope that her son would return before her death.

Khatija's other children have managed to prosper and live in fairly decent conditions. Khatija owes the progress of her children to her confidence in shrines and God. The shrines she visited transmitted into her the faith and other aspects of religiosity. Other than shrines, which imparted into her a sense of community and devotion, Khatija credits Radio Kashmir for expanding her understanding on religion. As noted in the previous chapter, Radio perfectly blended with the oral character of Kashmiri society and therefore satisfied the cultural and religious needs of the unlettered. Recollecting her initial experiences with Radio, Khatija remarks "I think my husband was the first one in the village to have bought a radio set. At that time Radio Kashmir would broadcast content (religious, devotional music, popular Kashmiri dramas) and we would listen to this content. I can recollect how neighbours in our village would flock in one room of our house and then collectively listen to series of episodes of Aknandun¹⁶. These series of episodes were broadcasted for a week and every single day of the week we would sit, chat, sip tea and listen to Aknandun."

The religious programmes that are broadcasted from Radio Kashmir always instil Khatija with deep emotions. She continues to tune into Radio Kashmir for Kashmiri music, religious programmes and Kashmiri news. Khatija has made her radio set an inalienable part of her life. Khatija has a very paradoxical relationship with television. She is not quite fond of the medium and criticizes her grandchildren for their obsession with television soap operas. At the same time, she does not mind watching channels which broadcast religious content. Most of the local channels which broadcast the sermons of the local Kashmiri preachers do make an impact on Khatija. Khatija still prefers radio over television any day.

¹⁶ Aknandun is a tale which has been transmitted orally from several centuries in Kashmir. The story is about a royal couple who are desperately longing to have a son. A Yogi then promises them a son on the condition that they will have to return him back to the Yogi after twelve years. The couple raises the son and totally forgets about this condition and then the Yogi shows up to take their son Aknandun back. He wants them to cut Aknandun into pieces and feed it to him. The ritual is completed with much pain and sorrow and in the end Yogi disappears and Aknandun is alive (Source: Koausa.org).



Figure 5: Khatija listening to radio which in a way has become her inalienable part

Nowadays Khatija is being mocked for her endless belief in shrines by her grandchildren. One of her grandchildren, barely fourteen years old, passes judgments on Khatija's religious convictions. Khatija's grandson Musharaf is a product of contemporary religious change occurring in Kashmir. Musharaf, a highly intelligent child for his age, quotes Ghazali and Ibn Tamiyah to prove his point to his grandmother. Musharaf credits his madrsasa teacher and also his school teacher for being his inspiration. Khatija's minimal understanding of the normative Islam confounds Musharaf. Although Khatija does not take her grandson seriously, she does have a perspective on the ideas of her grandson. Khatija agrees that the modern educated Muslim society in Kashmir is religiously more knowledgeable, she however relates this society with loss of values like generosity, empathy, compassion for fellow humans. Khatija puts it as "despite being so religious, the modern society has taken morality and goodness for a toss." Khatija relates this "decadence" of modern society in Kashmir to the disrespect shown to shrines and saints.

Khatija's faith in shrines as symbols of piety and sacred has defined her religious *weltanschauung* throughout her life. At the same time, her immeasurable faith in shrines does not prevent her from being critical of one single fundamental aspect of shrines which is the role played by some of the Rishis or khadims (custodians) at the shrines. The attendants at the shrine are termed as Rishis (Reush) in Kashmir. Some of these attendants trace their genealogy to the saint entombed at a specific shrine. These custodians at the shrines regulate the expenditure and apportioning of day to day tasks. Khatija says that she has seen attendants fighting over the offerings made by the devotees at the shrines. Although Khatija agrees that this unruliness of attendants at shrines can't be generalized, according to her one can't ignore the widespread practice of charlatanism among these attendants at the shrines.

The shrines as sites of spiritual experience aligned appropriately to meet the requirements for the functioning of religious dynamics in the oral society of Anantnag. The shrines as symbols of communicating religion in Anantnag provided a theatrical setting to the religio-cultural aspirations of the Muslims in Valley. Shrines in Anantnag aided the process of direct semantic ratification, where relationship between symbol and referent operated cumulatively. This totality of symbol-referent relationships according to Jack Goody is experienced by the individual in an exclusive oral culture, and is thus more deeply socialized (Goody, 1975, p. 29). The traditional religious institutional patterns of the oral society in Anantnag remained largely unchallenged until the introduction of literacy in the 20th century by the British missionaries. Though the printing press in Kashmir was introduced in the beginnings of 20th century, the masses in Anantnag could hardly connect with this literate medium. The attributes of printing remained the prerogative of those few who could read. It was radio which was the first modern media apparatus to appeal to most of the people in Anantnag. However, radio as a media technology didn't contradict the dynamics of the oral Anantnag. It was only in the backdrop of the increased literacy levels that there was an alteration in the pre-existing conditions of the society in Anantnag.

The practice of worshipping at shrines has always been worry for those who derived their understanding of Islam from textual sources. Many attempts by missionaries from Persia and Central Asia were made to counsel the Kashmiri Muslims for their religious practices. Despite criticism, the religious practices of Muslims in Kashmir continued to revolve around shrines. It was with the arrival printing technology and with the introduction of modern literacy in Kashmir that for the first time a Muslim reformist cause started to proliferate and make impact on the existing religious and cultural practices of Muslims in Kashmir.

The early story of printing technology in Kashmir is story of competing debates on the questions of the nature of Islam in Kashmir. In these debates fought on pamphlets, the newly emerging religious reformist groups saw the practice of shrine worshipping as un-Islamic. Most of these groups criticized any prayer to saints (dead or alive) ones, pilgrimages to tombs of these saints, the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, and even prohibited the use of gravestones when burying the dead. These groups associated veneration of saints by devotees as shirk (deification of anyone other than Allah) and describe the veneration of saints as a practice contaminated with elements from Hinduism or Buddhism. These new developments in Kashmir can be attributed to the introduction of literacy and printing technology.

5. Literacy and Religion in Anantnag

In just two decades (from 1981 to 2011), there has been a mammoth increase in the average literacy levels of Anantnag. The average literacy level of Anantnag as per the census of 1981 was merely 22.93 percent, while as per census data of 2011, the average literacy level of Anantnag was reported to be approximately 63 percent (Census, 2011). Literacy is fundamentally a practice that involves the culture of writing (Havelock, 1963). Plato in his critique of writing in Phaedrus saw writing as an invention that will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory (Fowler, Vol. 9, 1925). Similarly, Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy* held that writing is completely artificial. As per Eric Havelock (1963) “writing separated knower

from known by opening psyche as never before not only to external objective world distinct from itself but also the interior self against whom the objective world is set” (p. 197-214). These formulations on writing by Plato, Walter Ong and Eric Havelock generally see writing as an antithesis of oral tradition. However when one looks at the transmission of religious thought among Muslims in Anantnag, one can also recognize the essential relation between orality and literacy in communicating Islam in Anantnag.

One simple example of this relation is the oral functions of Quran among Muslims in Anantnag. The oral character of Quran is readily perceptible in almost any sector of Muslim life, today as in the previous ages of Islamic history. The idea of recitation of Quran is one of the core domains of the piety among Muslims. The Qirah or the Quran recitation has been the primary medium of transmission of the scriptural text. The concept of *tajweed* (elocution in the context of recitation of Quran) in Islam is the attempt to preserve the living word of God in the full beauty and full range of meaning with which it was given to and faithfully transmitted to prophet (Graham, 1993, p.100). Those who learn the science of recitations give life to written word by voicing it. Many Muslims consider Quran a book to be heard than a book to be read. There is a term Hafiz or Hafiza ascribed for those Muslims who memorize the Quran by heart. These practices do not detach the word from the knower and allows a culture of dynamic known-knower interaction. The word symbolized by Quran is neither an attack on memory, nor artificial or separated from knower.

There always has been a dialectical relationship between the oral religious tradition of Anantnag and the literate tradition. However, the literacy was limited mostly to clergy who could mediate between the text and devotees. This clergy mostly consisted of the privileged castes among Muslims in Anantnag (Peer, Shah, Syed etc.) The non-literate masses would relate with the written literature (Quran and other sacred literature) by rubbing these books on their foreheads, chests to attain spirituality. For these non-literate masses the copy of a sacred text is a wonderful thing, perhaps a magical and awesome thing, to be handled with solicitude and to which the proper response is reverential deference and even worshipful veneration. The massification of literacy in Anantnag in

the past three decades has restructured the consciousness of the society in Anantnag. Walter Ong has argued that literate beings are those whose thought processes do not grow out of simply natural powers but out of these powers as structured, directly or indirectly, by the technology of writing. Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does (Ong, 2002, p. 77).

The increasing levels of literacy in Anantnag in the past three decades have contributed to the formation of new religious and political imagination in Anantnag. The introduction of literacy as a media technology altered the traditional modes communication in Anantnag, thereby resulting in new social, cultural and religious changes in Anantnag. The pre-conditions of society in Anantnag gradually began to transform with the coming of new religious patterns and increasing literacy levels. The modern religious institutions started proliferating with the increasing levels of literacy among the masses. These new institutions didn't however emerge in a vacuum but were partially and largely shaped by the pre-conditions of the society in Anantnag. This shaping of new institutions by the local conditions gave Anantnag a specific character.

As indicated above, over the past three to four decades there has been rapid increase in the literacy levels of Anantnag district. Earlier one could argue that the religious character of Anantnag was predominantly shaped by oral media. Even though many religious reformist groups made their inroads into Kashmir much earlier, the society in Anantnag remained largely unreceptive to these changes. It was with the increasing literacy that a new generation of literate Kashmiri Muslims in Anantnag began to make sense of reformist cause. The role of Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) and rapid increase in literacy levels of Anantnag in this regard is worthy to be highlighted. The spread of the reformist message of Jamat-i-Islami in Kashmir through schools, literature brought a new angle to the existing discourses on religion in Anantnag. The questioning of traditional religious apparatus in Anantnag was for the first time brought in to public domain with the expansion of Jamat-i-Islami in Anantnag. Indian writer and academic, Yoginder Sikand, has noted that the Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir's relatively strong presence in Anantnag is particularly significant in that the district has the highest

literacy rate in the Kashmir valley, pointing to the ready appeal of the JJK among sections of the educated middle class Muslims in Anantnag (Sikand, 2002, p.705-751).

Since its inception in early 1940's to the modern times, Jamat-i-Islami has made deep inroads into the Kashmiri Muslim society. One could argue that Jamat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir in contemporary Kashmir is one of most significant religious organizations that define the religious as well as political character of the society in Kashmir. Yoginder Sikand (2002) writing on Jamat-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir argues that the increasing popularity of the JJK has much to do with structural, situational and ideational factors specific to the changing contours of the general socio-political context of Kashmir, from 1948, when it came under Indian control, to 1989, the year that marks the onset of the armed struggle in the region (Sikand, 2002, p. 705-751). The root of success for Jamat-i-Islami in Anantnag as well as in entire state of Jammu & Kashmir lay in its interventions in the education sector.

Before the intervention of Jamat-i-Islami in education sector, it was mostly the government schools which were pivotal in spreading education in Kashmir. However, the literacy levels were still abysmally low partially due to the poor quality of government school system. One of the earliest schools in the early 1950's started by JJK was established at Arwani village of Anantnag district. Later on, JJK established a network of schools in almost all the districts of Kashmir. There were number of JJK schools set up in Anantnag district as well. It was through these networks of schools that JJK spread its influence in Anantnag. Most of the important members of JJK have been teachers. The JJK was one of the earliest non-governmental organizations in Kashmir to enter the sphere of educational provision in a big way. The contribution of JJK in education sector in Kashmir can't therefore be denied. The JJK saw educational system symbolized by government school system as a means of propaganda to deviate Muslims in Kashmir from reality. The schools run by JJK integrated both Islamic and English curriculum. JJK started separate schools for both boys and girls. Other than schools, JJK also changed the dynamics of traditional madrasa system in Anantnag. With the increasing

influence of JJK in Anantnag, most of the madrasas run in villages had JJK teachers. Almost each village has at least one such madrasa.

JJK shares a common ideological framework with branches of the Jamat elsewhere, based as it is on the voluminous writings of its founder, Maulana Sayyed 'Ala Maududi (1903-79). Maududi was himself a product of the medium of printing. The principal means of disseminating Jamat-i-Islami message among the new literate Muslims was through publication of abundant literature. Maulana Maududi had himself taken a very serious interest in Kashmir issue. Indeed, he had written a book titled "*Masleyi Kashmir Aur Us Ka Hal* (Kashmir Issue and its Solutions). In This book, Maududi builds a case in which he tries to elucidate how Muslims in Kashmir have always been oppressed by their rulers particularly by Dogra rulers and India state. Maududi meticulously quotes most of the scholars mostly western scholars who have written on Kashmir.

However, it is the solution which Maududi suggests for solving Kashmir issue that makes his argument unique and reactionary. Maududi elucidates how Kashmiri Muslims have been betrayed by taking the example of Kashmiris right to self determination and UN resolutions. Maududi in this book opines that there are only two ways to solve Kashmir issue one is political and strategic negotiations and the other is Holy war (*Jihad*). According to Maududi since the resolutions and talks have failed Kashmiri Muslims, it is the holy war (*Jihad*) which remains as an option to solve issue of Kashmir. Maududi argues that Muslims should imitate what Indian state and its army did to integrate Princely state of Jungadh. Maududi passed away in 1979, while his idea of armed rebellion in Kashmir continued to carry significance. The idea of Maududi was later on translated into practice with the foundation of Hizbul Mujahideen by Mohammad Ahsan Dar in 1985. It is not coincidence that Mohammad Ahsan Dar was also a school teacher from Pattan, Baramullah. Hizbul Mujahideen was inspired by Maududian ideology on Kashmir.

By 1975, the Jamat-i-Islami in Kashmir had succeeded in preparing its own text-books for the schools, now no longer having to depend on books written by others. However, in

that year, the government of India under the rule of Indira Gandhi imposed a state of Emergency in the entire country. Among the many organizations to be banned were the *Jamat-i-Islami hind* and the JJK. As a result of the ban, the 125 schools of the JJK, with over 550 teachers and 25,000 students, were forcibly closed down, being accused of allegedly spreading communal hatred, a charge that JJK leaders strongly denied. With the lifting of the Emergency in 1977, the JJK decided to put the administration of its schools under the control of a separate body, formally independent of it. Thus, it set up the *Falah-i-aam Trust* to co-ordinate the functioning of its schools, prepare tsyllabi and appoint teachers. To carry its message to a wider audience, it also now began setting up a number of study circles and libraries in various parts of the state. In 1979, it was reported that the JJK was operating almost two hundred study circles and libraries, with a total stock of books estimated to be above 30,000 (Sikand, 2002, p. 736) . Besides, each activist of the JJK had his own stock of books, which were lent out to others. JJK currently publishes a monthly, named Momin from Srinagar. This weekly mostly touches upon the issues concerning Muslims across the world and tries to establish the supremacy of Islam through its contents.

6. Literacy and Religious Consciousness in Anantnag

The increase in the literacy levels and spreading of Jamat-i-Islami ideology in Anantnag coincided with many noteworthy events which were taking place in the Muslim world. These events have left an indelible mark on the nature of Muslim society of Kashmir. After the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, many Muslim groups in Kashmir changed their course to turn to political activism. For example, in August 1980, the leader of the student wing of Jamat-i-Islami called publicly on Kashmir youth to work for the advent of an 'Iranian type Islamic revolution in Kashmir in order to achieve independence from Indian (Grare, 2002, p.76). The course of events in Soviet-Afghan war and Iran-Iraq wars were enthusiastically followed by the many people in Anantnag as well as in whole of Kashmir. People would tune into news broadcasted mostly through BBC Radio and Radio Pakistan. The portraits and posters of Saddam Hussein were to be seen everywhere in Anantnag.

John Ray, who was residing in Kashmir as the Principal of a well known missionary school in Srinagar, has noted the gradual influence of religion during the late 1970's and 1980's in Kashmir. Ray has observed that since 1979 "large pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, seen everywhere in teashops, pointed to a renewed expectation from Islam. The Afghan struggle, and final success, against the mighty Russians raised in the minds of young Kashmiris a finally false comparison for themselves" (Ray, 2002, p. 204). The declaration of martial law in 1977 by Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and his policy of Islamicization of Pakistan had deep consequences for changing nature of society in Kashmir. Many writers have highlighted the role of Zia ul Haq in shaping the widespread popular and armed insurgency started in Kashmir 1989.

Large numbers of Muslims of Anantnag introduced to literacy were born in the socio-political and religious scenario explicated above. This led to the development of a new religious orientation largely informed by nature of politics in Muslim societies across the globe. Before the surfacing of Jamat-i-Islami in Anantnag, tiny sections of Muslims who were educated were largely the products of government aided educational system. The intervention of Jamat-i-Islami in the education sector created a newly ideologically oriented section of Muslims who would not compromise with the existing conditions of Muslims in Kashmir or even the world. Local religious experiences and events in Anantnag started to be shaped by the processes taking place in other parts of the world and vice versa.

The new generation of Muslims in Anantnag influenced by the message of reformist cause generally hailed from families whose religious lives were largely informed by the form of Islam shaped by orality. The literate sections with a new religious orientation primarily began to see family as the site where the transformation was required. The changes in religious thought led to the extension of criticism even to the religious practices of the family members. In this background, it was the use of printed literature which served as a transformative force in supplementing these changes which were taking place in Anantnag. Amongst my interviews with many individuals from Anantnag

who witnessed and participated in these changes, the following narrative of Rafiq Ahmed provides understanding of how meanings were associated with the variations brought by the intervention of religion informed through printed literature and changing politics.

Rafiq Ahmed was born in the late 1970's and hails from a small rural village in Anantnag. He was born to parents who practiced and understood religion the way Khatija practiced and understood it. Being Muslims who had no ability to comprehend the technology of writing, Rafiq's parents had immense faith in shrines and also in the spiritual power of saints in Kashmir. Their experiences of religion were shaped by oral dynamics of society in Anantnag. As a child Rafiq's parents would take him to shrines. Rafiq's parents admitted him in a state-run government school where he studied up to class tenth. At the time when Rafiq was studying in the government school he also had an opportunity to be student in a village madrasa. It was not in the government school but in the madrasa where Rafiq got introduced to Quran and the sayings of the Prophet. At the village madrasa he was taught by a teacher who was a follower of Jamat-i-Islami ideology. It was through under the influence of Madrasa teacher that the religious understanding of Rafiq was changed for life. Rafiq discontinued his formal education after tenth as he did not find any relevance in the education taught in the government school. The friends of Rafiq who were also going through similar experiences started to read the literature of Maulana Maududi. It was later on the literature of Maududi not the lessons taught at government school which transformed the religious orientation of Rafiq and his friends for life.

