

# The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris: Kashmiri Literary Culture and Language

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## 1.0 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The literary culture in Kashmiri has developed over the centuries in essentially two vital contexts of contact: cultural and linguistic. These two types of interactions have not always been harmonious or indeed welcome. The ultimate result of this contact and convergence, however, is the development of a literary culture in Kashmiri that embodies linguistic, contextual, and canonical characteristics of a “contact language” and “contact literature”.

It is, therefore, conceptually and methodologically insightful to describe the small corpus of Kashmiri literary creativity<sup>2</sup> and the medium of such creativity, the Kashmiri language, with reference to three interrelated regional characteristics: linguistic, sociolinguistic and literary.

This trimodal approach, then, views Kashmiri literary culture and language—and its diversity—within overall AREAL features of the subcontinent.<sup>3</sup> There is already considerable agreement that the subcontinent forms a LINGUISTIC AREA<sup>4</sup> and a SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREA.<sup>5</sup> The term LITERARY AREA has gained currency to conceptualize, for example, the *Indianness* in Indian literatures.<sup>6</sup>

In characterizing India as a literary area, the focus has been on identifying shared underlying features of two or more literatures within a rigorous descriptive methodology. Foremost, this focus has centered on tracing major canons of cultural and literary traditions that contributed, as Chatterji (1963: 118) says, to “the real integration of India into one single entity, in spite of some basic and fundamental racial, linguistic and cultural diversities.” In Chatterji’s view then, this integration has taken place “through the world of the epics and the puranas and the philosophical literature of Sanskrit (especially Vedanta as supplemented by Islamic Tasawwuf), in the ancient and medieval times . . .” Second, this focus has sought to present a typology of shared assumptions about literary creativity— structural and linguistic features of genres and styles. These shared characteristics are evident in the subcontinental literatures from the earliest period to the modern period— characteristics that reveal how a literary movement, religious or secular, passes from one language area to another “by study and adaptation of the original [texts] rather than regular translation” (Chatterji 1963: 133). Finally, a third element of this focus is the critical efforts to describe *externally* (foreign) and *internally* (native) initiated innovations that have contributed to shared areal characteristics, for example, the process of Sanskritization and the Persianization, the Progressive movement (*pragativād*)<sup>7</sup> and relatively recent Englishization of literatures and languages.

The above digression indicates the context within which I shall discuss the Kashmiri literary culture and language. There are two additional points that may be mentioned here—and will be discussed later—which I believe are appropriate to this discussion.

First is that numerically Kashmiri is a *minority* language (and Kashmiri literature a minority literature). Second is that the concept of *literacy*, and presuppositions associated with this terms require redefinition if they are to have explanatory power in multilingual societies. A salient feature of such societies is that they functionally comprise a variety of *literacy types*, sometimes with multiple unrelated scripts associated with each literacy type as in Kashmiri, Konkani, and Tibetan.

Kashmiri language is called *Kashur*, by its native speakers. In other languages (e.g., Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Tamil), the language is called *Kāshmirī* or *Kashmirī*. The *Kashur* and its dialects are spoken in an approximately 10,000 square mile area in the bowl-shaped valley of the Kashmir Province in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. English variant spellings include *kaschemiri*, *cashmiri*, *Cashmeeree*, *kāc'mirī*. The state borders with linguistically and culturally diverse regions, not all of which have traditionally been congenial to the inhabitants of Kashmir. In this northernmost state of the Republic of India live a small percentage of India's population—just 0.8 percent. But that figure is misleading as Kashmir is

geographically and culturally of strategic importance, and during the post-Independence era of the subcontinent it has been a political tinderbox. Kashmir also has a fascinating historical legacy and cultural pluralism that is often characterized as *Kashmiriyat* (*Kashmiriness*)—an elusive term evoking a rich pluralistic literary, cultural and aesthetic tradition of the Pandits and Muslims of the Valley.

In the larger configuration of languages in India, the majority of Kashmiri speakers live primarily in the Kashmiri Valley, also referred to as the Kashmir *maṇḍala*, a term that demands an explanation. The concept *maṇḍala* has been used since the ancient times for the Valley: In liturgical terms it means a “circle” or a geographical zone. In the long history of Kashmir the *maṇḍala* concept has been used in a variety of art forms. In Kumari’s view (1968:131) *maṇḍala* was synonymous with *deśa*, *viṣaya*, *rājya*, and *rāṣṭrā*.