In early stage of his life, Rafiq could differentiate between knowledge of different varieties. Rafiq refers to education imparted at the government school he attended as worldly knowledge (*dunyawi taleem*). On the other side the literature on Islam which he read touched on the aspects of his moral, domestic and spiritual domain, and he terms this knowledge as religious knowledge (*deeni taleem*). Rafiq credits his transformation into a pious and conscientious Muslim to the interactions he had with a friend who was a student of *Islami Jamiat-e-Tulba*. *Islami Jamiat-e-Tulba* is the student wing of JIJK and was founded in 1977. IJT introduces its students to the teachings of Islam, organize them

on a platform and develop their character according to the Islamic (Source: <http://www.ijtk.org/>). Once Rafiq started to read Islamic literature, he started to reflect on what he saw was going on around him. For Rafiq, the Muslims in Kashmir who practised Islam shaped by orality were Muslims for namesake. These Muslims according to Rafiq would mostly take their lives for granted.

“I would say thirty years back Muslims in Kashmir were Muslims for the namesake. They would mostly ascribe to pre-Islamic practices. Our elders had no understanding of the conditions they lived in. Those people, who can’t assess their own standing in society, can’t think about situation of Muslims across the globe.”

The literature by Maududi made Rafiq to rethink most of the issues concerning Muslims across the world. It was through the literature of Maududi that he started becoming critical of tradition rishi/sufi practices. He believes that it is due to sufi/rishi inclinations that Muslims in Kashmir were oppressed by Dogras and now by India. The Jamat-i-Islami on the contrary according to Rafiq believes in assessing the situation and then changing it. Once Rafiq was impressed by reading Maududi, his quest for understanding Islam evolved. Rafiq would regularly buy books on Islam from a bookshop named JK Bookshop in Anantnag town. By then Jamat-i-Islami had started its own libraries and reading rooms and Rafiq would be a frequent visitor to these libraries. The book titled Muta'la e Tasawuf (Assessing Sufism) by Dr. Ghulam Qadir Lone made Rafiq to hold the opinion that Sufism is nothing but a mixture of Buddhism and socialism. A small pamphlet of Maududi on the history of revivalism in Islam convinced Rafiq to see Sufism as an equivalent of Communism or Christianity.

“How is it possible that those who work hard can’t manage their daily lives and those who are corrupt are ruling us. Sufism is indifferent to such happenings. The message of Jamat-i-Islami on the other hand believes in justice and practical politics. There was an incident of Kunan Pushpora in Kashmir. In this incident, nearly 100 women were gang raped by units of Indian army. No justice has been done. Jamaat believes in speaking against these atrocities. It is not only sufis who are indifferent to these happenings, even other religious such as wahabbis, tablighis are also indifferent to such horrendous acts of violence committed against Kashmiri Muslims. You will

notice that all those people persecuted by state mostly belong to Jamat-i-Islami. This is only because Jamat-i-Islami speaks truth to power.”

What is essentially important here is to highlight the role of media (print particularly) in informing Rafiq about his religious convictions. Rafiq rarely watches television as he is of the opinion that television is a medium of vulgarity. He however understands the need for Muslims to be media savvy. Media for Rafiq is essential to propagate the idea of Islam. Rafiq is a regular subscriber to Momin, a weekly published by JIJK.

“Maududi, the founder of Jamat-i-Islami was a journalist. He wrote comprehensively and used printing technology for spreading his message.”

Rafiq also uses internet for accessing the content he is interested in. He is a frequent visitor of many Islamic websites including the website of JIJK. Rafiq has a belief that Muslims need media to counter the narrative of Islamophobia. According to him modern media is controlled by those who have regressive opinions on Islam and Muslims. For Rafiq secularism propagated by this media is a conspiracy to deviate Muslims from the path of Islam. The religious literature consumed by Rafiq has made him critical of the status of women in the western culture. For him, the emancipation of women in the western sense simply means objectification of women. However, in Islam, as he sees it, woman is the symbol of piety. In Islam, according to Rafiq, women have a specific role which is largely to complement their male counterparts.

“The best vocation for any woman is either to be a teacher or a doctor. If woman is a doctor, then our sisters don’t need to be handled by the male doctors. If woman is a teacher, then our sisters will be educated separately from men.”

The aspiration of Rafiq is to see one simple successful example of an Islamic society which is truly built on the basic premises of Quran and Hadith. For him in the current political order there is not a single society which can be claimed to follow Islam in entirety. However, for him creating an Islamic society does not mean that Muslims can’t study science. There just has to be a balance and it is ultimately religious knowledge

which should be privileged over worldly knowledge. There are few books which Rafiq thinks have deeply influenced his opinions on the world and Islam. A book titled *Maine Roos Main Kya Dekha (What I saw in Russia)*, written by Engineer Mohammed is Rafiq's all time favourite. This book talks about the harsh policies of Lenin and the influence of communism in Russia. Another book which shaped opinions of Rafiq is titled *Maut Ka Manzar Aur Marne ke Baad Kya Hoga (Spectacle of Death and afterlife)* written by Khwaja Mohammad Islam. This book deals with torments of the grave and the punishment of God for those who deviated from path of Allah.



Figure 6: Cover of Maut Ka Manzar and Marne ke Baad Kya Hoga?

The story of Rafiq is the story of change in the religious thought in Anantnag. With this change brought through the increasing levels of literacy and accessibility to printed literature on Islam, the place called Anantnag became increasingly phantasmagoric. In this condition of modernity, according to Giddens (1990), the locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of influences quite distant from them (p. 19). Giddens argues that in this situation identity can no longer be seen as something that is just given but has to be understood as something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. Those Muslims in Anantnag who started to question what was given to them engaged in the reflexive activities as elaborated by Giddens. It is

often argued by scholars studying media and society that a distinctive form of public comes into being in relation to the texts and their circulation. According to Michael Warner, public is a space organized by nothing but the discourse itself (Warner, 2002, 413-25). The accessibility of religious literature to newly literate section of Muslims such as Rafiq resulted in formation of space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.



Figure 7: Books with religious content displayed at a shop in Anantnag

The circulation of discourses produced in relation to religious texts accessed by educated Muslims in Anantnag brought concrete changes in religious thought. However, this discourse was still limited in its circulation. It was only with the emergence of cassette culture in Anantnag, that for the first time, sermons of noted preachers became one of the widely consumed media forms amongst all sections of Muslims in Anantnag. In the main town of Anantnag many cassette shops and outlets sold the cassettes of popular preachers such as Qari Hanif and Nisar Qazi. In addition, folktales and songs touching many aspects of religion were recorded and sold in the form of cassettes. These cassettes were played and listened across Anantnag. The cassette tapes were sold in the bus stand of Anantnag, outside shrines and many other marketplaces. Charles Hirshkind's work on cassette sermon audition in contemporary Egypt bears striking similarities with the way in which cassette recorded sermons and other devotional content became a ubiquitous

part of the cultural and religious landscape of Anantnag. The cassettes were listened to anywhere, including in passenger buses, barber shops or at home.

McLuhan (1964) has warned us that it is too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium (p. 2). The access to printed literature on religion by the educated in Anantnag extended a different understanding of religion in Anantnag, on the contrary the access to sermons and devotional content through cassettes brought into life the significance of ear. The voice component reflected through cassettes appealed to the larger sections of the Muslim society in Anantnag. Cassettes became the terrains on which religious discourses circulated across Anantnag. It is not the religious content but the way in which cassettes influenced the structure of the content which made cassettes the popular medium among Muslims in Anantnag. The cassettes enhanced the ability of listeners to bypass traditional gatekeepers of religious content in Anantnag. The circulation of sermons allowed a new perception of religious reality. The preachers who used cassettes to circulate their views on religion became the new age experts on religion in Anantnag. The absence of study on how unorganized cassette industry interpenetrated with religion in Anantnag makes it difficult to have a structured narrative on the cassette industry in Anantnag. In an attempt to understand the relationship between cassette technology and religion in Anantnag, the following depiction of how cassettes contributed in bringing a new religious experience in existence uses in depth interviews with those who have been a fundamental part of the journey of cassette industry in Anantnag.

7. Cassette Culture and Religious Discourses in Anantnag

The component of speech or voice as an essential part of cassette technology appealed to cognitive faculties of Muslims in Anantnag. Those who accessed religious content through cassettes identified immediately with the voice element. This attribute of cassette technology probably highlights the strong currents of oral thought still prevalent in Anantnag. The religious sermons through cassettes became new texts to reflect upon and enhance the ethical capacities of its audiences. If print medium was the terrain to

propagate the ideology of Muslim thinkers such as Maududi, the cassettes contributed to the circulation of discourses espoused by new preachers. These preachers who were from diverse sects within Muslims appealed to different audiences.

Two preachers who went on to become household names in Anantnag are Qari Hanif from Multan of Pakistan and Qazi Nisar from Anantnag. Qari Hanif was known for his speeches touching mostly on eschatological issues with Islam. Foremost among them touched the religious aspects such fear (*khauf*), humility (*khusho'*), regret (*nadm*), repentance (*tauba*), and tranquility (*itmi' nan or sakfna*) in Islam. The speeches of Qari Haneef were in Urdu and had a deep influence primarily on the religious thought of those who had understanding of the written word. As noted in the previous chapter, the cassettes that reached Kashmir via Pakistan were filled with content with a reference also to the existing political conditions in Kashmir. The fiery religious sermons of Qari Hanif introduced a section of Muslims to knowledge they corroborated with their religious viewpoints.

Qazi Nisar, the other preacher whose sermons and religious thought shaped the social, political and religious landscape forever in Anantnag, came from a well-known religious family of Anantnag. The family of Qazi Nisar traces their roots back to the reign of Yusuf Shah Chak (1579 to 1586) in Kashmir. It was Yusuf Shah Chak who had appointed an ancestor of Nisar Qazi as a qadi (judge) during his rule. Since then the Qazi family has remained one of the most highly regarded families of Anantnag as well as of Kashmir. Qazi Nisar's father, Qazi Ghulam Mohammad, was the founder of Anjuman-i-Tabligh-ul-Islam in Anantnag. The Anjuman-i-Tabligh-ul-Islam was a non-political religious organization based in in Anantnag and was committed to the dissemination of Islamic theology, Hanafi jurisprudence and Sufi way of life.

Tabligh-ul-Islam was established with a purpose to defend the idea of traditional rishi Islam in Anantnag. Qazi Ghulam Mohammad was the founder of *Idare Tehqeeqat Islamia* (Islamic Research Institute) in Anantnag. Idare Tehqeeqat established in 1983 consists of religious school (madrassa) which so far has produced thousands of alims,

fazils and hafiz's. Idare Tahqeeqat till date is regarded to be a key contributor to the burgeoning of religious trend in existing Anantnag. Some of the students of this institute are now well known religious preachers in Anantnag. Idare Tehqqaat also consists of a primary school which follows modern curriculum and imparts education besides religious education. At present Idare Tehqqaat runs a chain of forty two schools imparting modern education to children. Each school has more than three hundred students.

Idare Tehqqaat was the first religious school in Anantnag which published a monthly named Islamabad. This monthly which was started in early 1980's, covered issues on the basics of Islam and also had a question-answer section in the end. In the question-answer session, the readers of the monthly would write questions to the publishers of Islamabad on issues pertaining to Islam. This was a time when political situation in Kashmir was changing. The changing circumstances in Kashmir valley motivated Qazi Nisar to enter into the political scene in Kashmir. Qazi Nisar had completed his doctorate from Aligarh Muslim University and therefore was popularly known as 'Doctor Qazi Nisar'. He was also an alumnus of Al- Azhar University, Cairo. What differentiates Qazi Nisar's ancestors from him is related to his intervention in politics, his art of articulation and particularly the dissemination of his ideas through cassette technology. Qazi Nisar succeeded his father Qazi Ghulam Mohammad as the Mirwaiz (chief cleric) of South Kashmir.



Figure 8: Poster of Qazi Nisar displayed in Anantnag, June 2016

In 1985, Kashmir was under the Governor rule and the Governor Jagmohan had tried to impose ban on the sale of all kinds of meat including mutton in Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir during the Hindu festival of Janmasthan. Qazi Nisar defied this ban by publicly slaughtering a cow in Lal Chowk, Anantnag main-town. This act by him turned him into a champion of Muslim population in Anantnag. The defying of governments ruling on cow slaughter till date is vivid in the memories of people who speak about Qazi Nisar. Qazi Nisar later on founded *Ummat e Islami* (Islamic Community) in Kashmir which claimed to represent the interests of Muslims in Kashmir. Ummat e Islami became the part of Muslim United Front (MUF) among several other religious organizations to contest infamous 1987 elections in Kashmir.¹⁷

Qazi Nisar integrated his religious message with the politics he represented. The combination of his religious thought and political activism blended perfectly with the aspiration of majority of the Muslims in Anantnag. Qazi Nisar was not a religious literalist and his religious message mostly struck a bond with the traditional aspects of Islam in Anantnag. The religiously philosophy of Qazi Nisar can be categorized under Barelvi sect in Islam. However, what differentiated him from the previous preachers representing traditional rishi/sufi Islam in Anantnag was his involvement with the politics of Kashmir. Qazi Nisar was the product of the changes that were happening across the Muslim world and this made the first Muslim reformist of contemporary Anantnag.

Qazi Nisar preached his religious ideology through sermons which he delivered in a Mosque at Reshi Maul Sahab (mosque named after Hardi Rishi) in Anantnag. These sermons by him were mostly delivered during Friday prayers. The cassette industry at that time in Anantnag was evolving at a faster pace. It was through the cassettes that the religious message of Qazi Nisar reached to masses to Anantnag. While interviewing different individuals from Anantnag about their accounts of media and religion, many references were made on Nisar Qazi and the circulation of his sermons through cassettes. Following narrative by Ghulam Nabi, once a cassette shop owner in Anantnag, explains how the flourishing of cassette industry in Anantnag was intrinsically linked to the

¹⁷For details refer to Sumantra Bose, Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace, 2009.

content about religion. In Ghulam Nabi's account of how cassette technology circulated religious content to the masses, the role of cassettes in circulating the sermons of Qazi Nisar was repeatedly emphasized.

Ghulam Nabi owns an electronic shop in Anantnag. He was fifteen when he started to sell cassettes in Anantnag. According to Ghulam Nabi, it was a shop named Radio World which was a trend setter for cassette business in Anantnag. In the beginning, it was mostly Bollywood songs, Kashmiri Songs, Kashmiri dramas which were recorded by Radio World and then sold to the customers. Radio World later started recording wedding functions, performing artists. According to Ghulam Nabi, it was a cassette titled Yunus Nama (story of Prophet Yunus/Jonah) which became the popular cassette containing religious content. Yunus Nama, the story of miraculous endurance of Prophet Yunus (Jonah) after being swallowed by whale. Yunus Nama was sung in Kashmiri by Ghulam Nabi Bhat and it became an instant hit amongst the people.

Soon after the success of Yunus Naama, the largest cassette distributor of Kashmir, Ravimech Studios run by R. K. Bhan realized the potential of cassettes addressing religious sensibilities in Kashmir. Ravimech Studios was the first studio in Kashmir equipped with multi-track, digital recording facilities and video post production facilities. Realising the business prospects of recording and selling religious content, R K Bhan, a Kashmiri Pandit recorded Khwab Naama of Hazrat Khatija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad. Khwab Naama of Khatija is a story about her dream in which sun descended from the heavens into her courtyard and radiating her home. Khwab Naama was sung also by Ghulam Nabi Bhat.

Ghulam Nabi recalls that when cassette business was its peak, Qazi Nisar was a phenomenon in Anantnag. According to Ghulam Nabi, Qazi Nisar was a preacher whose oratory skills swayed the crowds in Anantnag. It was the time when his sermons were recorded on cassettes and put on sale. There was a huge demand for his cassettes. These cassettes not only were popular in Anantnag but in entire Kashmir. After Qazi Nisar was killed, there was more demand for his sermons. The major reason how Qazi Nisar could

strike a chord with his followers in Anantnag was through the cassettes. The cassettes allowed the masses to listen and choose the content of their choice. The cassette industry was soon replaced by the arrival of new digital technologies. Some of Nisar Qazi's recordings have been recently uploaded on YouTube and these uploads are receiving immense response from those Muslims who have heard of him. On 19th July, 1994, Qazi Nisar was killed by unidentified gunmen in Dialgam village of Anantnag. His death anniversary is commemorated every year with complete shutdown (hartal) in Anantnag. Idare Tehqiqat and Umat i Islami are currently represented by the son of Qazi Nisar named Qazi Yasir. Qazi Yasir is the current Mirwaiz (chief cleric) of South Kashmir.



Figure 9: Cassette shop with CD's on display in Anantnag

8. Religion, New Media and Culture in Anantnag

From the 1990s onwards, a remarkable transformation in the terms of discourse in which the Kashmir conflict has sought to express itself may be clearly discerned. In the midst of this milieu, in Anantnag, the first generation of Kashmiri Muslims was exposed to mass media in the form of print, TV, internet, publishing, mobile phones. This is the first generation grown up with mass marketing and demographic targeting of modern advertising. In an era when modern technology has a major influence on the spread of knowledge and information, the use of modern media technology for religious purposes in Anantnag has seen unparalleled intensification. This has also seen enormous response from the masses who engage with such media. The use of media (publishing, CD/DVD,

TV, mobile phones, internet) in engendering religious consciousness in Kashmir can be illustrated by the role these media have played over the last two decades. In the present information age, these media have been integrated in a sense to perform role of religion.

The changes brought by literacy, changing political conditions and onset of globalization, coupled with the explosion of the media technologies such as television, internet, mobile phones gave a distinctive shape to the discourse on religion in Anantnag. The new discourses on religion significantly altered the ways in which people of Anantnag traditionally had perceived religion. The integration of media to perform the role of religion has multiplied with the changing trends in technology and economics, resulting in an increasingly diverse, decentralized and multi-channel environment. This following section of the chapter tries to trace the emergence of new religious trends in Anantnag in the past two decades and the relationship of these trends with the media technologies such as publishing, television, memory cards, internet and other digital media forms.

As mentioned previously, the economic structure of Anantnag shifted radically with the onset of liberalization policies of 1990s. The changes brought by the liberalization policies, insurgency in Kashmir and other changes in the world economic and cultural patterns, intersected with the onset of new age discourses on Islam in Anantnag. One of the significant sites to assess the changes in religious structure of Anantnag is the rapid flourishing of madrasas in Anantnag post 1990s. At the time when father of Qazi Nisar established Idare Tahqeeqat in 1983, it was probably the first of its kind in Anantnag. In just two decades, the number of madrasas in Anantnag has multiplied rapidly. There must be at present more than hundred different madrasas functioning in Anantnag. It is mostly the children from less fortunate sections who are studying in these madrasas. The madrasas in Anantnag are divided on the basis of religious sects within Islam. Since majority of Muslims in Kashmir and in Anantnag are the followers of Sunni sect within Islam, therefore the madrasas in Anantnag are divided among Barelwi, Deobandi, Jamat-i-Islami and Ahle Hadith sub-sects.

The trajectory of society in Anantnag is a reflection of changes that were taking place at the world level. These changes leading to new religious and political identities were fervently facilitated with the new technologies of communication. An overriding feature of the current communication ecology is that new media expand to shape the public sphere increasingly as a marketplace for ideas, identities and discourses. The religious orientation rooted in local context took a different form and shape with the interconnection between local and non-local. The new religious patterns that emerged were distinctively modern however at the same time influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions and historical experiences of the Muslim society in Anantnag. Paraphrasing and contextualizing S.N. Eisenstadt's (2002) theory of multiple modernities, the response of Muslim society in Anantnag to global cultural changes did not conform to the assumptions held by classical theorists on modernization, but new religious and cultural trends emerged in Anantnag which questioned the traditional modes of functioning of Muslim society in Anantnag (p. 1-29).

The changes in religious patterns in Anantnag post 1990s coincided with the boom in media technologies such as TV, mobile phone technology and internet. An overriding feature of these new technologies is the way in which technologies expand to shape the religious public sphere increasingly as a marketplace for ideas, identities and discourses. The changing media ecosystem in Anantnag speaks volumes about the transition of Muslim society in Anantnag. The employment of media technologies to seek and create information about Islam is altering how information and ideas on Islam were shared, communicated and produced in the traditional media ecosystem/practices. This correlates with the observation of Arjun Appadurai (1996) that there is a growing evidence that that the consumption of mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity and in general agency. Images of media are quickly moved into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, resistance (p. 7).

The history of Ahle-Hadith, Barelvi thought, Deobandi thought, Jamat-i-Islami, Tablighi Jamaat thought and various other thoughts in Kashmir can be traced well before the dawn of the globalization and liberalization in Kashmir. What is strikingly important however

is the way in which these religious schools of thoughts have come to make their presence in a distinctive and concrete form after 1990s. Although many sects made their inroads in Anantnag prior to 1990s, however it is only in the context of rapid urbanization, increasingly literacy levels, post-liberalization process and power of globalization, that the identities among Muslims on sectarian basis are sharpening. Very few number of Muslims before 1990s could discern between the several sects within Islam. In Anantnag district, hundreds of new mosques been built in the past two decades. Many Muslims are of the opinion that the role of mosque as symbol of unity has significantly been redefined in the past couple of decades.

Earlier a typical mosque in Kashmir, according to Chitrlekha Zutshi, represented the center and symbol of unity among all Muslim sects in Kashmir. In the present Anantnag, mosques are divided on the basis of their affiliation with the given religious sects among Muslims. In Anantnag town, there are four major jama masjids (prominent mosques) other than many smaller ones belonging to Jamat-i-Islami, Jamiat-i-Ahle Hadith, Barelwi and Deobandi sects. These mosques are symbols of communicating a given religious ideology and almost all these mosques have separate media outlet (book store) containing information about a given sect. These media outlets attached with the mosques sell books, CDs, DVD's, memory cards with a content related to a given sect. Some of the media outlets have separate computer units for uploading religious material on the memory cards.

A particular sect in Anantnag has particular number of preachers speaking on various issues related to Islam or global politics mostly during Friday sermons. People attending these sermons place their mobile phones at different locations of the mosque in order to record the sermon. The recorded sermons are later on circulated amongst friends and neighbours. There are several prominent local preachers in Anantnag each one with huge number of following. Every religious sect in Anantnag has a madrasa which play an important role in diffusion of sectarian identities. Madrasas in Anantnag are important sites through which sectarian (maslaki) identities are transmitted. Other than the local preachers, there are also some non- local preachers such as tele-Islamicist Zakir Naik,

Israr Ahmed, Tariq Jameel, Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, who are contributing to the shaping of discourse on religion in Anantnag in the times of digital media. These non-local preachers also have a huge following among different sects of Muslims within Islam. In order to understand how modern day local Muslim preachers are using media technology to propagate their views, the following sub section focuses on few Muslim preachers who enjoy an enormous following in Anantnag.

8.1 Preaching Traditions in the age of Digital Media

Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi as an orator and preacher has a powerful ability to sway people with his Islamic speeches in Kashmiri. His chiselled and intonated voice is seen as a sign of God by those who follow him. The sermons of Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi are circulated through CD's, DVD's, and mobile phones. Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi perhaps enjoys the highest numbers of followers in Anantnag. An alumnus of Idar e Tahqeeqat of Nisar Qazi, Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi commonly referred as Dawoodi is a powerful religious figure of Anantnag. While studying in government school, Dawoodi developed a keen interest in studying religion. Immediately after passing his tenth grade, Dawoodi left worldly education taught to him at government school. In the year 1994, he became a student of Idar e Tahqeeqat to learn Islam. At Idar e Tahqeeqat, Dawoodi completed courses in religious (*deeni*) education. After his training in religious education, Dawoodi developed ardent interest in preaching Islam. Dawoodi is now leading a movement aimed at defending the idea of Barelwi or traditional religious practices among Muslims in Kashmir. In 2005, he established a religious seminary named *Soutul Auliya* in Anantnag. Soutul Auliya manages to receive generous donations from the Muslim population in Anantnag.

In the span of twelve years, Soutul Auliya movement has won significant number of adherents to its ideology. One of the important characteristics of those who follow Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi in Anantnag is that these followers mostly come from rural, less educated and agrarian backgrounds. The office of Soutul-Auliya at Bagi-Naugam in Anantnag consist of a madrasa spread over 4-5 acres of land. This madrasa imparts

religious education among its students and offers Alim, Hafiz and Fazil courses. One of the greatest strengths for the success of this movement has been the charisma of Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi and his ability to integrate media technologies in performing his mission. Soutul Auliya publishes a monthly named Soutul Auliya in Urdu and has a website www.soutulauliyajk.org. The religious content generated by Soutul Auliya is available on soutulauliyajk.wapka.mobi/ in mp3, FLV format. Many videos of Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi are also available on YouTube. Nearly thirty thousand people, mostly men, attended the 12th annual conference held by Soutul Auliya at Bagi-Naugam 2016. Those who attend and participate in the events organized by Soutul Auliya make every effort to record the event and transmit the message.

Since Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi began to preach Islam in Anantnag, most of his sermons have been recorded. Shabir Ahmed Sheikh, an electronics shop owner at Nai Basti Anantnag has devoted himself completely to record the sermons by Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi. Shabir's electronic shop is a worth mentioning media extension of Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi's sermons. Shabir claims that he has recorded almost three thousand sermon speeches of Abdul Rasheed dawoodi so far. Those who follow Dawoodi visit the electronic shop of Shabir in order to upload sermons by Dawoodi in their mobile phones. In recent times Dawoodi has also been able develop a strong connection with religious scholars outside Kashmir. He has been invited to deliver speeches in Kerala, Yemen, Punjab and many other places. Shabir has been able to access and document these speeches delivered by Dawoodi at places outside Kashmir.

An important factor that differentiates Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi from other well known preachers such as Qazi Yasir is the formers incredible ability to integrate with media logic. Every event organized by Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi is nothing short of a media event. Qazi Yasir, who hails from a respectable family of Anantnag and inherits the legacy of his father, Qazi Nisar, has not been able to strike a bond with the people at a level compared to Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi. Qazi Yasir like his father has tried to integrate his religious thought with the prevailing political conditions in Kashmir. His father managed to create an aura around himself for the very quality of being able to

integrate religion and politics. Qazi Yasir maintains a very ambivalent relationship with media technology. His perspectives on the relationship between modern media technologies and religion reflect his ambivalent relationship with media.

Qazi Yasir differentiates between various forms of media such as cassette technology and internet. For him TV and cassettes does not allow any room for confusion. For him the religious content that is mediated through cassettes and TV do not lead to any confusion among the users. This in his opinion is because of the fact that there is a reasonable and identifiable voice behind religious content mediated through TV and cassettes.

“In case of doubt, you can consult the preacher. Similarly on TV, you will not see any misinformation. Muslim televangelists are guided well enough to do justice to the mission of dawah (propagation).”

However, Qazi Yasir has a very complex opinion about internet. He believes that the contradictory information available through internet and other digital forms leads to confusion amongst the followers of Islam. Many Muslims who are confused by their access to information available on internet turn to atheism. Another criticism which Qazi Yasir cites is that “though technology has made people powerful enough to have information of anything, but it is at the same time dangerous to form opinions on the basis of your subjective experience.”

Qazi Yasir believes that the central tenet of Islam is consensus. Individuals can't have opinions on their own without confirming it with the larger community understanding of Islam. According to Qazi, this is very much unlike Christianity where there is more focus of individualism and separation of private and public realms of life. Islam largely rests on the idea of consultation and guidance. The metaphorical significance of verses in Quran makes it difficult to understand without guidance. The examples of Dawoodi and Qazi Yasir simply illustrate only couple of distinctive relationships established by Muslims in Anantnag in relation to media. Other than Dawoodi and Qazi Nisar, there are many other popular preachers who have a huge following among Muslims of Anantnag. The well

renowned local preachers who appeal to vast numbers of Muslims using media technologies in Anantnag are Maqbool Akhrani of *Difai Jamiat-i-Ahle Hadith*, Mushtaq Ahmed Veeri of Ahle-Hadith, Mubarak Ahmed of Deoband School, Fayaz Ahmed Rizvi of Soutul Auliya. The sermons of all these preachers are circulated through mobile phones, CD's, local cable television and internet.

Many commentators who have written on changes in religious patterns of Kashmir have attributed these changes with the insurgency in Kashmir. The insurgency in Kashmir by many commentators and scholars is considered as reason d'être for the rise in what they have called as Islamic radicalism. However very few studies have been able to connect the changes in religious patterns with the juggernaut of changes brought by late modernity across the globe. Manuel Castells (1996) has argued that the distinctive social and political trend of the 1990s was the construction of social action and politics around primary identities, either ascribed, rooted in history and geography, or newly built in an anxious search for meaning and spirituality (p. 21-22). The explosion in information technologies which coincided with the onset of globalization serve as important sites to explore more nuanced way of understanding changing religious patterns in Anantnag. The increasing influence of new media technologies such as television, mobile phones, and internet reflects how identity became the organizing principle of Muslims in post globalized variant of society in Anantnag. Identity here in the words of Manuel Castells implies a "process by which a social actor recognizes itself and constructs meaning primarily on the basis of a given cultural attribute or set of attributes, to the exclusion of a broader reference to other social structures" (p. 22).

Mediascapes, referred by Arjun Appadurai (1990) as the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and the images of the world created by these media served as tools to direct religious landscape of Anantnag and Kashmir in a new way (p. 298). In the dominant narrative on Muslims and Media, much of the scholarly focus in the past two decades has revolved around on the question of representation of Muslims by the global corporate media. Since the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said, there have been plenty of studies conducted by scholars'

questioning the way in which public perception of Islam has been mediated. Nabil Echchaibi (2012) has argued that the studies of media representation, though of critical significance, tend to overemphasize the image of Muslims trapped in a structured system of signification that is impossible to overturn (p.191). Echchaibi continues to argue that Internet and digital media has afforded Muslims new and at times rival spaces to reinforce, cultivate, and act on a variety of ideological views, positions and projects. The new media technologies is allowing the Muslim population of Anantnag to actively participate as social actors to reproduce circulate and articulate their versions of social, religious, cultural or political realities.

The proliferation of religious sects in Anantnag over past two decades is closely connected with the question of identity in a world where more and more people are directly coming in contact with the knowledge previously unavailable. At the centre of people's ability to access this knowledge lays the role of media technologies. This knowledge which is largely mediated later on is reflected upon and applied to the operation of day to day affairs in life. According to Castells (1996) in a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning. People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are (p. 3). Before the explosion of information technology, the access to religious knowledge in Anantnag was only the sole prerogative of few families or few learned men.

The interpretation of Islam which earlier would be monopoly of few is in the hands of many. People install religious apps on their mobile phones, access sites of their choice and also consume content that satisfies their cognitions. With the function of user generated content facilitated by new media technologies more number of Muslims in Anantnag in a position to access, assess, and interpret the religious content. This has led to an emergence of new forms of religious consciousness and sharpened identities. Writing in the context of identity in the globalizing world, Zygmunt Bauman (2001) quoting Stuart Hall, elucidates how there has been a veritable discursive explosion in

recent years around the concept of identity. According to Bauman identity has become by now prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined (Bauman, 2001, p. 121).

The production and use of religious content circulated through new media forms are self-generated (by more or less professional individual users), self-directed (particular addresses) and self-selected (in using preferred sources). Manuel Castells (2009) refers to this participative interaction between media content and users as 'mass self-communication'. The participatory function of media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp has facilitated Muslims in Anantnag to produce and consume the content which they identify with. This generated content largely reinforces the preferred worldview of the individuals. The easy access and inexpensive to technological tools such as mobile phones has also allowed to challenge the narrative of those scholars who were of the opinion that international corporate media exclusively dictates the worldview of people. Despite the fragmentary nature of content that is served through new media technologies Muslims in Anantnag to a large extent selectively expose themselves to a content that corresponds to their pre-existing belief system. Information which is seen contradictory to existing belief system is rejected or ignored.

8.2 Articulating Religiosity in the age of Digital Media

In this sub-section, the attempt will be to chart out the ways in which religious lives and religious identities are articulated by individuals in relation to media culture in Anantnag. In order to illustrate the ways in which modern religiosities in Anantnag are articulated, the following pages present the 'account of media' by Ajaz Rather. The 'accounts of media' as a category here is borrowed from the work of Stewart M. Hoover (2006) on religion and media. Hoover refers to these accounts of media by individuals or groups as public scripts (p. 88). Hoover notes that these scripts are in the area of media what James Carey has called the "publicly available stock" of images and ideas through which we understand ourselves in our social and cultural contexts, and what Ellen Seiter has called "lay theories of media effects" (p.88) The account of media here by Ajaz Rather is also a

representation of how new generation of Muslims in Anantnag conceive and interpret Islam vis-à-vis media technologies.

Ajaz Ahmed Rather is a lecturer of Economics. Ajaz completed his Masters in Economics from University of Kashmir in 2006-07. Later on, Ajaz wrote his M.Phil dissertation on Chinese Economy. Ajaz is a voracious reader and has immense interest in economics and issues concerning Islam and Muslims in the modern world. Recently Ajaz has started an initiative to bring representatives of different sects in Anantnag on a single platform. Through this initiative, Ajaz wants to build a consensus among the leading ulema of different sects in Anantnag. Ajaz recently has established a centre named as Dawah Islamic Center where Ajaz invites scholars across the Valley to speak on issues related to Islam. These lectures are recorded, uploaded on YouTube and also circulated through the Facebook page of the Center. Ajaz himself also delivers sermons at a mosque in his village where he speaks on contemporary themes associated with Muslims.

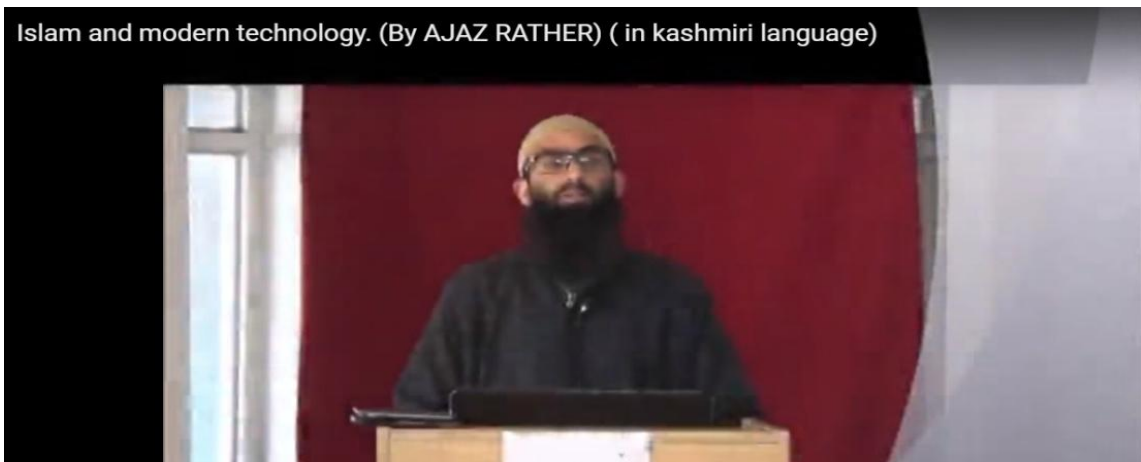


Figure 10: YouTube Video of Ajaz Rather

Ajaz is well aware of the potential of the modern technologies and their placing in Muslims societies. He opines that before the digital explosion of media, it was the traditional oral methods which communicated Islam to masses in Anantnag. Now in the times of digital media, there are more numbers of Muslim preachers who are spreading the knowledge on Islam. However, Ajaz believes that most of the new preachers hail

from madrasa backgrounds. The madrasa background of these preachers dominating the religious marketplace, according to Ajaz, limits the ability of these preachers to engage with a public outside their domain. As per Ajaz, the print media, electronic media and digital media which is used by local sermon preachers to perform role of Islam tries to cover mostly issues which deal with acts of ritual worship such as prayer, fasting etc.

“Mostly the religious preachers adjust their message for homogenous populations. There must be an attempt to cater to larger and heterogeneous populations. Modern debates on feminism, secularism, environmentalism can be efficiently integrated to the message of religion. On the contrary, the media used for religious purposes by Muslims in Kashmir is mostly traditional to the core and always apologetic.”