The ritualistic connotation of *maṇḍala* is discussed by Bhattacharya (1975 II: 911-912) among the “types of icons and mūrtis”:

The *maṇḍala* are consecrated to the advent of the *Grace* of the Deity. These, too, are geometrically designed into a variety of ‘courts’ and ‘yards,’ ‘pockets’ and ‘arenas.’ The actual drawing itself becomes an exercise in attention, and cultivation of the faculties of art, aesthetics and sense of grace. The concentration

demanded in the drawing of a *maṇḍala* with care and exactness has to be seen to be believed. The outcome is certainly a piece of art.

In Kashmir *maṇḍala* there are 3,174,684 speakers of this somewhat isolated and almost orphaned language that traditionally has been deprived of any serious state patronage. There is additionally a smaller number of Kashmiri speakers within the boundaries of the state in the Doda district, Bashili, and Riasi. The diaspora varieties of the language are used in various degrees of diminishing competence by Kashmiris in other parts of India and in parts of Asia. There is now also a small number of diasporic Kashmiris in Europe and the United States.

In parts of Pakistan, as a Pakistani scholar, Rahman observes (1996:225-226), “there are pockets of Kashmiri-speaking people in Azad Kashmir [Pakistan-occupied Kashmir] and elsewhere ...” Rahman adds that the process of language shift is in progress among Kashmiri speakers in Pakistan too, as:

most of the them [Kashmiris] are gradually shifting to other languages such as the local Pahari and Mirpuri which are dialects of Punjabi...Most literate people use Urdu since, in both Azad and Indian-held Kashmir, Urdu rather than Kashmiri is the official language of government.

One might ask: What iconic status does Kashmiri have for the identity of *Kashmiriyat* on either side of its Indian and Pakistan borders? In India, even those Islamic groups in Kashmir who aggressively oppose the current political status of the state, particularly that of its Kashmiri-speaking province, have articulated no

serious identity with the Kashmiri language. The vast chain of *madrasas* (Islamic schools) in the Kashmir province do not consider Kashmiri a medium of empowerment for distinct identity construction. Their focus is on Arabic and Urdu. The situation in Pakistan is nearly identical. In Pakistan, as Rahman (1996: 226) observes, “ the Kashmiri-speaking community has been far too scattered and ineffective to organize a language movement.”

One obvious reason for this ineffectiveness, Rahman continues, is that, “decision-makers in Azad Kashmir are either Punjabi bureaucrats of Punjab or locals who speak dialects of Punjabi. Thus, its is only for propaganda reasons they pretend to patronize Kashmiri.” (1996:226).

In the case of India, however, the ‘decision-makers’ and educational policy planners are Kashmiris themselves, and in spite of that the situation is not much different from what Rahman tells us about Pakistan. In his response to the claim of a Pakistani “writer on Kashmir affairs,” Mir Abdul Aziz, that “Kashmiri [language] remains a stranger in its own country” (Aziz; 1988), Rahman argues:

[t]he fact, however, is that Kashmiri’s ‘own country’ is not Azad Kashmir but the Vale of Kashmir which is occupied by India. If the Vale joins Pakistan or attains independence, Kashmiri would have a brighter chance of coming into its own. But that is a matter of speculation. (see also Aziz 1983).

In diaspora, whether in parts of India or abroad, the language is going through gradual attrition due to the impact of languages of wider communication, mainly Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English, and the resultant language shift—that is the acquisition by Kashmiri speakers of functionally more dominant languages that ultimately causes the decay and “death” of Kashmiri. We notice this shift in major metropolitan cities of India where a significant number of Pandits have relocated in the post-1980s and earlier (see Bhatt: 1989).