The recent proliferation of religious sects in Anantnag according to Ajaz is a manifestation of late day capitalistic adventures. For him “the modern sectarian proliferation and its manifestation in Anantnag is a power battle for constructing bigger buildings, acquiring more land and having greater audiences. More people are interested now in the business of religion.” What led Ajaz to realize the potential of media technologies in performing the role of religion is through his access to the work of tele-Islamicist Zakir Naik. From the year 2000, Ajaz started to associate himself with Islamic Research Foundation (IRF). IRF is headed by Zakir Naik and promotes propagation of Islam worldwide through international satellite TV channels cable TV, internet, print media and other electronic forms. Ajaz would receive the religious material from IRF occasionally. Ajaz notes that Zakir Naik has been a trend setter in showing Muslims how to use modern media in performing the role of Islam. Other than informing himself about religion through sources of Islamic law (such as Quran and Hadith), books of Ghazali, literature by Maulana Maududi, Ajaz follows many websites which contain Information about Islam. Some of the Islamic websites Ajaz regularly follows are kalamullah.com, saaid.net, www.islamweb.net, www.imaanstar.com.

9. Glance at Religion, Media and Culture in Anantnag through Images

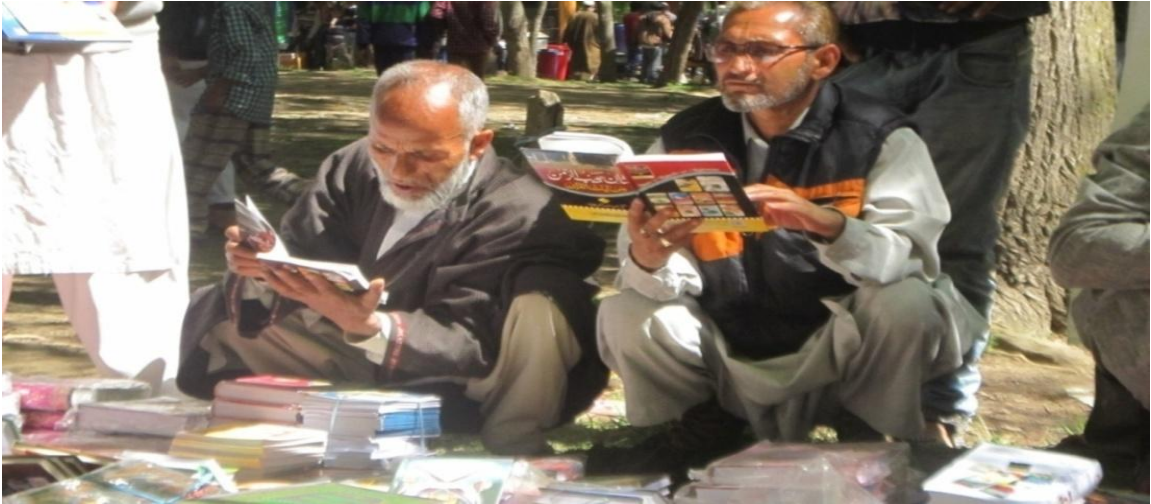


Figure 11: People reading the content before planning to buy Books during a sale of books on Islam



Figure 12: Event organized by Soutul Auliya recorded by participants



Figure 13: People using mobile cameras while recording a religious event



Figure 14: Abdul Rasheed Dawoodi –centre - (Popular preacher in Anantnag)



Figure 15: Devotee showing a religious app installed on his phone

Chapter 4

Media and Religious Practices in Urban Spaces of Srinagar

A main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms.

(Williams, 2005, p. 191)

Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backwards.

(Huxley, 1941, p.8)

This chapter aims to explore the relationship between media and religious practices in the urban spaces of Srinagar. Srinagar as the capital city, administrative base, religious centre and commercial zone, has always functioned as a laboratory for new religious and spiritual movements in Modern Kashmir. This chapter therefore attempts to explore the intense and complex interplay between media and religion in Srinagar. With focus on the contemporary religious configurations in Srinagar, this chapter predominantly tries to bring the role of new media technologies to the fore while assessing the relationship between media and religion in Srinagar. While incorporating the learnings from the previous chapter on Anantnag, this chapter argues that the relationship between media and religion in Srinagar and the countryside of Kashmir has never been mutually exclusive. At the same time, experiments with media and religion in Srinagar have contributed distinctively to general religious landscape of Kashmir.

1. Context

Srinagar has had almost always been the capital city, administrative base, religious centre and the commercial zone of Kashmir Valley. The history of Srinagar is a well documented one. The earliest reference to Srinagar is found in the Rajatarangini of Kalhana written in the mid twelfth century AD (Khan, 1978, p. 2). Rajatarangini is seen as the first written historical text and an imperative resource of information on the history of Kashmir before the rule by different Muslim dynasties. Modern historians of Kashmir have often portrayed Srinagar as a distinct form of civilization and referred to Srinagar as Venice of the East (Khan, 1978). The history of Srinagar is divided by historians into three distinct epochs or time frames. This division into ancient, medieval and modern Srinagar is often linked with different ruling dynasties of different time periods. The medieval history of Srinagar is the history of rule by successive Muslim dynasties which extended from 1320 AD to 1819 AD. The modern cultural, social, religious and political institutional structures of Srinagar began to develop only in the last decade of the 19th century, prior to which the essence of the social, religious and political order in Srinagar was under the influence of medieval institutions (Khan, 1978). The flourishing of modern institutions in Srinagar has often been attributed by historians of modern Kashmir to the changes brought by the direct colonial interventions of British in the Dogra ruled (1846-1947) Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (Lawrence, 1895; Zutshi, 2004; Rai, 2004).

Before the establishment of British Residency (1885) and the first foundations of modern education in Srinagar, it was the largely the traditional *maktabs* and *patshalas*, which dominated the transmission of education in Srinagar (Khan, 1978). The education transmitted through these traditional means was largely confined to the domains of religious instruction at a very limited scale. The traditional education imparted through *maktabs* and *patshalas* was also directed towards the creation of a small percentage of influential section of literate class in Kashmir. The literate abilities of this class prepared them to be an indispensable of the government administration. Prior to the direct involvement of the British, the routes of communication were primitive and country boats along the rivers were only means of transportation. The construction of roads such as

Jhelum Valley Cart Road (1880-1890) intensified the interface of Srinagar with outside. These new means of transportation facilities resulted into the transformation of Srinagar city. The construction of roads in Kashmir facilitated the initial arrival of conditions of modernity in Kashmir.

The introduction of modern education in Srinagar is associated with the schools established by the British Christian missionaries in late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Rai, 2004). Though the influence of Christian missionary schools remained restricted to small percentage of urban population in Srinagar, the impact of these initiatives however a left a conspicuous mark on the religiously conscious educated, urban Muslim classes of Srinagar. For example, in an attempt to face up to the educational initiatives by the Christian missionaries, Mirwaiz Rasool Shah laid the foundation of first modern Muslim school (or socio-religious or reform organization) named Anjuman-i-Nusratul-Islam in Srinagar. Established in 1899 first as a madrasa, Anjuman-i-Nusratul-Islam later on developed into the Islamia High School by 1905 (Rai, 2004, p. 236). The rationale of founding Anjuman-i-Nusratul-Islam was two-fold, one, to deter the 'designs of the Christian missionaries' from making inroads into the Kashmir Valley, and second to provide an alternative to Muslims for having an education which could integrate religion and sciences. This understanding of religion was deprecatory of oral aspects of religion in Kashmir and therefore aimed to purge local Islam of Kashmir from its polytheistic practices. This early initiative of Muslim religious elite to approach modern education was grounded on a reaction to the changing patterns of society in Srinagar.

The early spread of literacy in Srinagar at the turn of 20th century contributed to an intense focus on Islam and definitions within the literate sections of the society (Zutshi, 2004, p. 120). These new discourses on Islam were circulated through the use of printing. The early religious reformists used printing as tool to propagate their ideas. In fact, these Muslim reformists were early adopters of printing technology in Kashmir. The printing technology was central to the spread of writings of the members of reformist movements such as Ahle-Hadith, Deobandi and Jamat-i-Islami in Kashmir. Mostly these religious

discourses were circulated through the pamphlets. American historian Elizabeth Eisenstein in her work on the role on printing press in the cultural transformations in early- modern Europe has shown the correlation between printing and Protestant Reformation. Eisenstein argues in her work that the effects of movable type printing press in post-Gutenberg Western Europe were closely tied to the success of Protestant reformation (Eisenstein, 1980). In similar but distinctive fashion, the birth of printing press in Srinagar coincided with assertions of new religious piety and zeal. The arrival of publication market in Srinagar coincided with the articulation of new religious ideas, firmly linking the history of printing in Kashmir in the religious publishing.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the religious reformist groups such as Ahle-Hadith, Deobandi and Jamat-i-Islami circulated their major ideologies through pamphleteering. Ahle-Hadith in 1936 started publishing Tawhid, which was the first official publication of Ahle-Hadith. This publication however lasted only for four years. After winding up the publication of Tawhid, Anjuman-i-Ahle-Hadith in 1940 came up with a new official publication called The Muslim. The founding members of Ahle-Hadith movement insisted on converting afresh the Muslims of Kashmir, who in their view were adhering to polytheistic practices (Khan, B.A, 2007, p. 147)). One of the interesting features of some of these religious tracts published during this period was that they were written in poetical form. Understanding the significance of poetry as a mnemonic device to transmit traditions in oral Kashmir, the use of written poetical religious tracts by members of Ahle-Hadith was seen as way to strike chord with the dynamics of an oral society. The core message in these writings was to criticize the Muslims of Kashmir for forsaking the book of Quran and other doctrines of Islam. The ubiquitous practice of shrine culture among Muslims of Kashmir was publicly declared to be erroneous by Ahle-Hadith and the doctrine of tawheed (worshipping Allah alone) was tried to be advocated.

Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, who was associated with the Deobandi school of thought, founded the Muslim Printing Press in the initial decades of twentieth century by publishing of two weeklies titled Rahnuma and Al-Islam. Through these weeklies, Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah aimed at educating the Muslims of Kashmir about the 'truer form of Islam'. Mirwaiz

Yusuf Shah later on also translated and published the first Kashmiri translation and commentary on the Quran (Sikand, 2002, p. 713). The other group which appeared later in the changing religious landscape of Kashmir and depended on printing technology to propagate its reformist thought was Jamat-i-Islami. How Jamat-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir circulated its ideas by using various media technologies has been elaborated in the previous chapters.

In spite of the influx of religious reformist organizations in Srinagar much earlier, their influence for a longer period remained only on the margins of the society in Srinagar. It is with the transition to mass literacy in Srinagar that these religious reformist discourses started to make their presence felt unprecedentedly. In 1941, as per the estimates only 1.6% of Muslim population in entire Jammu and Kashmir could read and write (Sikand, 2002, p. 732). As per the census 2011, the literacy rate of Srinagar is 71.21%. With a population of approximately 1.3 million, Srinagar of today is a focal point where multiple discourses produced around religion and politics in Kashmir emanate. The mass literacy in Srinagar intersected with the various other economic, social and political developments to produce a religious public with new notions about self, religion and the world.

The urban characteristic of Srinagar facilitated new religious changes with much rapid pace than less urban or rural areas of Kashmir. The massive increase in literacy levels has coupled with the corollaries of globalization and therefore resulting in making Muslims in Srinagar extremely cognizant of their social, political and religious standing. In these settings, it is through the explosion of media technologies in past three decades which have contributed significantly in catapulting the information on religion in to the public prominence. The ability of new media technologies to place the religious content in circulation has enabled increased access to information about religion by all sections of the society.

The intersection of new information and communication technologies with the changing social, cultural, religious and political fabric of society in Srinagar has made media as an integral component of routine life. These media in the terminology of various media

ecologist theorists are not merely technological appurtenances to society in Srinagar but have become crucial determinants of the social fabric in Srinagar (Carey, 1967, p. 270). Media in modern society of Srinagar has come to dwell or permeate into the day to day affairs of the modern individual life as never before (Hoover, 2006). The increasing influence of new means of communication in Srinagar has enabled local contexts to develop communication practices and flows of exchange with geographically remote and temporally distant contexts (Giddens, 1990). This chapter is an attempt to explore media as a site for understanding the interaction between local religious settings of Srinagar with the electronic and digital technologies such as television, computer mediated communications and desktop publishing.

2. Television, Religion and Culture in Srinagar

A preliminary look at the religious patterns of Kashmir valley establishes that the relationship between Srinagar and the countryside has never been mutually exclusive. The Muslim Rishi tradition emanating from the rural settings of the Kashmir valley left indelible mark also on the religious settings of Srinagar. Similarly, the literate Islam represented by Central Asian Kubravi Sufis penetrated into the rural religious patterns in Kashmir Valley. These two variants of Islam in Kashmir are inseparable and intertwined and yet identifiable. With the developments in transportation and with the birth of new institutions, the linkage between Srinagar and the countryside intensified. The changes brought about by access to better roads, enhanced movement of people, increasing educational levels, changing economic realities have led to the blurring of conventional notions about rural and urban regions. With the particular reference to revolution in information and communication technologies, the religious trends emerging in Srinagar and religious trends emerging from rural areas are no longer confined to the origins of their location. The information and communication technologies and universal aspects of literate thought allow for the free flow of religious ideas across Kashmir region.

Despite the amalgamation of rural-urban spaces and times in Kashmir, Srinagar continues to have its own distinctive character. Srinagar has been the capital of Kashmir for

centuries. In *The Valley of Kashmir* written in the last decade of nineteenth century, Walter Lawrence points out that for many generations Srinagar monopolized the attention of rulers of the Kashmir Valley (Lawrence, 1895, p. 39). In *Rajatarangini* of Kahlana, written in the twelfth century AD by Kalhana, it is mentioned that the King Lalitaditya who ruled Kashmir in the 8th century was of the opinion that cultivators must be repressed and their style of living must be lower than that of the city people or the latter will suffer (Lawrence, 1895, p. 187). Till today Srinagar continues to be the power centre of discourses produced around religion, politics or economy in Kashmir. Most of the key economic, political, educational and religious institutions of Kashmir are located in and around the city of Srinagar. The urban character of Srinagar in particular over the past three decades has coupled with the proliferation of new media technologies leading to transformation of urban space in contemporary Srinagar.

The integration of media platforms such as TV, Internet, mobile phones into the existing religious economy of Srinagar not just mirrors religious patterns but also is contributing significantly to the formation of new modes of perception and knowledge, as well as the production of new forms and sites of social action (McQuire, 2008, p. 203). Through the interactive nature of new media platforms, a new variant of religious public is emerging and widely reflecting on the available religious content. Many new methods of articulating religion have originated in the past few decades in Srinagar. This chapter looks at few of these religious trends which can only be conceived in relation of new information and communication technologies. The religious content circulated through these new information and communication technologies is not different from religious content of the religious groups established well before the dawn of globalization.

The new actors involved with the processes of production and circulation of the content about religion tend to package religious content in a different way than their predecessors. At the root of this differentness and re-packing is the role performed by the proliferation of new information and communication technologies. The electronically mediated religion does not in any sense abolish the previously established discursive

religious traditions¹⁸ within Islam but allow the parceling out these traditions in a new way. In the process of doing so, these new methods do not merely produce and circulate the religious content but also contribute to the construction of new socio-cultural and religious reality.

Television in India much like several countries in Europe was built of the model of public broadcasting systems. Before the introduction of television in India, it was radio which had a mass appeal in the Indian socio-economic context. The print media mostly catered to the literate abilities of the educated section within India. In the existing socio-economic and cultural settings of India, it was the broadcasting media such as radio and television, which catered to the demands of mass audiences in India. The broadcast media in India, which were under state monopoly for a longer period, formed a tentative bridge between different sections of the society (Rajagopal, 2001, p7). Since the introduction of television in India in the year 1959, the television viewers in India could only watch one television channel called Doordarshan until 1991 (Mehta, 2008). Srinagar was one of the first few places to have a television broadcasting Station in India. In fact Doordarshan Srinagar was the third television station of India set up on 26th January, 1973 (Rasool, 2012).

To realize the success of Doordarshan in Kashmir, the programme content was developed to satisfy the local cultural attributes of the society in Kashmir. In an attempt to popularize Doordarshan in Kashmir, a regional language channel named *Doordarshan Kashmir* was launched in the year 2003. Doordarshan Kashmir broadcasts many programmes in the form of serials, music etc. touching upon the aspects of religion in Kashmir. The peculiarity of the content with religious connotations telecasted through Doordarshan in Srinagar has usually meant to highlight the ‘culture and heritage’ of the society in Kashmir. The monopoly of state over the airwaves in India ended only when in 1995 the Supreme Court of India came up with a judgment that the airwaves and frequencies were

¹⁸ An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present (Asad, 1986, p. 14).

a public property. The economic reforms and policies initiated in 1991 by the Congress government in India facilitated the entry of many private television broadcasters. The number satellite networks in India rose to more than 300 from 1995 to 2007 (Mehta, 2008). In the terms of revenue, India is at present one of the top fifteen global media and entertainment markets (Mehta, 2015, p. 50).

The availability of privately produced satellite television according to Robin Jeffrey meant that ‘people discovered new ways to think about themselves and to participate in politics that would have been unthinkable a generation before’ (Jeffrey, 2003, p.1). The proliferation of private television broadcasters for the first time catapulted the entry of channels by Muslim individuals or organizations devoted entirely for the religious purposes. The privatization of media in India afforded Muslims for the first time to use television as a space to propagate variety of ideological views, positions and projects concerned with their religion (Echchaibi, 2012, p. 191). It was in this backdrop that the well-known tele-islamicist, Zakir Naik, made inroads into the religious settings of Muslim society in Kashmir. Any understanding of the current flow of religious discourses in Kashmir can’t be comprehended without making reference to Zakir Naik. To study relationship between religion and television in contemporary Kashmir can’t therefore be completed without understanding Zakir Naik, his television channel (Peace TV) and his audiences.

2.1 Zakir Naik, Peace TV and Audiences

This study employed several research methods to understand the nuances of religion in Srinagar particularly with its relation to television. The existing literature on the nature of society in Srinagar allowed me to develop a basic understanding of existing religious patterns within Srinagar. On the basis of the existing literature about the various religious organizations situated in Srinagar, the first task began with the identification and location of these religious organizations. In the next step, I tried to arrange interviews with individuals representing or belonging to these organizations. These interviews with the individuals of different religious organizations involved in-depth discussions on the

questions of relationship between modern media technologies such as internet, television, mobile phones and religion. The interviews also provided insight into various media related initiatives started by religious organizations. All the religious organizations contacted by me have taken an active role to integrate new information and communication technologies in realizing their objectives. Most of these religious organizations have their presence on online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.

On the questions pertaining to television, the references to Zakir Naik featured recurrently in almost all the answers. These respondents' individuals belonging to different theological orientations mostly saw the efforts of Zakir Naik as commendable and worthy to be emulated by Muslims who are in a position to do so. On the ideological front, many came up with criticisms of Zakir Naik, but the ability of Zakir Naik to make use of television as a medium to communicate religion was widely lauded. If Zakir Naik was the key theme that would come up in most discussions with individuals belonging to different religious groups, his name reverberated much more strongly in the discussions with those individuals who use new communication technologies to inform themselves about religion. Most of the interviews conducted in Srinagar for this study attempted to explore individual accounts of media in relation to religion.

Other than the individuals associated with noted religious organizations, the individuals with no known association with any of the religious groups existing in Srinagar were also interviewed. As the interviews were conducted with respondents from different sections of the society in Srinagar, this study used two different methods of interviews. The initial research plan of personally conducting in-depth interviews with the all respondents had to be replaced with interviews through questionnaires with particular reference to female respondents. The socio-cultural norms in Kashmir prevented me to arrange in-depth interviews with the female respondents. A questionnaire for female respondents was administered with the help of various institutions and individual contacts. All of these female respondents interviewed through questionnaires were students. Since most of the

questionnaires were administered within the educational institutions, the sample size thereby naturally involved female respondents from varied socio-economic backgrounds.

To look for the gender aspect of studying relationship between religion and media, the study administered more than forty questionnaires for female respondents. In reference to the views of these female respondents on television, the name of Zakir Naik resurfaced. Out of forty-two female respondents, forty mentioned Zakir Naik as their favorite television preacher and Peace TV as their favorite religious television channel. The study also conducted 22 in-depth interviews with the men and in these the male respondents also highlighted the role of Zakir Naik in communicating Islam on television. On Zakir Naik and his methods of preaching, one of the female respondent remarked that “by tapping on the potential of new technologies such as television and internet, Zakir Naik has made more influence on the Muslim population of Kashmir than the religious organizations which for years have been intending to do same at the grassroots level.”

In addition to Peace TV of Zakir Naik, there are many other religious channels devoted to present Islam to Muslim population in Kashmir. Some of the most watched religious channels listed by respondents in Srinagar are QTV, ARY, Madani etc. The popularity of these religious channels in Kashmir has precipitated the burgeoning of home grown preachers on the local cable television channels. The following section tries to understand the mediation of religion in Srinagar with particular reference to the Peace TV of Zakir Naik. The easy accessibility and pervasiveness of Peace TV in Srinagar has facilitated the constitution of a new Muslim public. The consequences of formations of this new Muslim public necessitates for a new understanding of religious patterns in the contemporary Srinagar. This case is built in the backdrop of studies conducted by scholars on the relationship between religion and television in other contexts. Television by these scholars has been described as one such medium which has revolutionized the way in which religion is disseminated.

2.2 Locating Zakir Naik

For Zakir Naik, media is a weapon which can convert black into white, day into night, hero into villain and villain into hero (Naik, Aljazeera, 2016). It is the international media which in the opinion of Zakir Naik has done most of the damage to the image of Islam. The idea of Peace TV at the moment according to him is rooted in the purpose of challenging the stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in the world. Zakir Naik started his religious television channel *Peace TV English* in the year 2006. Peace TV has now turned into a vast network of religious channels addressing millions of people in diverse languages. Peace TV is broadcasted in four different languages through four different television channels. *Peace TV English*, which was the first channel of Peace TV network, has a viewership of more than 100 million claims Zakir Naik. Covered by 14 satellites, Peace TV English, according to Zakir Naik is not only the largest watched Islamic channel in the world, but also the largest watched religious channel of the world.

The second Peace TV Channel named *Peace TV Urdu* was launched in 2009 to address the Urdu/Hindi speaking populations of South Asia. Zakir Naik claims that Peace TV alone has a viewership of more than 80 million. The third Peace TV channel named *Peace TV Bangla* was launched in Bengali Language. This channel launched in 2011 has a viewership of more than 50 million according to Zakir Naik. The recent and the fourth channel launched in 2015 was *Peace TV Chinese* addressed to the Mandarin speaking population. According to Zakir Naik, the future aim is to have no less than ten channels which can broadcast the Islamic content in the ten largest spoken languages of the world (Naik, Aljazeera, 2016).

A fuller understanding of Zakir Naik can't be established without placing him in a historical context. Zakir Naik in the past has credited Indian born, South African Muslim missionary Sheik Ahmed Deedat for his transformation from a medical doctor to a Muslim preacher (Dae). Ahmed Deedat is known for having debates with pastors and evangelists on the corruptions of the Bible, the Trinity, the prophetic character of Jesus, and the announcement of the Prophet Muhammad in the Old Testament (Sadouni, 2013,

p. 53). Ahmed Deedat was also known as the Muslim television preacher who challenged Pope John Paul II to a public debate on Christianity. The speeches of Ahmed Deedat which circulated through pamphlets, audio/video cassettes and television promulgated Ahmed Deedat to enormous fame wider sections of Muslim population in the world (Larkin, 2008, p. 101). Deedat, like Zakir Naik, with the exception of reciting Qura'n in Arabic, used English language a means to cater to the audiences at a global scale. According to Samadia Sadouni, the internationalization of Ahmed Deedat's mode of Muslim proselytism is mainly based on the circulation of his booklets and videocassettes worldwide and on his political loyalty to Saudi Arabia, which in turn supported the South African preacher financially (Sadouni, p.54).

If Ahmed Deedat was a precursor in shaping the ideology of Zakir Naik, Ahmed Deedat himself derived his inspiration from a book titled *Izhar al-Haqq* (demonstration of the truth) written in 1864 by Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi (1810-1891). Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi is famous for his debate with Karl Gottlieb Pfander, a popular German Christian missionary often described as a person who “embattled the forces of False Prophet” (Bennet, 1996, p. 76) . *Izhar al-Haqq* by Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi was written as a response to a book *mizan al-haq* (balance of truth) written by Karl Gottlieb Pfander in 1829. In *mizan al-haq*, Karl Gottlieb Pfander stationed as a missionary of British mission agency CMS in India, had refuted Islam to highlight the supremacy of Christianity and presented Bible rather than Quran as a book of revelation (Schirmacher, 1997). Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi in *Izhar al-Haqq* dealt with the deviation of Christian scriptures, corruption of Bible, and the foretelling of truth by Christian Sources (Sadouni, 2013, p. 55). The popularity of *Izhar al-Haqq* has been attributed to the ability of Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi in taking advantage of the new European theology that had started to question the biblical sources through rationalist perspectives. This new European theology influenced by liberalism and historical criticism paved the way for Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi to attack Christianity with its own weapons (Schirmacher, 1997).

Before the publication of *Izhar al-Haqq*, an oral polemical debate also known as the ‘great debate’ took place in 1854 between Karl Gottlieb Pfander and Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi at Agra, where both rebutted the religious doctrines of one another. Both *Izhar al-Haqq* and *mizan al-haq* are considered to have influenced many noted Muslim and Christian apologists in taking on each other. Both the books have never run out of printing up until the current times. In fact, *Izhar al-Haqq* has been stated as “the first great classic of modern Muslim polemic that has never been superseded” (Dorman, 2006, p.44). Therefore 19th century India marks a turning point in the development of Muslim Apologetics, which by its very nature emanated from a response to the Christian apologetics. Based on this context, Zaki Naik is therefore seen as someone who can be credited or discredited for bringing back the model of religious polemics back to the place where it emanated. However, the polemic of Zakir Naik is reframed in a context marked by the religious conflict not between Christians and Muslims, but between Hindus and Muslims (Sadouni, 2013, p.65). Zakir Naik went on to become a television star in the lifetime of Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005). The peculiarity of Zakir Naik to memorize and quote Hindu scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads or Manu Smriti in addition to Christian scriptures earned him an epithet ‘Deedat Plus’. Ahmed Deedat was so satisfied with the work of Zakir Naik, that he himself pleurably referred Naik Naik with Deedat Plus.

In 1987, Zakir Naik with his father Abdul Karim Naik organized a conference in Mumbai by inviting Ahmed Deedat to present his views on Islam. In addition to the Naik Family, many well-off Muslims from Mumbai had come in contact with the works of Ahmed Deedat during their pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Following their return home, these Muslims from Mumbai asked The Islamic Propagation Center International (IPCI), an organization in Durban run by Ahmed Deedat, to send its literature to them. The literature from IPCI resonated well with the religious sensibilities of these Muslims. The work of Ahmed Deedat convinced Zakir Naik to travel to Durban for receiving three months of Islamic preaching (Islamic Dawah) training from Ahmed Deedat.

In his anthropological explorations of plebian identities and politics in postcolonial Bombay, Thomas Blom Hansen provides a glance into the initial years of work carried out by Zakir Naik in Bombay (p. 177). In 1991, Zakir Naik started to held discussions and lectures on many themes related to Islam. According to Hansen, the talks by Zakir Naik were conducted in English and videotaped in order to be broadcasted every Saturday and Sunday on several cable networks in Mumbai's Muslim neighborhoods (p 78). Zakir Naik founded Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) in 1991 as a non-profit public charitable trust to promote Islamic Dawah (Invitation to Islam). Following the footprints of IPCI of Ahmed Deedat, IRF integrated modern media technologies as means to accomplish its objectives. The initial infrastructure of the IRF consists of library facilities, lecture halls, bookshops and so on.

The initial objective of IRF was to address educated Muslim youth who according to Zakir Naik "had become apologetic about their own religion and who had started to feel that their religion is outdated" (Hansen, 2001, p. 177). With the changing times and changing politics, IRF in addition to its original objective of addressing 'apologetic' Muslim youth, has started to identify itself as an organization which challenges the stereotypes about Muslims in post 9/11 world scenario. IRF today utilizes modern technology to reach millions of people worldwide through international satellite TV channels, cable TV networks, internet and the print media. As per IRF, The content of Zakir Naik is aimed to clarify Islamic viewpoints and misconceptions about Islam, using the Qur'an, authentic Hadith and other religious Scriptures as a basis, in conjunction with reason, logic and scientific facts. Zakir Naik fulfills this objective by appearing on television to give lectures on Islam and answer questions, often citing Qur'anic verses, hadith reports, and non-Muslim religious scriptures by heart.



Figure 16: Source: IRF Website

Many studies have placed Zakir Naik in the list of leading influential Muslim individuals of the world. In 2015, Zakir Naik was one of five recipients of King Faisal International Prize from the King Salman of Saudi Arabia. This award which is one of Saudi Arabia's highest honorary awards was presented to Zakir Naik for his 'service to Islam'. In 2013, Zakir Naik was also named as the Islamic Personality of the Year by a religious association in Dubai, an honor bestowed upon him by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates (Hubbard, NYT, March 2, 2015). Zakir Naik has been awarded with many other such tributes for his work. However, his work has also received significant amounts of criticism from various sections of Muslims. For example the renowned Muslim seminary in India, Darul Uloom Deoband, in 2007 issued fatwa against Zakir Naik by calling him a *ghair muqqalid* (one who does not follow any of the four Sunni Imams) and advised Muslims against listening to him (Mohammed Wajihuddin, TOI, Jul 9, 2016). In 2008, a fatwa (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) against Zakir Naik was issued by Shia clergy in Uttar Pradesh, India, describing Zakir Naik as a Kafir (sinner). This fatwa against Zakir Naik also suggested for his ex-communication from Islam.

Zakir Naik essentially identifies himself as a student of Comparative Religion. By referring himself as a student of Comparative Religion, Zakir Naik evokes a language which resonates with the evolution of religion in post-enlightenment framework. In the Weberian framework, Zakir Naik by speaking in the manner he does, mimics the logic of instrumental rationality and spirit of capitalism. It is the language of rationality and liberalism which allows Zakir Naik to gain legitimacy with the audience which see itself as modern (Azam, 2016). According to Zakir Naik, there is not a single verse of Quran that opposes established scientific facts. It may conflict with certain theories of science, but none of these, like evolution, has been scientifically proved and they change all the time (Naik, 2016). As a self-proclaimed student of Comparative Religion, Zakir Naik divides world religions into Semitic and non-Semitic religions. Having studied and memorized the scriptures of other religions, Zakir Naik attempts to forge a commonality between Islam and other religions. In the process of seeking commonality Zakir Naik affirms the absolute truth of Islam over all other religions.

Zakir Naik derives his ideology through literalist reading of Islam. His method of literalist interpretation of Islam is an existing tradition within Islamic traditions that locates *Quran* and *Sunnah* as only two sources of Shariah (Islamic law). The links of this particular tradition in Islam is attributed to the contributions of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, founder of Hanbali School of Islamic jurisprudence. In the current order of religious patterns within Muslims, this school of thought has most of its followers from countries such Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE. Saudi Arabia where Hanbalism is the source of official law has played a significant role in supporting the internationalization of the career of Zakir Naik. Earlier as well Saudi Arabia had played a similar role in supporting the internationalization of the career of Ahmed Deedat (Sadouni, 2013).

Zakir Naik has integrated many market strategies to expand the role of IRF. Recently IRF of Zakir Naik launched an Islamic Smartphone called *Peace Mobile: A Solution for Humanity*, which according to the phone's description is pre-installed with '80 hours of Zakir Naik's videos, 50 Islamic apps, hundreds of Islamic Wallpapers and 200 Islamic ringtones'. Zakir Naik also has launched a *Peace Memory Card* which comes with logo

'Make every Smartphone an Islamic Phone Now'. As per the information available IRF website, these new ways of communicating Islam through technology 'will help people to foster an intimate relationship with the Creator.'

Zakir Naik is also the founder of a chain of Islamic International Schools which according to the official website of International Islamic School aim develop the Islamic character and behavior of the students. The school claims to 'up bring students personifying the profound spirit, vision and skills. The school believes that the true and able Muslims must be *Generation Next* leaders as well as future torch bearers to all the people of the world. The school provides an environment in which the students can learn, understand and practice their way of life. With moral principles derived from Quran and hadith, the school also claims to 'strive for excellence in subjects like Mathematics, Science, English, Business studies, ICT (Information and Communication Technology), History, Geography and others'. As per the content available on the website of Islamic International School, the school also claims to shape the personalities of student, according to righteous Islamic tenets. Islamic International School also 'inculcates in students the values and concepts of compassion, truthfulness and universal brotherhood.'¹⁹

The circulation of the Islamic apologetics by Zakir Naik through media technologies made their entry into the society of Kashmir as early as the foundations of Islamic Research Foundations.²⁰ This coincided with the period when Kashmiri society was going through a major socio-religious, cultural and political transformation. The emergence of new literate sections within Kashmir found immediate connection with the message of Zakir Naik. The wide popularity of Zakir Naik can also be attributed to the ways in which non-Muslims are shown to embrace Islam on Peace TV. The conversion to Islam on Peace TV allows the audiences of Zakir Naik to have a sense of symbolic victory over people of other religious denominations. These televisual images of people

¹⁹ Source: www.iischool.com

²⁰ During my interviews in Srinagar, I came across few individuals who had started to subscribe the literature from IRF, Mumbai, way back in mid 1990's.

from other faiths converting to Islam beguile not only wider section of Muslims in Srinagar but also large sections of Muslims in other parts of the world. Many Muslims I met during my study see Zakir Naik as symbolic figure that represents Islam on the world platform. Through his usage of media technologies, Zakir Naik has been able to make inroads into the households of the majority of Muslim population in Srinagar. There are those who don't subscribe to his interpretation of Islam but are not untouched by the pervasiveness of Zakir Naik.

The articulation of Islam by Zakir Naik through media platforms such as television, social media has led to various interpretations shaped by local settings in Srinagar. These interpretations of Zakir Naik and his preaching depend largely on the 'prehistories' of viewers who come in contact with the methods of Zakir Naik (Hoover, 1998, p. 97). The social class and education of viewers of Zakir Naik in Srinagar play a definite role in interpreting his content. This localization of Zakir Naik in Srinagar also offers a resistance to the centrifugal force of capitalist globalization (Tomlison, 2003, p. 270). Those who watch Zakir Naik experience and interpret him within the context of their own individual cognitive and religious prehistories. The Zakir Naik phenomenon has even lead to a trend where many local Kashmiri preachers of different theological positions have begun to appear on different media platforms to articulate their perspectives of Islam. The watching of religious channels has turned into a ritual where the viewing contributes symbols and values to the existing individual identities and beliefs (Hoover, 1998).

2.3 Zakir Naik and Islamic Fraternity in Srinagar

The introduction of apologetics of Zakir Naik not only has introduced new language and symbols for his audiences, but has also led to proliferation of a new trend where his methods of articulating Islam are emulated or taken forward. One of such examples from Srinagar is the emergence of preacher and religious entrepreneur Muhammad Amir. Muhammad Amir worked as Medical Representative and later attended a *Daaee* (Islamic preaching) Course at Zakir Naik's Islamic Research Foundation (IRF). After the

completion of his preacher training at IRF, Muhammad Amir started organization named Islamic Fraternity (IF) at Srinagar in the year 2006. Muhammad Amir started his '*Islamic mission*' in Srinagar by renting two rooms in a building complex. Today there are many institutes or establishments functioning under the banner of Islamic Fraternity (IF). The names of these establishments are Idarah Tazkeerul Quran, Rawzat-ul-Atfaal School, The Islamic Revival Magazine, Centre for Dawah, Centre for Humanitarian Aid, Islamic Media and Resource Centre (MRC), and Islamic Global School (Source: <http://www.islamicfraternity.org/>).

The activities of these establishments are aimed to address different objectives of Islamic Fraternity. As per the descriptions given by Islamic Fraternity about these establishments, *Idarah Tazkeerul Quran* (Quran for Islamic Education and Research) is expected to provide Islamic education based on Quran. At Idarah Tazkeerul Quran subjects like Tajweed (Phonetics), Tafseer (Commentary) & Arabic language are taught. *Rawzat ul Atfaal* Preparatory School teaches Islamic values apart from the mainstream education. *Centre for Humanitarian Aid* provides scholarships to orphaned and poor students & helps them to pursue education. *The Revival* is the monthly newspaper published by Islamic Fraternity. The paper covers themes on Islam and Muslim issues. Under *Centre for Da'wah*, Islamic Fraternity organizes various Daw'ah (Islamic preaching) programs & lectures throughout the valley. The *Centre for Dawah* distributes free copies of Quran and other printed religious material. *Islamic Media & Resources Centre* prints literature which is later circulated through different means. *Islamic Media & Resources Centre* is also responsible for video/ audio production of various programs & their management. *The Islamic Global School* under Islamic Fraternity is attracting many students from different social backgrounds and regions from Kashmir. Islamic Global School which provides education till 8th standard, defines itself as school which strives to 'integrate contemporary world education with that of Islamic education'.