#### Kashmiri speakers in 1941, 1961, 1971, and 1981 Census Reports

Year	J&K State	Kashmiri Province	Jammu Province	Other parts of the state <sup>7</sup>
1941	15,49,460	13,69,537	1,78,390	1174+323 <sup>8</sup>
1961	18,96,149	17,17,259	1,78,281 <sup>9</sup>	609 <sup>10</sup>
1971	24,53,430	21,75,588	2,77,070	772 <sup>11</sup>
1981	31,33,146	28,06,441	3,28,229	1,476 <sup>12</sup>

(Note that no census data was collected in Kashmir in 1951 and 1991.)

We have no firm figures about Kashmiris living in diasporic contexts beyond India. Kaul in *the Kashmiri Overseas Association (KOA) Directory 2001* (2001:3) says:

It [KOA] has information on about 1450 families, of whom 1070 are in the USA and the remaining are in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and other African, Asian, European Countries...

The number of families in the USA has increased steadily from 250 in 1985, to 340 in 1992, to 620 in 1995, to 1070 in 2000. *It is our belief that there are at least 200 to 400 more families in the USA who do not appear in this directory.* (Emphasis added).

It should be noted that this Directory primarily provides figures for Kashmiri Pandit families, not for Kashmiri Muslims.

## 2.0. Regionality and contact

The major Kashmiri-speaking area in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a very sensitive and complex regional location. In the north, the state borders Afghanistan, the former Soviet countries, and China; in the east it borders Tibet; and in the west Pakistan. The Kashmiri-speaking area is surrounded by distinct linguistic, cultural, and political zones. This configuration of *contact* zones and their impact on Kashmiri language, culture, and literature, add various cultural and linguistic layers to the region.

These language contact zones are produced by contiguity with typologically distinct language types: a Dardic language, Shina, in the North; Balti, Ladakhi and other Tibeto-Burman languages in the East; Pahari and a variety of dialects of Punjabi in the West; and Dogri and other Pahari dialects in the South. All these languages have in various degrees converged with Kashmiri, or with its dialects, particularly at what are termed *transition* zones.

It is, however, the more geographically distant languages that by the middle of the 14th century gradually had acquired the status of languages of literary creativity in Kashmir. The domains of function of native Kashmiri were primarily

restricted to the home and non-formal interactions. The language never overcame that marginality, and never was assigned elevated or formal functions.

The languages of literary culture in Kashmir at various periods of its history have been, essentially, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and much later—and to a smaller extent—English. The Kashmiri language was never in competition with any of these “elevated” languages of wider communication. In fact, attitudinally the Kashmiri language had a lower status than other languages of power, and functionally it had very restricted domains. This linguistic choice was again a consequence of the marginality of the natives of the state, the status of their language, and indeed the attitude of Kashmiris themselves toward their own language.

The language of creativity and literary discourse before Islam’s arrival in the Valley was Sanskrit, which occupied almost all elite formal roles of discourse—philosophy (e.g. *Trika darśana*), poetics (e.g., *rasa*), historical narratives (e.g., Kalhana’s *Rājataranginī* 1150 AD?), satire (e.g., *Ksemendra*, 11<sup>th</sup> century), and translations. The Sanskrit manuscripts were mostly written in the Sharada script.

The predominance of Sanskrit in formal discourse continued until the middle of the 14th century when Islam was firmly established in the Valley. At first the role of Sanskrit overlapped with Persian which ultimately acquired the functional domains of administration, law, and literary creativity. The hegemony of Persian lasted for more than four centuries. Finally during the Dogra period, Maharaja

Pratap Singh (1885-1925) gradually introduced Urdu in those roles, with some functions assigned to English.

The Islamic period initiated the Persianization of Kashmiri in more than one sense. In Kashmiri literary culture a phase began that developed into ‘Kashmiri Persian’ and includes over three hundred writers and a thousand critical and literary works (see, e.g., Tikku 1971). The ancestral Sanskrit language and local creativity in Kashmiri—whatever little there was of it—gradually became peripheral. Persian thus became yet another language of access for the Persian-knowing Pandit community and for Muslims. The Pandits used Persian to study their own Hindu religious and cultural texts such as Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Rāmāyana, Shivapurāna, and the Bhagwat Gītā. Pushp (1996: 22) observes that the non-Muslims

. . . enjoyed reading Persian classics like the Mathnavi of Moulana Rumi, the Shahnama of Firdusi and the Sikandarnama of Nizami. These used to be taught in the *maktabs* often run by Kashmiri Pandit *Akhuns* . . .