Islamic Fraternity of Muhammad Amir defines itself as a 'multifold Islamic organization' which initially started as an institute aiming to impart Islamic education. Islamic Fraternity also sees itself as an organization which strives to build peace, social welfare,

harmony and unity among the Muslims in Kashmir. One of the central objectives of Islamic Fraternity is to make best use of media technologies such newspapers, internet, television, radio for propagating the message of Islam. By organizing various programs, conferences, seminars, workshops in relation to its objectives in the past several years, Islamic Fraternity has been able to receive remarkable public attention in Srinagar. In the month of May, 2016, Islamic Fraternity organized its Fourth Global Convocation where a number of renowned international Muslim scholars and preachers were invited. In this convocation, well known Malaysian Muslim preacher Shaykh Hussain Yee was invited to be the chief guest. The invitation to Shaykh Hussain Yee was later on extended by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, one of the key religious and political figures based in Srinagar. Shaykh Hussain Yee addressed a gathering of thousands at historic *Jama Masjid* of Srinagar.



Figure 17: Islamic Fraternity Webpage



Figure 18: Shaikh Hussain Yee with Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and Mohammed Amir I. Souce: IF



Figure 19: Shaikh Hussain Yee with Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and Mohammed Amir II. Souce: IF

The institutes working under the banner of Islamic Fraternity are located in Rajbagh, Srinagar, a locality known for inhabiting the most influential individuals, families and organizations of Kashmir. According to Muhammad Amir, “one of the primary reasons for choosing this location was to announce our arrival in the confident manner”. The general ideology of Muhammad Amir does not contradict at any level with the ideology of Zakir Naik. Islamic Fraternity claims that its purpose is not to highlight the divisions within different schools of thought within Islam but to unite scholars of various schools on a single platform. Like Zakir Naik, Muhammad Amir believes in Quran and prophetic traditions as the ultimate and only sources of guidance for the emancipation of humanity. One of the important institutes functioning under Islamic Fraternity is Islamic Global School. This school uses audio-visual methods for teaching subjects such as Mathematics, English, Science, Social Science, Information Technology, Arabic language, Quranic studies, *Dawah* (preaching) and *Hafiz* (knowing Quran by heart) courses.

Islamic Global School writes its mission as ‘*Best World, Best Akhirah* (afterlife)’ and its vision as ‘*Quran and Sunnah*’. Islamic Global School conducts regular events for

showcasing the talent of children enrolled at the school. These events are recorded with best of the technological means and then circulated on YouTube and other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Most of the videos uploaded by Islamic Fraternity on YouTube have children displaying their talent as ‘future daees (preachers)’ of Islam. Mohammad Amir claims Islamic Fraternity has more than twenty thousand followers on different social networking platforms. The events organized and recorded by Islamic Fraternity are also broadcasted through local television channels in Srinagar. Islamic Fraternity in the past has coordinated with Islamic Research Foundation of Zakir Naik to organize several religious programmes at multiple locations in Srinagar.



Figure 20: Future preachers trained at Global Islamic School

Muhammad Amir is of the opinion that the new media technologies are essential to circulate the message of Islam. He opines that without television Zakir Naik would not have been able to emerge as an international preacher. Zakir Naik, according to Muhammad Amir, has played a significant role in influencing the youth of Kashmir. According to Muhammad Amir, it is essentially important for Muslims in the present world to have their voice as Muslims according to him, have always been represented by

others. The modern technology for the first time in the opinion of Muhammad Amir has allowed Muslims to broadcast their views. Muhammad Amir has been able to receive a positive feedback for his work in Srinagar from noted preachers of Islam across the globe. In one of the videos made about Islamic Global School, Bilal Philips, a well known Canadian Muslim preacher based in Qatar appreciates the efforts of Muhammad Amir and encourages people to educate their children in Islamic Global School. How Islamic Fraternity see media as central to its functions can be comprehended by the following quotation from Muhammad Amir.

“Doordarshan and Radio are both in the control of the government. Given the role media has in present world, it is essential for Muslims to have control over media. We at Islamic Fraternity hire a professional team to record the events we organize. We at Islamic Fraternity have a separate media unit called The Islamic Revival Television run by a group of professionals, which records the various events organized by Islamic Fraternity. These recorded events are later on uploaded on YouTube and also sent to different local television channels for broadcasting. Sometimes even these events are telecasted live. We at Islamic Fraternity are also aiming to start a radio station so that our message can be heard in cars, kitchens, bedrooms etc. Youth are attracted to new ways of experiencing religion. How you present religion is very important. Nauman Ali Khan for example has managed to get millions of audiences only through YouTube and Facebook. The message of Islamic Fraternity is simple. We aim to spread the message of Islam as per Quran and Sunnah (the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapprovals) of Prophet Muhammad). We believe Quran is the only solution which can bring an end to the discord prevalent among Muslims in the world. Quran is an adhesive.”

2.4 Interpretations of Zakir Naik in Srinagar

Today’s religious minded person is a bricoleur, one involved in building with whatever is at hand from a variety of sources, who cobbles together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and doctrines, all the while exercising considerable agency in defining and shaping what is considered to be religiously meaningful (Wagner, 2012, p. 199). With the heterogeneous nature of content made available through new information and communication technologies, the new religious identity of a Muslim in

Srinagar is like that of a bricolage constructed through inventory of symbols at hand. A person watching Zakir Naik does not imply that all the understanding about religion of that person emanates from a single source. The religiosity of people interviewed from Srinagar in this study is a result of flowing together of various factors. Those who watch Zakir Naik therefore draw their religious weltanschauung also from various other sources other than Zakir Naik. The following pages are devoted in locating Zakir Naik as one of the symbols that ties into, and intersects with, many other things in reproducing meanings.

One of the crucial indicators which certainly do influence the religiosity of people is the family structure. Attitudes towards media consumption emerge from particular material conditions and family configurations (Hoover, 2012, p.37). Different families draw on different cultural resources, based on religious beliefs, personal biography, or the culture of a network of family and friends, and as a result construct a (more or less permeable, more or less defended) bounded environment—the home (Silverstone, 2003, p. 17). The following media accounts of Abid Rasool Bhat and Pervez Ahmed Ganai elucidate the role of family apparatus in shaping the religious outlook of individuals. Abid and Pervez come from families with different backgrounds. The families of Abid and Pervez interpret and understand Zakir Naik in different ways. The difference in their understanding of Zakir explains the ways in which Zakir Naik as a ‘media-religious symbol’ takes different meanings depending on the particular set of socio-cultural dispositions.

Abid Rasool lives with his family which consists of his parents, a younger sister and a younger brother. Abid is 24 years old and at present studying business administration. While speaking about the parental control and television in the family, Abid revealed that there is no authority or control over who switches on television in the family. However, there is concern within the family over negative effects of television. Family members of Abid hold ‘lay theories’ about television and its content. Ellen Seiter (1998) has noted that lay theories seek to investigate the cultural determinants on people’s common sense and worldview. Lay theories are frequently ambiguous, incoherent and inconsistent, that

is, people can hold two mutually incompatible or contradictory ideas or beliefs at the same time and not be particularly troubled by that inconsistency' (p. 3- 5). When all the members of Abid Rasool's family collectively watch television, it is usually the choice between news and the religious programmes. In contrast when the individual members of his family watch television, there is shift in the nature of the content chosen to be watched. Abid notes that his sister prefers to watch Hindi and Urdu soap operas while his brother is fond of watching cricket on television. Abid himself often prefers to watch both religious programmes and cricket.

In the family of Abid, television set is located in the living room. Every evening the family members of Abid assemble at living room to watch television together. Usually it is Peace TV of Zakir Naik or news channels which are seen to synchronize with the moral and ethical standards of the family. According to Abid, this moral code is essential part of the society we live in. Both parents of Abid are educated, employed and are devoted Muslims. All the family members of Abid see Zakir Naik as an enlightened Muslim who explains the Islam in the context of scientific knowledge. Abid claims that his family does not follow any particular sect of Islam. Abid is of the opinion that Zakir Naik does not indulge in kind of sectarianism, which has otherwise become a norm in Muslim communities. Speaking about the influence of the Zakir Naik over the family, Abid opines that it is due to Zakir Naik that their family has arrived at a new understanding of Islam. This new understanding reinforces the idea that Islam is indeed the most excellent way to seek truth.

By comparing Islam with other faiths of the world, Zakir Naik, according to Abid has also allowed their family to understand the limitations in other faiths. By comparing religions Zakir Naik establishes the supremacy of Islam, notes Abid. Abid thinks that there is no verse in Quran which contradicts with science and this realization in Abid has been strengthened by none so much as Zakir Naik. Family members of Abid see Zakir Naik as true symbol of Islam in the present age. Father of Abid is of the opinion that in itself, television is a medium whose penetration into domestic spheres should be restricted, however for him this 'dirty medium' has been sanctified through the

broadcasting of sacred in the form of Peace TV. Otherwise Abid's father sees television largely dominated with obscene, indecent and profane content. According to Abid, normally it is the joint moral consensus in the family which plays a significant role to police media tastes, which in turn depends on a class position of the family in the society. Abid concedes that the content from Zakir Naik does not contradict with the existing beliefs of his family. The Peace TV helps the family to form a protective cocoon which helps to maintain the family's ontological security, a necessary part of living in modernity according to Giddens (Hoover, 2012, p.39). Ontological security as a necessary condition of modernity according to Giddens is a sense of stability, continuity and order in regard to events in the life of an individual (Giddens, 1991, p.243).

Unlike Abid, Pervez Ahmed Ganai belongs to a family with meager economic and educational resources. Pervez's father runs a small retail store and his mother is a housewife. Pervez has three sisters and a brother. Pervez is a student of Political Science and also the only individual in the family to have an opportunity for studying at a university. As a student of Political Science, Pervez has the ability to deliberate almost upon all aspects of society in Kashmir. According to Pervez, Kashmir is a Muslim majority land and there is no single linear pattern that can define the relationship of Muslims with normative sources of Islam. Muslims in Kashmir like Muslims anywhere across the globe according to Pervez are divided into sects. Each sect endeavors to promote their own ideology and foundational values. The role of media according to Pervez is central to the proliferation of the content generated by various sects. "For example, in Kashmir, Jamat-i-Islami circulates its religious ideas through a daily newspaper named Momin. Shias who are a minority have their own television channel called Al-Noor."

Speaking about Zakir Naik and media, Pervez sees Zakir Naik as someone who has set a trend when using media to deliver religious content. Neither Pervez nor his family see themselves as adherents of Zakir Naik ideology. The parents of Pervez though having no skill to comprehend the English sermons of Zakir Naik however do have a perspective about Peace TV. Parents of Pervez see Zakir Naik as a religious literalist who has little

respect for shrine worshipping. Both parents of Pervez follow Barelvi School of thought and therefore watch channels which are broadcasted by Barelvis. The family members of Pervez prefer watching Madani Channel of Dawate Islami, a religious organization founded by Muhammad Ilyas Qardi of Pakistan. Pervez is of the opinion that Barelvi school concentrates more on faith while as other religious denominations are too rational, political and instrumental. According to Pervez, new media including television has led to the intensification of already existing religious divisions in Islam. Before the digital era, people had limited options in seeking information about Islam and therefore were prone to be manipulated by those who controlled knowledge about Islam. Pervez argues that the knowledge of those who preached to previous generations such as my parents was never questioned. Digital media, according to Pervez, has integrated print, television and many other media forms, and therefore, the new digital medium allows people to validate what their preachers communicate. The digital recordings of the sermons allow people to replay, reflect and judge the content. This for Pervez was not possible in the pre-digital era. In the pre-digital era, there was no recording of sermons by religious preachers, thus there was no accountability for what was spoken.

Even though Pervez and his family subscribe to the Barelvi television channels, the mention of Zakir Naik is recurrent while they speak about relationship between television and religion. Pervez accepts the fact that Zakir Naik is the most popular out of all the preachers who appear on television in Kashmir. Pervez himself watches Peace TV and also knows the religious content disseminated by Zakir Naik. In addition to Zakir Naik, Pervez is a member of various online religious groups.

“Digital media has allowed me to enjoy the comfort of ideology (nazariya). I follow many religious groups online only to retain the information which comforts my cognitive consonance. I read the literature by other sects simply to find faults in those sects. To find faults in other religious sects helps me to protect my own belief system. Otherwise there is regular onslaught on the ideology followed by Barelvis in Kashmir. Barelvi sect is followed by those Muslims in Kashmir who are more traditional and less exposed to literacy.”

3. New Experiments with Religion and Media in Srinagar

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the economic structure of society in Kashmir shifted radically with the onset of Indian liberalization policies of 1990's. The changes brought by the liberalization policies, globalization, insurgency in Kashmir and other changes in the world economic and cultural patterns intersected with the onset of new age discourses on Islam. In contemporary Srinagar, largely three kinds of advertisement hoardings dominate the city space. One type of advertising hoardings is devoted to advertising of commercial products; the second type is dominated by political hoardings with faces of politicians and the third type of advertising hoardings are devoted to religious figures and religious events. The new forms of cultural and economic patterns in Srinagar have facilitated the proliferation of many experiments with the religion and media in Srinagar. In the following pages, the attempt is to highlight the works of School of Orthoepy Quran & Theology Education (SOQTE) and True Message Foundation (TMF). Both these organizations based in Srinagar have integrated new forms of media into their operations.

School of Orthoepy Quran & Theology Education (SOQTE) was founded by Tanveer Ahmed, a computer professional, in 1995 with an aim to 'propagate Islam through latest electronic means.' SOQTE is located in Zainakal, a place known for its cultural and commercial importance in old Srinagar. There are more than hundred students presently enrolled at SOQTE. These students come from diverse age groups and social backgrounds. The students at SOQTE are taught correct recitation of Quran (tajwid) and also acquainted with basic fundamentals about Islam. The classrooms at SOQTE are equipped with modern teaching aids such as LCD projectors, speakers and computers. The use of LCD projectors is aimed to make the experience of learning easy, engaging and interesting. The students at SOQTE use internet for downloading information about Islam. Computers in SOQTE other than accessing internet and watching religious videos are used to burn CDs and these CD's are later on distributed free to people. According to a local media report, the chairman of SOQTE claims to have distributed '12000 Islamic CDs' in the past several years (Hyderi, 2007, GK).

At SOQTE memory cards, CDs and other digital devices used for recording are loaded with the lectures of Zakir Naik, Israr Ahmed²¹ and different translations of Quran. SOQTE in future aims at establishing a ‘fully computerized Quranic laboratory, Mobile Darasgah (seminary), development of Islamic software centre, Islamic cable network, print and multimedia library, and Islamic cybercafé’. SOQTE believed that these initiatives will help in the development of the religious character of Muslims in Kashmir. SOQTE firmly believes that the interactive nature of computer mediated communication technologies will bring a paradigm shift in communicating religion. There is manifold increase in the demand for digital copies of Quran and Prophetic traditions during the month of Ramadhan.

SOQTE also operates a separate entity named as Peace Centre Jammu and Kashmir, where the aim is to ‘convey the message of Islam to all irrespective of religious ideologies’. SOQTE claims itself to be a nonpartisan, nonsectarian religious group with its focus on common themes about Islam. In December 2007, SOQTE brought Adnan Oktar’s (Harun Yahya) *Atlas of Creation* to the attention of public in Kashmir by advertising it on Kashmir’s largest English Daily, named Greater Kashmir. *Atlas of Creation* is a series of books written by Adnan Oktar under the pen name Harun Hahya. Through *Atlas of Creation*, Harun Yahya challenges the claims of theory of Darwin and also describes Darwinism as a theory ‘with feeble foundations and perverted ideology’. The web presence of SOQTE through multiple domains such as www.soqte.org, peacecentrejk.com and Facebook pages facilitates the outreach of SOQTE to a significant section of internet savvy Muslims of Kashmir.

²¹It is important to note here that Israr Ahmed, a noted scholar on Islam from Pakistan has significant following in Kashmir. Israr Ahmed was the founder of Tanzeem-i-Islami. Known for writing more than fifty books on or related to Islam, Israr Ahmed also hosted many religious programmes of the Peace TV of Zakir Naik. The videos and audios of Israr Ahmed are abundantly available on internet.

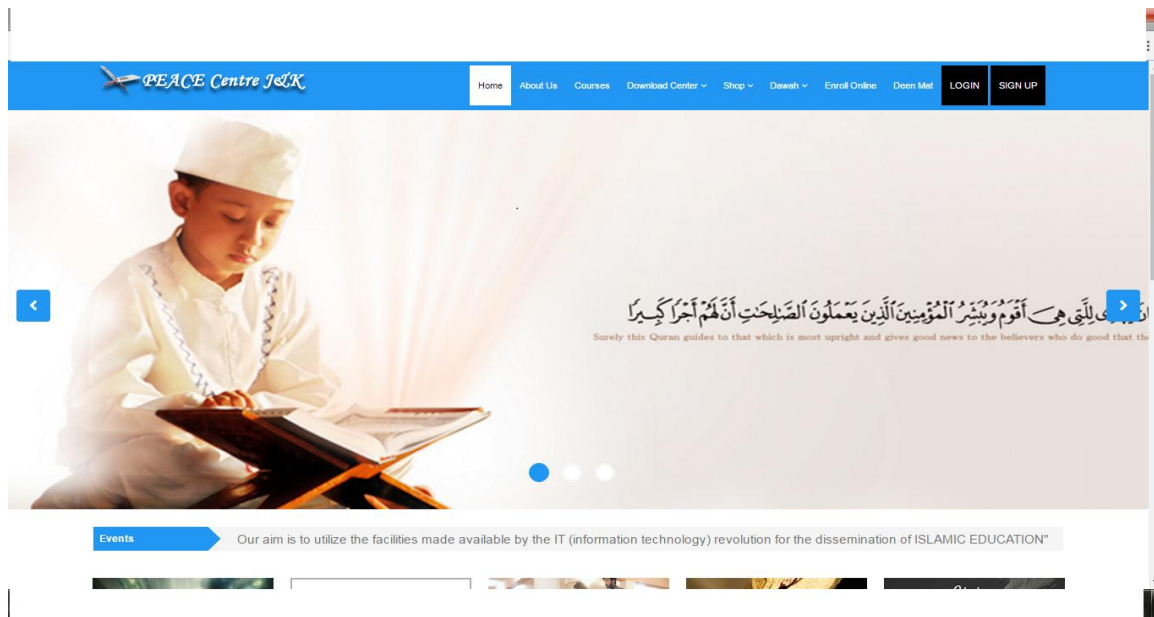


Figure 21: SOQTE Webpage

In September 2014, floods left much of Srinagar ravaged. During these floods, many families were stranded and therefore were screaming for help from their homes. It was during these times that many religious groups involved themselves in assisting the flood victims. To survive the imminent danger, many people were requesting a copy of Quran. In many of the photographs and videos about these floods, people were seen reciting Quranic verses in order to instill themselves with hope and faith. It was in this context that Sirajul Uloom, a Deobandi Madrasa, located in Srinagar came up with an idea to launch True Message Foundation. According to the principal of Sirajul Uloom, Maulana Adnan Ahmad, it was shocking to see Muslims in Srinagar with no copy of Quran in their houses. The True Message Foundation therefore aimed to develop a plan whereby 'each and every individual in Kashmir could be reached out with the message of Islam'.