The Pandit identity with the medium, Pushp observes, was so close that they used Persian to produce manuals so that literate Kashmiris could read about Hindu rituals (*karmakāṇḍa*), astrology (*jyotishashāstra*), and the indigenous medical system (*āyurveda*) in Persian. The Pandits ran *maktabs*, which are traditionally associated with Muslim education and Islamic teaching. This identity with Persian

continued until English also gradually became part of the linguistic repertoire of educated Kashmiris. In this interplay of language, politics and power, the Kashmiri language never received patronage from the powerful and the court, except for a short duration during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470). That picture has not altered even now in any serious sense (see Warikoo 1996).

### 2.1. Confronting regionality

The literary culture of Kashmir has been nurtured within the regionality that confronts this speech community: It is evident in language attitudes, language choices, and indeed in Kashmiris' responses to the functional power of the languages the community has encountered in its history. However, regionality contributed to the multilingual milieu that produced several types of multilingual elites in Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and English.

An *elitist* multilingualism in various degrees penetrated down into the Kashmiri society. We see a *bilinguals' literary creativity* in Persian, in Urdu, in Hindi, in Punjabi, and in a very restricted sense —and much later—in English. This *bilinguality*, is evident in multiple layers of convergence in the Kashmiri language and literature, in the development of a *diglossic* situation in which two or more varieties of Kashmiri co-exist, for example, Sanskritized, Persianized and Englishized varieties: Bilinguality is also evident in the extension of the *style range* of Kashmiri.

The elevated styles are marked by the types of foregrounding in each style: *Sanskritization* in terms of the Sanskritic substratum, especially the vocabulary and the underlying literary canon related to the Sanskritic tradition. And *Persianization* in terms of the extensive borrowings at various levels from the Persian language and the Perso-Arabic literary styles and canons.

The colloquial or *neutral* style refers to what Śītikāṅṭha Achārya (13<sup>th</sup> century?) has called *sarvagōcara deśī-bhāṣā* (the native language intelligible to all), in his treatise on an esoteric *Tāntric* sect entitled *Mahānaya Prakāś* (Illumination of Highest Attainment or Discipline). We can apply Śītikāṅṭha Achāryā's yardstick in retrospect and say that what he perhaps had in mind is a variety of Kashmiri that is unmarked by the Sanskritized or Persianized foregrounding.

In literary creativity and in social interaction it is, however, not uncommon among Kashmiris to engage in style shift and style alteration. The strategy of hybridization—mixing of two or more languages—is part of Kashmiri discourse and indeed of its literary creativity, as it is indeed of other major literary traditions of the subcontinent. Kashmiris traditionally acquired their bi-or- multilingual competence from multiple sources—from sacred texts, from religious discourses in temples and mosques, from interaction with pilgrims to Hindu and Muslim sacred

places and from tourists visiting the Valley. Thus, in acquiring this ‘literacy’ a written text was not necessarily the main resource.

This tradition of a bilinguality cultivated from such sources is evident in Parmananda (1791-1874), a *bhakti* poet, who learnt some Persian from the village *mullā* in Bhavan (Matan), Sanskrit from the discourses on sacred Hindu texts, Shaiva philosophy from a Pandit, and the lore of Laleshwari (born around 1335) and Sheikh-Nur-ud-Din (1376-1438) from the oral tradition of the village and beyond. His biographer and translator into English, Zinda Kaul “Masterji”—himself a poet of distinction—believes that Parmanada’s contribution “...surpasses all his known predecessors in the technique of meter and rhyme, and all excepting only Lalla in mysticism ...his didactic poems and even his psalms and litanies have not yet been surpassed” (1941:19).

Parmananda, thus, provides a good example of creative bilinguality that has been one of the traditions of Kashmiri literary culture. Consider the following three example of Parmananda’s language shift and mixing. First is the Sanskritization of his style in his poetry as in the following *pada* (foot of a measure of verse):

*karmībhūmikāyi dizi dharmuk bala*

*santoshi byāli bhavi ānada phal*

Zinda Kaul does not translate this *pada* word for word, instead he transcreates the underlying idea in English:

Strengthen the field of action with the loam of righteousness, then sow the

seed of contentment which will yield the harvest of bliss: (1955:40—45).