Figure 22: True Message Foundation Quran Vehicle

The founders of Sirajul Uloom operate separate branches of Madrasas for boys and women. The madrasa for women is known as Jamia Raouzatul Mominaat (Institution for women) and is located in Munawar (Munawarabad), Srinagar. The curriculum at Sirajul Uloom mainly comprises of learning Quran and Hadith (prophetic traditions). Though these teachings, Sirajul Uloom endeavors to develop 'Islamic character' of its students. Sirajul Uloom publishes a magazine titled *Nisab* with its content largely focusing on issues of aqeedah (matters of faith) and Muslim eschatology (interpretations of Day of Judgment in Islam). In 2015, True Message Foundation of Sirajul Uloom launched a Dawah (preaching Islam) initiative named 'Quran for all'. Through this initiative a vehicle (Quran Gaadi) was launched to be driven upon every day to different areas of Kashmir. The launch of the vehicle was inaugurated in the presence of several noted local and non local Muslim scholars. The launch of the vehicle was inaugurated in the presence of several noted local and non local scholars on Islam. General Secretary All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, formally flagged off a mobile library van installed with LCD. The mobile library van of True Message Foundation carries copies of Quran abundant and electronic devices such as flash drives, CDs, DVDs, memory cards loaded with literature on Islam.



Figure 23: People checking the religious content carried in the vehicle

The Quran for All initiative was launched in collaboration with Satya Sandesh Foundation Quran Center, an organization which has been doing similar kind of work from Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India. Given the already existing Muslim majority character of society in Kashmir, Satya Sandesh Foundation Quran Center was initially skeptical to be a part of such a project in Kashmir. According to the local news reports, few members of Satya Sandesh Foundation Quran Center who visited Kashmir witnessed many social and religious problems within the Muslim community of Kashmir. The members of Satya Sandesh Foundation Quran Center saw Muslim community of Kashmir divided and afflicted with schisms. Hotels and guest houses where Satya Sandesh Foundation Quran Center representatives stayed apparently lacked facilities for praying and also the Qibla (prayer direction) markings in rooms of these hotels were lacking (Greater Kashmir, August 4, 2015). It was in the context of these observations that the decision of unveiling of 'Quran for All' mobile library van was taken.

According to Maulana Adnan Ahmad, head of Sirajul Uloom and True Message Foundation, Muslims in the present age have become too complacent. The world according to Maulana Adnan Ahmad is dominated by the logic of marketing and

advertising. Given the nature of the circulation of discourses about Islam and Muslims in mainstream media, it has become pertinent for Muslims to have their own narrative and means to express it. Islam according to Maulana Adnan Ahmad has given Muslims a best product in the form of Quran. Even then Muslims are incapable of presenting this unique product in front of the world, says Maulana Adnan Ahmad. Computer-mediation communications, as per Maulana Adnan Ahmad, has opened a great opportunity for Muslims to showcase their product. Therefore, as per Maulana Adnan Ahmad, it is imperative of Muslims to learn the art of marketing their product. One of the essential prerequisites for Muslims to market Islam to the world according to Maulana Adnan Ahmad is to understand the logic of how modern media technologies function.

“Why is it that democracy sells while Islam is seen as reprehensible? Democracies have done violence, destroyed nations, why then actions of minority of Muslims are singled out to make a caricature of Islam. It is simply because democracy has adopted a language which is appealing to masses. Muslims on the contrary are incapable of speaking in a language which can resonate with the masses. This is despite the fact that Muslims have with them the Holy Quran. Quran is not only for Muslims, it is for the entire world. When a company manufactures a refrigerator, the company makes sure to put a user manual with the product. Allah is creator of the world and humans. Humans are made of the best material and the crown of creation. Quran is user’s Manual for all humans. Through mobile van library, we drive our vehicles to remote areas of Kashmir, to public parks, railway stations, and airport. We have Quran translated almost in every language. Kashmir is place known to attract tourists around the year. We sell apples, carpets, almonds and what not to tourists. Why can’t we advertise the source of our moral strength, Quran, to those who visit Kashmir? Through mobile van library we distribute our real product called Quran to non-Muslims for free. We have seen the impact of Zakir Naik over Muslims across the globe. The way in which Zakir Naik has brought Islam before public is commendable. This is despite our ideological differences with Zakir Naik.”

3.1 Legitimizing Technology by Preserving Tradition

In the past three decades, like Anantnag, Srinagar has been experiencing a rapid proliferation of new religious seminaries, mosques and several other forms of faith based experiments. In most of these cases, media technology has played a significant role in

enabling these religious groups to practice and preach their beliefs to Muslim population of Kashmir. As indicated above, the arrival of new information and communication technologies coincided with the emergence of new religious groups with their *raison d'être* intrinsically linked to the logic of information and communication technologies. The ubiquity of new information and communication technologies has not however left pre-digital/already existing religious organizations of Kashmir impervious. The ability of new information and communication technologies to interact with older media forms, from orality to newspapers to television, has made new media essential components for the operation of these old religious organizations in new contexts. Digital media has allowed these religious groups to connect with people in new ways.

Two of such key faith based organizations with vast influences on the contemporary forms of religiosity in Srinagar as well as of entire Kashmir Valley are clan of Mirwaiz (chief preachers) in Srinagar and Jamat-i- Islami. The family of Mirwaiz, based in Srinagar, traces its lineage to an ancestor who had travelled to Kashmir from Persia along with Mir Syed Ali Hamdani in the 13th century. Many of the contemporary historians of Kashmir are of the view that the title of Mirwaiz was officially declared during Afghan rule (1750-1819) in Kashmir. In her book, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, Mridu Rai writes that the title of Mirwaiz had been used at least since 1901. This position of Mirwaiz gradually turned into a hereditary one. To understand the interplay between media and religion in modern Kashmir, the family of Mirwaiz becomes an important site to locate such intersection.

The first reaction to the educational initiatives started by the British missionaries in Srinagar during late 19th century came from Mirwaiz Rasool Shah. It was Maulana Ghulam Rasool Shah, one of the heirs of Mirwaiz dynasty, who formed a socio-religious organization named Anjuman Nusratul Islam in 1899. This institution was started with a mission to counter the secular education of the British, and integrate modern education with religious education. Maulana Rasool Shah wrote several religious tracts against the practice of saint worshipping among Muslims in Kashmir. The successor and brother of

Mirwaiz Rasool Shah, Mirwaiz Ahmadullah is credited with setting up of Oriental College in Srinagar.

Mirwaiz Moulvi Muhammad Yousuf Shah, another heir of Mirwaiz dynasty, has been credited by few sources as the first Muslim individual to set up a Muslim printing press in Kashmir. According to Yoginder Sikand, 'to popularize reformist cause, Yousuf Shah set up the first press in Kashmir, the Muslim Printing Press, launching two weeklies, al-Islam and Rahnuma, to broadcast the views of the Deobandis and to combat what were seen as the un-Islamic practices of the Kashmiri Muslims. He also translated and published the first Kashmiri translation of and commentary on the Qur'an, so that ordinary Kashmiris could understand the Qur'an themselves, rather than having to depend on the custodians of shrines for their religious instruction' (Sikand, 2002, p. 713). Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah studied at Darul Uloom Deoband, a seminary known for training well educated 'ulema (religious scholars) in scriptural Islam' (Metcalf, 1978, p. 117). After the completion of studies at Darul Uloom Deoband in 1924, Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah, set up a branch of Khilafat Committee in Srinagar to popularize the cause of the Khilafat movement.

In 1932, Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah along with Sheikh Abdullah, Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas, Afzal Beg and GM Sadiq, formed All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference with an aim to put up resistance against the Dogra rule in Kashmir. Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah migrated to Azad Kashmir (Pakistan held Kashmir) at the time of partition, and from there would recite the Quran from Azad Kashmir Radio. His programme which would run probably for half an hour could manage to draw many people in Kashmir tuning to Radio Azad Kashmir. Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah later became the third President of Azad Kashmir and also held the office of Education and Health Minister in Azad Kashmir. Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah lived rest of his life in Pakistan and his act of migrating to Pakistan earned him a title Muhajir e Millat (The immigrant of the Community). This epithet is symbolic and makes a figurative reference to the emigration of Prophet of Islam and his community of believers from Mecca to Medina (Hijra).

The religious and political power of Mirwaiz family began to fade after the migration of Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah to Pakistan. It was in 1960s, when Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq assumed the role of Mirwaiz that the Mirwaiz family started to regain its religious and political significance. It was Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq who catapulted the Mirwaiz family into the changing sociopolitical settings of contemporary Kashmir. Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq emerged as a political and religious figure in the backdrop of mysterious disappearance of the sacred relic of Prophet Muhammad's hair from the Hazratbal Shrine in 1963. Later in 1964, Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq launched Awami Action Committee with a mission to internationalize Kashmir issue and seek its political solution. Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq was known for his ability to sway masses with his religious and political sermons. He had a considerable influence over religious and political matters of his time. Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq launched a newspaper titled *Hurriyat* and a weekly called *Harf-e-Haq (Word of Truth)* to articulate and disseminate his thoughts. In 1990, Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq was killed by unknown gunmen. The mysterious killing of Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq turned him into a potent symbol and a heroic martyr for Muslims in Kashmir. Upon the death of Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq, he was given the honorific title of Shaheed-e-Millat (Martyr of the nation).

Following the assassination of Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq, his son Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, the present Mirwaiz of Kashmir, was conferred with the title of Mirwaiz. Mirwaiz Umer Farooq assumed the mantle of Mirwaiz at the age of seventeen and rose to prominence for laying the foundation of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) in 1993. In October 2014, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was listed as one of The 500 Most influential Muslims by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan (Bhat, 2014). Mirwaiz Umar Farooq studied in an elite missionary school established by the Mill Hill Missionaries of London in Srinagar, and holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from University of Kashmir (Hassan, 1 Nov, DNA). The ability of Mirwaiz Umar Farooq to integrate modern information and communication technologies for circulating his thought has contributed significantly in accelerating his popularity. To popularize his sermons, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq in 2016, live streamed his sermons on Facebook as a way to connect with Muslims online. Most of those who watch the sermons online mainly consisted of Kashmiri Muslims living abroad

(The Hindu, July 2016). With a following of more than 27 thousand on Twitter and nearly ten thousand on Facebook, Mirwaiz is one of the or perhaps the most popular Kashmiri religious figures on the internet.

The Mirwaiz family clan holds the distinction for their control over one of the historic and significant mosques of Kashmir called Jamia Masjid. It is from the pulpit of Jamia Masjid that Mirwaiz family propagates its own version of religion and politics in Kashmir. Jamia Masjid in Srinagar is a product of an era when Kashmir was ruled by Muslims. Given its historical and political significance, the mosque symbolizes a significant source of moral narrative structure of Muslims in Kashmir. As noted by Charles Taylor, such schematic historical narratives exercise a force of attraction of their own. One important secret of these narratives about self and the community is to confer a meaning and substance to people's lives (Taylor, 1989, p. 97). Jamia Masjid according to various sources holds a capacity to accommodate more than thirty thousand people for praying at a time. On every Friday, thousands of Muslims from every walk of life assemble at the Jamia Masjid Srinagar where Mirwaiz through his sermons acts as an intermediary to facilitate the interaction between the divine and his believers.



Figure 24: Jama Masjid Srinagar

The importance of Jamia Masjid as a symbol of communication has transformed with the arrival of new information and communication technologies. The events held at Jamia Masjid are extensively covered by the local press and are also circulated through various digital media platforms. On the day of my field visit in May, Jamia Masjid was crowded with people who had come to offer Friday prayers. Before the arrival of Mirwaiz Umer Farooq to the mosque, copies of weekly newspaper were distributed to all those who were present. The content of the weekly titled Sada-e-Kahkashan (voice of galaxy) distributed on this day was majorly devoted to the ‘contributions and sacrifices’ of the Mirwaiz family. The Friday sermon by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq on this day was a part of programme *Hafta Shahadat* (Week of Martyrdom), aimed at commemorating the death anniversaries of Mirwaiz Maoulvi Farooq, Abdul Gani Lone²² and many others.



Figure 25: Copies of weekly Sada-e-Kahkashan being distributed at Jamia Masjid, Srinagar

²² Noted lawyer and politician, Abdul Gani Lone, was assassinated on 21 May 2002 while commemorating the twelfth anniversary of the death of Kashmiri leader, Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq.

The content of the speeches touched upon the aspects of politics and religion in Kashmir. Many parallels were drawn between the early phases of Islam in Mecca/Medina and the present situation confronting Muslims in Kashmir. During the speech by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, people were using their mobile phones to capture a snapshot of the chief preacher. Many people were seen using their mobile phones to record the event. These recordings are later on transposed into public realms through digital means. Such form of mediation is essential to personal identity, where the mediated symbols, signs, language and texts become central to the project of self and self-understanding (Hoover, 2006, p. 91). The religious traditions circulated from the pulpit of Jamia Masjid have always been entwined with and dependent upon media infrastructures. However, in the times before the emergence of new media forms, the circulation of the content disseminated from the Jamia Masjid was limited to fewer sections of Muslims. The ubiquity of new digital mechanisms has however drastically intensified the relationship between religious experiences and media. These new media forms thus not only circulate sacred experiences emanating from Jamia Masjid to masses but also contribute significantly to the formation of new social, religious and cultural realities (Bourdieu, 1991, p 22).



Figure 26: People recording the Friday sermon at Jama Masjid



Figure 27: Mirwaiz Umer Farooq delivering speech before Friday Prayer

Other than the Mirwaiz clan, another organization which continues to have a strong influence on the contemporary forms of religiosity in Srinagar is Jamat-i- Islami. How Jamat-i- Islami made inroads into the Muslim society of Kashmir has been already delineated in the previous chapter. Jamat-i- Islami in Kashmir was one of the earliest non-governmental organizations to enter the sphere of education provision in a big way. Jamat-i- Islami in Kashmir is known for its contribution to minimize the dependence of Muslims on education provided by government schools. In its initial phases, Jamat-i- Islami depended on printing technology to advance its agenda. In the recent past, the new information and communication technologies have become central to the functioning of Jamat-i- Islami in Kashmir. In 2004, Jamat-i- Islami started to publish Momin by printing 1500 copies. In 2016, Momin, which now is a weekly newspaper, has a subscription of nearly 23 thousand only in its print form. The content of Momin initially was addressed to appeal the educated Muslim youth of Kashmir. According to the current Managing Editor of Momin, through printing technology, Jamat-i- Islami could cater to the needs of only those who could read and write. The digital technology according to Managing

Editor of Momin has allowed the circulation of Jamat-i- Islami's content even to those who cannot read and write. According to him...

“Jamat-i- Islami has its own website. Momin newspaper has its own website. Our student organization Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba has its own website and comes up with a publication named Payaam. We are present on Facebook and also have our own Youtube channel. We at Jamat-i- Islami organize religious sermons, record them and distribute them to various cable channels. Our institutions or schools are present in almost all the districts of Jammu and Kashmir. At present, there are around 80,000 students enrolled directly or indirectly in different schools affiliated with the religious and political thought of Jamat-i-Islami.”

The religious knowledge which was organized in hierarchical form in the oral settings of Kashmir has been challenged with the mass transition to literacy in Kashmir. In Srinagar, the digital technologies have come to play a key role in the flow of information about religion. Media forms have become important sites where the cultural manifestation of the present society in Srinagar can be located. These media forms reflect the ways in which religion in contemporary Srinagar is articulated. The assessment of media texts allows us to locate the direction of religious trends in Srinagar. The ways in which the religious content of Islamic Fraternity or True Message Foundation find their way into the public discourse in Srinagar places the role of media at the center of the new religious configurations. It is only through the use of media technologies that new religiosities find their way in the public discourses. These media forms have become a cultural forum in which questions about religion are aired, debated, articulated, and negotiated (Hoover, 2006, p. 10).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

1. Summary

This study began with a purpose to look at the ways in which media and religion intersect in the social, cultural and political spaces in contemporary Kashmir. As such, the study has closely examined to the contexts, influences, and the consequences of the relationship between religion and media in the spheres of social and cultural life of Muslim populations in Kashmir.

To study the relationship between religion and media, scholars on religion and media have generally used five major theoretical approaches. These approaches can be classified as technological determinism, mediation of sacred forms, social shaping of technology, mediatization of religion and mediation of meaning. In the approaches involving technological determinism, the focus is on distinct characteristics and each type of media and how every specific media form encourages different modes of thinking and different value systems. The mediation of sacred form approach leans on the Durkhemian framework to study religion. In this approach it is opined that all sacred forms are mediated. According to Cordon Lynch, the main thinker on mediation of meaning approach, “The interaction of symbol, thought, feelings and action that characterizes sacred forms is only possible through media which give sacred forms material expression” (Lundby, 2012, p. 231).

This study was mostly influenced by the remaining three approaches which have been employed by scholars studying religion and media. Through the mediatization of religion approach, the study was able to view media as an integrated part of religion. At the same time, the study departs from mediatization of religion approach which imparts too much credit to media for influencing other institutions including religion (Hjarvard, 2008). According to Hjarvard, “the process of mediatization is considered a double sided

process of late modernity. In this process, the media on the one hand emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other institutions have to accommodate. On the other hand media simultaneously becomes an integrated part of other institutions” (Hjarvard, 2008, p.134).