In this *pada* of the poem, there is only one lexical item, the verb *dizi* (‘should give’), that does not produce the stylistic effect of Sanskritization. All other words (*karma*, *bhumi*, *dharma*, *bala*, *santośa*, *ānanda*, *phala*) are from Sanskrit, and semantically most of these words have cultural connotations related to the Hindu texts and traditions. Parmananda metaphorically constructs “the spiritual ideas,” as Zinda Kaul says, “in the familiar language of agricultural processes...” (1958: 40-45).

A native Muslim Faquir, Wahab Sahib, Zinda Kaul tells us, “...playfully complained that Parmananda had written all his poems in “Hindu Kashmiri,” which was intelligible to Hindus only, and nothing for the benefit of his Muslim friends ” (Kaul, 1958: 32—33).

This challenge of the Faquir unfolded the second stylistic shift of Parmananda, that of de-Sanskritization:

*panctre bhāglis karārdādas,*

*vadas zyāda na z† kam.*

In this short verse, the agricultural imagery is maintained; however, the style is different. Zinda Kaul renders it into English as, “ in the contract of division (or produce) in the ratio of five parts to three, the agreement has to be filled exactly—neither more nor less can be accepted” (1958:32-33).

The third stylistic shift demonstrates the smattering of Punjabi and Hindi that Parmanada had learnt from the Sikh sacred text Granth Sahib, and itinerant sadhus:

*bāp hamārā kṛṣṇ huā hō pitā tumhārā nand,*

*āpas mē kyā pahuncōgā ham āp karōdardām*

“Thou art my father, being named Krishna; but Thy father is Nanda (which is my name). What is our mutual relationship then? This Thou alone canst calculate. (1958:51)

This convention of stylistic shift-- and mixing of codes--has become one of the most effective resources for creativity in Kashmiri, particularly in the Modern Period (1900-1947) and the Renaissance (1947-1985).

The mixing of languages indeed was only one face of this convergence. It is also evident in the representation of Sanskrit and Persian metrical patterns, as well as in the classical imagery of *gul-o-bulbul* (the rose and the nightingale) that dominated literary creativity until the Progressive movement influenced young Kashmiri writers.

It was at two conferences in Lucknow (1936) and in Allahabad (1938) that India’s progressive writers outlined the agenda for the Progressive movement. This movement clearly reflected the ideological and social impact of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. But in a serious sense this movement did not impact Kashmiri literary culture until the mid 1940s.

In her assessment of this cultural and linguistic blending of traditions and their implication for the creativity of two religious groups in Kashmir, Cook (1958:28) points out that:

...the pandits composed a new Shaiva literature in Persian verse. The classical Persian *gazel* became the ode to Shiva, Lord of the La Makan, Spaceless Space. The technical vocabulary of Erfan suited their purposes perfectly, and morning prayers were conducted in a Persian which listening neighbours could not distinguish from songs of the “Orafa.” Whatever position they won for themselves in India when forced out of Kashmir by Persian-speaking invaders, the pandit émigrés continued to compose their Persian Shaiva odes.

This convergence cut across the religious divide, as in *Prakāśa Rāmāyana* (see, Koul 1974:273—277), and was not restricted only to the Persian infusion of lexis and grammar but beyond that as pointed out by Grierson (see, Grierson and Barnett, 1920:144):

...in Kashmir, two distinct metrical systems are known and cultivated. The first is that used for formal works, such as epic poems and the like. Here Persian meters, with many irregularities and licenses, are employed. Numerous examples will be found in the edition of Mahmud Gami’s *Yūsuf Zulaikhā*...In that case we have a poem written by a Muslim in the Persian character, and the use of Persian meters is expected, but we find the same system in epics written by Hindūs. For instance, a great portion *Śivaparaiṇaya* of Kṛṣṇa Rāzdān is in well-known *hazaj* metre, and the same is employed in the narrative portions of *the Śrīrāmāvatāra-carita* of Dēvakara-prasāda Bhaṭṭa...