The other approach which has been employed by scholars to study religion and media is the religious-social shaping of technology. Heidi Campbell, one of the leading proponents of this approach leans on case study method and has observed that the technology is not just a given, but is shaped through choices made by designers as well as users. This approach sees the relationship between religion and media as a dialectical process (Campbell, 2010). To study the relationship between media and religion in the context of Kashmir, this study has been primarily influenced by the mediation of meanings approach whose leading propounder has been Stewart Hoover. In the mediation of meanings approach, the task is simply to go and ask people what they think about the media which is religiously significant. The interviews about media or accounts of media conducted during this study therefore remain elementary resources of this study for assessing the relationship between and religion in Kashmir.

Owing to the rich details collected during the preliminary fieldwork and realizing the potential of studying religion in the backdrop of media technologies, the study was extended to incorporate media technologies of the past. This method helped the study to navigate through most of the scholarly work that has come to shape the discipline of media studies. In the backdrop of such broader framework, the study initially chose to focus on oral aspects of the society in Kashmir and its relation with the rich but limited scribal culture of medieval Kashmir. The study came to conclude that however orality and manuscript tradition have been intertwined with each other, these traditions simultaneously influenced religious patterns in Kashmir in a distinctive ways. This interplay between oral aspects of religion and manuscript tradition comprised the much of the apparatus of the society in Kashmir up until the spread of modern education in Kashmir. The study is of the opinion that it was in the latter half of the 19th century, when

transport system and modern education began to alter the nature of institutions in Kashmir, thereby resulting in the arrival of conditions of modernity in Kashmir.

Though the educational institutions started by the British attracted tiny sections of population from Kashmir, it was enough to facilitate the spread of printing technology in Kashmir. The printing technology also was used by those Kashmiris who had migrated to Punjab. This deterritorialized section of Kashmiri Muslims population settled in Punjab produced abundant material which had reflections of political, social and religious situations of their horizontal comrades in the Kashmir Valley. Within Kashmir Valley, various socio-religious organizations came into existence during this period. One of the first of these socio-religious organization was Anjuman Nusratul Islam started by Mirwaiz Rasool Shah in 1899. With these changes new section of Muslim public emerged in Kashmir which began to articulate their ideas through the use of printing technology. The study then correlates the emergence of various religious reformist groups in the backdrop of their use of printing technology. In this case, the study particularly highlights the role of printing technology in articulating the religious orientation of Jamiat-i-Ahle Hadith, movement started by Sayyid Hussain Shah Baktu in the last quarter of the 19th century (Khan, 2000, p. 136). Besides Ahle-Hadith, many other religious reformist groups began to use printing technology by focusing on various theological issues in Islam. The study charts the ways in which Jamat i Islami Jammu & Kashmir came to proliferate its ideology in Kashmir through the extensive use of printed literature, and looks at religious patterns in Kashmir in the backdrop of media technologies such as radio, television, cassettes and digital technologies.

Finally, the study charts the ways in which religious groups and individuals in Kashmir negotiate with the media technologies in the light of issues related to religious identity, community and religious authority. To study meanings individuals and religious groups in Kashmir ascribe to mediated religion, the study takes Anantnag and Srinagar districts of the Kashmir Valley as sites of ethnographic inquiry. Through the historical and culturalist approach, the study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews, visual ethnography, and participant observation for collecting the data.

By closely following the historical method and culturalist approach (Hoover, 2006), following are some of the recurrent themes which emanated from this study.

2. Key Findings

2.1 Religion as Mediation

Islam is a missionary religion. The mission of the Prophet Muhammad was to invite people to acquiesce to the message revealed to him by transcendental God (Allah). The terms like *daw'ah* (inviting people to submit to Allah), *tabligh* (truthful propagation), message, messenger constitute indispensable components of the lexicon of Islamic worldview. The mandatory process of interaction of individuals transforms Islam into a religious-social system, which necessitates the sharing of system of values and actions associated in terms of symbolic meanings. The encounter of Islamic traditions with diverse cultures and geographies unfurls manifold accounts of the variants of Islam. The occurrence of the multiplicity of the inestimable and sometimes contradictory accounts in relation to the history of the expansion of Islamic traditions inherently signifies that there is no possibility to draw a single linear pattern to study expansion of Islam to different lands and peoples. The regional variations and experiences make it impossible to have a homogenising narrative of communication to explain the spread of Islam.

Therefore to understand the ways in which Islam as a religion has been communicated, it is important to locate it in the context in which it has evolved, shaped and flourished. In this backdrop, the study attempted to trace the relationship between media and religion studying existing literature on the spread of Islam in Kashmir. The initial purpose of the study was to understanding the modes of communicating Islamic traditions in Kashmir when Islam as a cultural form for the first time began to intersect with the existing social, cultural, religious and political environment of the society in Kashmir. By closely looking at the existing literature on the history of Kashmir before and after Islam, the study found communication patterns central to the functioning of Islamic traditions in Kashmir.

Through the study of the relationship between various communication forms (orality, manuscript tradition, printing technology, radio, cassettes, television, and computer mediated technologies) and religion, this study found that communication and Islamic traditions in Kashmir are essentially tied to each other. Therefore this study places itself within the framework of studies on media and religion which have argued that media should be regarded as an integral part of the definition of religion. Scholars such as Hent de Vries, Derrida, Knut Lundby, Stewart Hoover, Birgit Meyer, Annelis Moors and James Carey have argued that communication and mediation lies the at root of functioning of religions. This is even so much truer in the case of present day ubiquity of digital technologies in every sphere of contemporary life. This study argues that in the present situation where media technologies have come to pervade into almost all spheres of religious life in Kashmir, religion in Kashmir can't be analyzed outside the forms and practices of mediation that define it (Meyer and Moors, 2005, p. 7).

Situating communication as a something central to the narrative of religion in Kashmir, this study therefore contradicts the view of scholars such as Niel Postman who has held that compatibility of religion and media is impossible. To Postman, by bringing religion and media together would result in the destruction of religion from the holiness to non-sacredness (Postman, 1985; Hosseini, 2008, p.62). Accepting mediation as central to the functioning of religion in Kashmir, this study also contrasts the view held by Heidegger that any attempt to religionize the media or turn religion to media is fruitless, useless, and abortive. For Heidegger, technology could not have any interaction with religion because a contradictory nature exists between them (Hosseini, 2008, p.61).

By studying the relationship between media and religion in Kashmir in historical context, this study establishes that it is not possible to fully understand either (media or religion) without reference to the other (Hoover). In Kashmir this is particularly noticeable with reference to the explosion of media technologies such mobile phones, computer mediated communications etc. By taking Kashmir as an example, this study also links with the larger question of the theoretical perspectives on Islam and

communication, detailing the role of communication as constituting a remarkable constituent for explaining the spread of Islam. Communication has been an instrumental and integral part of Islam since its inception as a religio-political movement. Indeed in the founding text of Islam, Quran, there are numerous references, where God urges Muhammad to invite people to Him.²³ Ibn Khaldun (1967) in *The Muqaddimah* (An Introduction to History) cites “truthful propagation (tabligh) and group cohesion (assabieh)” as two fundamental factors in the rise of world powers as States and large communities (Mowlana, 1996, p.116).

2.2 Media and Religious identity

By perusing available literature on the history of Islam in Kashmir, one can clearly discern that religion has always been an organizing principle around which the Muslims in Kashmir constructed their moral and spiritual notions of self. However with the arrival of conditions of modernity in the form of modern education, emergent idea of nationalism, advent of printing technology and the access to better transportation, there was a shift in the way in which Muslim elite of Kashmir began to articulate the notion of religious community and the self. In other words, the history of expansion of Islamic traditions in Kashmir is actually the story of cultural transactions. However before the 20th century, these cultural transactions had been restricted. By the first half of 20th century in Kashmir, the processes of cultural transactions in Kashmir were accelerated through the new means of mobility, printing technology and changing historical conditions. Therefore it was during this period that many religious reformists groups began to make inroads into Kashmir. However until the recent transition of Kashmir to mass literacy, the influence of religious reformist groups remained on the peripheries of the society.

²³Summon thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and with kindly warning: dispute with them in the kindest manner, (xvi. 126.) “Say to those who have been given the Book and to the ignorant, Do you accept Islam ? Then, if they accept Islam, are they guided right: but if they turn away, then thy duty is only preaching; and God's eye is on His servants. (iii. 19).

It was only with the coming together of mass literacy and globalization which led to an intense and renewed focus on the project of identity while articulating religion in Kashmir. In 1989, Kashmir saw a full scale armed insurgency against Indian rule. This coincided with the unfolding of many political events at the global level and local level. These intersections of local with global events resulted into a formation of religious identities in Kashmir which were not entirely shaped by local cultural context but also by the interactions between the local and the global. Kashmir is not the only example where there was this veritable discursive explosion around the concept of identity. Scholars such as Manuel Castells, Zygmunt Bauman and Raymond Williams have argued that the explosion around the concept of identity in 1990's was a universal phenomenon and therefore can be seen as a corollary of globalization.

The study found that media technologies such as satellite television, computer mediated communications and various forms of digital media have performed a vital role in intensifying the social, religious and cultural changes taking place in Kashmir. These media the study argues circulated the content about religion in Kashmir which became the source for the ideas and symbols in creating religious identities in new ways. The new means of electronic communication enabled the society in Kashmir to develop flows of exchange with geographically remote and temporally distant contexts. Therefore this study bears much in common with the definition of globalization provided by Anthony Giddens, who sees globalization as an intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990, p.64). In these twin yet opposing processes of globalization and localization, media play a central role and reveal the tensions between the macro and micro levels of socio-economic structures, cultures and development dynamics (Durham & Kellner, 2009, p. 605).

By having access to new media technologies, Muslim individuals in Kashmir increasingly are in position of choice to decide which interpretation of Islam they chose to trust. The religious content produced by specialists in Kashmir is no longer wholly confined to specific groups, but becomes routinely interpreted and acted on by

individuals in the course of their everyday actions. In this process, Muslim individuals are increasingly aware of the religious content with which they identify with. As argued in the study, most of sects within Sunni Islam made their inroads in Kashmir much before the age of electronic and digital media. However with the explosion of media technologies, these already existing religious sects are first time in a position to circulate their content in way which is unprecedented. This has led to circulation of various forms of religious content and thereby increasing the sectarian awareness among Muslims in Kashmir. In many of the interviews, it became evident that people are not content with the way religion in the past has performed its role in Kashmir. The earlier traditions of popular Islam represented by non-literate masses is reflexively interrogated, criticized and made use of in common with new available sources of religious content.

2.3 Media Ambivalence and Religion

Jenny L. Davis (2012) has argued that technological ambivalence is rooted primarily in the deeply embedded moral prescription to lead a meaningful life, and a related uncertainty about the role of new technologies in the accomplishment of this task. On the one hand, technology offers the potential to augment or even enhance personal and public life. On the other hand, technology looms with the potential to supplant or replace real experience (p. 955). The advent of printing technology brought a revolution in the transmission of knowledge. Being appreciative of the transformation of the religious life of Western Christendom, Martin Luther once said, 'Printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one'. For publishing religious tracts printing technology however was not adopted by the Muslim communities until the beginning of the 19th century, that is, until four centuries after the Christian world began using it (Robinson, 200, p. 40). It is not until the years 1870-90, that it is possible to see Ottoman elite beginning to be transformed by print. Printing technology adopted by Muslims hereafter led to the circulation of content about Islam in an unprecedented manner.

Up until the present times, there continues to be ambivalence towards various media technologies in Muslim societies. Media ambivalence in the context of the present study

refers to a condition in which people have simultaneous, conflicting reactions, beliefs, or feelings to in their evaluation of media technologies. This phenomenon is related to the question about how Muslim communities relate to and come to terms with technological and social changes. Like most discussions of Islamic theology, debates in Kashmir by Muslims about how to understand and use the new information and communication technologies are complex and often contradictory.

As the study shows, there is no limit to penetration of new technologies in to the social, cultural and religious domains of life in Kashmir. Given the unimaginable force with which modern technological and informational order has come to dominate the present forms of life, Muslims in Kashmir have also come to terms with this all-pervading technological and informational force. However the process of negotiation with the new media technologies brings into circulation several cultural and religious discourses which describe the way in which media technology is debated and discussed by Muslims in Kashmir. One of the common trends emanating from the study was that Muslim individuals in Kashmir generally perceive media technology as an unavoidable force where the question concerning negotiation plays a significant role. Many Muslim individuals interviewed in this study propose the idea that media technology is inherently neither good nor bad; it is the process of negotiation with particular form of media, which can explain its goodness or badness. Muslims in Kashmir generally acknowledge the fact that media has come to define the modern way of life and by understanding this fact it is essential to adopt media technology for preserving the religious traditions. Therefore the assessment of media technology is more often seen through the prism of moral principle guided by Islamic injunctions.

In most of the interviews, media was seen as one of the components contributing to the proliferation of social evils (*burrayiyaan*) in the society in Kashmir. Therefore most of those interviewed during this study opine that one of the ways in which it is possible to purge media of its demonic (*satanic*) characteristics is to exploit media for fulfilling the role of religion. The Muslim religious clerics from Kashmir interviewed during this study for example highlighted the positive sides of using mobile phone while at the same time

warning of its much negative attributes. The installation of religious apps on mobile phones, accessing authentic sites for religious knowledge are seen the positive aspects brought through the mobile technology by these religious clerics. The smartphone for example is viewed as reflective of a person's day to day engagement with worldviews inherent in the apps used, so the digital body becomes an extension of the physical or spiritual self (Lundby, 2012, p. 204). However at the same time these religious clerics from Kashmir see mobile phones as reason for disappearance of happiness from society, the increasing tendency for Muslim youth to access the religiously forbidden content (pornography) or the exposure to 'risque' (*fahash*) material culture of the West. To maximize the religious benefits of media over otherwise seen negative benefits, many religious institutions and individuals have come up with new manuals to explain 'Islamic' way of using technology.

2.4 Religious Authority and Computer Mediated Technologies

Before the transition to mass literacy, in Kashmir religious interpretations in general continued to be sole prerogative of those few who could comprehend the technology of writing. The mass literacy in Kashmir has given the prowess to large sections of Muslim population in Kashmir in accessing the religious scriptures directly. Until recently majority of Muslims in Kashmir were not sufficiently skilled to read, comprehend and interpret religious texts. Mass literacy in Kashmir therefore this study argues fostered a direct, albeit selective, access to the written word, thereby transforming the earlier traditions of religious authority. This also coincided with the proliferation of madrasas in Kashmir Valley over the last three decades. Almost all religious sects in Kashmir Valley run a chain of madrasas which later play an important role in diffusion of sectarian identities. The study thereby recognizes madrasas in Kashmir valley as important sites through which sectarian (*maslaki*) identities are transmitted. The proliferation of these madrasas has allowed new actors to join the religious marketplace in Kashmir Valley and propagate their ideas.

With these transformations, it is the user generated content characteristics of the new media technologies which have played a vital role in the facilitation of the flow of religious information in contemporary Kashmir. Through new media such as internet, smart phones, digital television, people in Kashmir are for the first time able to come in contact with multiplicity of expert claims about religious matters. Among these multiple types of knowledge and information about religion, expert knowledge becomes routinely interpreted and acted on by lay individuals in the course of their everyday actions (Mesny, 1998). Giddens has observed that internet and digital media has afforded Muslims in Kashmir new and at times rival spaces to reinforce, cultivate, and act on a variety of ideological views, positions and projects. The new media technologies have allowed the Muslim population of Kashmir to actively participate as social actors to reproduce circulate and articulate their versions of social, religious, cultural or political realities. In the context of this finding, Giddens has noted that the “modern social life is a complex affair, and there are many filter-back processes whereby technical knowledge, in one shape or another, is reappropriated by lay persons and routinely applied in the course of their day-to-day activities” (Giddens, 1991, p. 145).

Before the explosion of new information and communication technologies, the religious authority over textual interpretation of Islam in Kashmir was concentrated in the hands of few traditional experts. These traditional experts were regarded as the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of Islamic knowledge, doctrine and law. However with the massification of literacy and explosion of new information and communication technologies, the distinction between religious preachers and publics has come to lose its basic traditional character. The difference between religious preachers and public in a way has become merely functional. At any moment a person consuming the religious content is ready to become a preacher. In the terminology of Walter Benjamin, the readers gain access to the authorship.

The study at the same time found that in order to arrive at an understanding of the ways in which religious authority has come to unfold itself in the backdrop of new information and communication technologies, it is also essential to stress the importance of traditional

methods which are used in circulating religious content in Kashmir. The traditional methods of communicating Islam such as sermons, speeches, religious activities in mosques and Madrasas serve as fundamental sites to analyze the understand religion in its relationship with new information and communication technologies. Events such as sermons, speeches, religious activities in mosques and other religious events are prerequisites to analyze the concept of transmitting Islam in Kashmir. Since these traditional methods are ephemeral and lack the quality to exist in the memory of the spectator.

Therefore it is only through the mechanical reproduction of these events that they start losing their specific presence in time and space. It is only through the digital recording which brings out aspects of the events that are unattainable to the naked eye. For example with the aid of certain function the digital recording allows to capture images which escape natural vision. The zooming in or slow motion allows the people to analyze the religious content in more intense manner. The new information and communication technologies have therefore moved discourses about religion in Kashmir beyond the traditional method which sustained for centuries. With the changes that can be attributed to globalization, mass literacy, global focus on Islam and the role of new information and communication technologies, a religious landscape with new actors, new sites of production and consumption has emerged in contemporary Kashmir.

It needs therefore to be reiterated here that the media are an important cultural resources not only to understand religious patterns in Kashmir, but also are a mirror to the other social, cultural or aspects of society in Kashmir. It is true that digital technologies have catapulted the offline religious practices of people into the public sphere as never before, but this should not imply that exploring relationship between religion and media has to been primarily understood in the context of new media technologies. While the new media technologies have highlighted and made apparent to us the relationship religion and media, however this relationship also needs to be explored in relation to the modes of communication of the past. The digital technologies indeed have altered the ways in which people traditionally have practiced religion in Kashmir, however while studying

the other dominant means of communicating Islam in Kashmir, this study also recognizes how other modes of communicating Islam in the past have contributed to the shifts in the practice and perception of Islam in Kashmir. The study established that this historicizing not only will broaden our understanding of the relationship between religion and media in the present context but also can provide us an opportunity to extend this understanding to the relationship between religion and media in the past.

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