The earlier major philosophical traditions of Kashmiri literary culture include: Shaivaite, the Bhakti, and the Sūfi traditions. The innovative and popular ceremonial

traditions include the *vatsan* and *lōl* traditions. I shall not go into a detailed discussion of these here (For references, see Kachru 1981; 9-13).

In the following sections (3 to 5) I shall instead contextualize Kashmiri literary culture within the linguistic antecedents of the language.

### 3.0 LINGUISTIC AFFINITY OF KASHMIRI

The origin and linguistic affinity of the language of Kashmiris has been a point of prolonged scholarly debates surrounding one major issue: whether Kashmiri is affiliated to the Indo-Aryan or Dardic family of languages. The central points of this ongoing debate are outlined here.

In Grierson's now outdated view (e.g., 1915 and 1919), Kashmiri belongs to a distinct group within the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European. The other group members being Indo-Aryan and Iranian. Grierson considers Kashmiri a "mixed language" of "a Sanskrit form of speech." He proposed that Kashmiri belongs to the Dard group of the Pisacha family allied to Shina. The Dardic substratum, asserts Grierson, forms the basis of the Kashmiri sound system, word formation, grammar and prosodic systems. He identifies several linguistic features that are "peculiar" of Pisacha and which Pisacha shares with Eranian [Iranian]. Therefore, Grierson argues, Kashmiri must be treated as a Dardic language. These characteristic (or what he considers "peculiar") features of Kashmiri include: absence of voiced

aspirates (such as Hindi *gh*, *dh*, *bh*); consonantal epenthesis (change in a consonant under the influence of the following vowel or semi-vowel) aspiration or breathy release of stops in final position (as in *p*, *b*, *t*, *d*); absence of vowel alteration or gemination of Prakrit borrowings; non-deletion of *t* between vowels; presence of a (*ah*) as a marker of indefinitization; presence of large number of post-positions peculiar to Pisacha; the similarity of the numerical system with Pisacha; a three-fold system of demonstrative pronouns (*vi* “this,” *hu* “that” (within sight) or *su* “that” (out of sight); a three-term system for the past tense; and differences in the word order.

In its sentence structure in many respects Kashmiri is identical to Indo-Aryan language in the formation of the passive voice, in subject-verb agreement, in marking ergative case (where, in certain tenses, a subject of a transitive verb take a special case-marking [ergative], and the verb agrees not with its subject but instead with its object, which is in the nominative case). The word order in Kashmiri however, is distinct from Indo-Aryan languages: finite verb (that is the verb marked for tense) occurs in the second position following the verb. Note, for example, Hindi-Urdu (Indo-Aryan) *Sheela khā rahī hai* “Sheela is eating”, and Kashmiri *Sheela cha khyavān*. In Kashmiri the auxiliary (*cha*) marks the agreement features and follows the subject (Sheela), as in English. It has been argued that this

grammatical feature is shared by Kashmiri with languages such as Dutch, German, Icelandic, and Yiddish.

Grierson concedes that Kashmiri has been “powerfully influenced by Indian culture and literature” and that this influence is evident in its vocabulary. However, he is emphatic that, for example, some of the “commonest words,” seldom borrowed and retained for long periods in Kashmiri, correspond to Shina words and are of Pisacha origin, including earlier numerals and kinship terms such as those for ‘father’ and ‘mother’.

Grierson’s position has over a period evoked essentially two types of responses. One group of scholars (e.g., Chatterji 1963) seem to adopt the middle path. On this question Chatterji makes two observations: First, that in spite of the Dardic impact on the Kashmiri people and their language, Kashmiri “...became a part of Sanskritic culture. The Indo-Aryan Prakrits and Apabhramsha from the Midland and from Northern Punjab profoundly modified the Dardic bases of Kashmiri...” (1963). Second that the question of the linguistic affiliation of Kashmiri still is not settled and remains undetermined.

The second group of scholars on the basis of extensive fieldwork and comparative textual and typological studies completely rejects Grierson’s hypothesis. This research raises serious doubts even about the linguistic validity of Grierson’s conceptualization of the Dardic or Pisacha language group. With reference to Kashmiri, Fussman (1972), among others, says that the denomination

“Dardic language” should not strictly speaking be applied to Kashmiri (“Inverssement *stricto sensu* la denomination langue darde ne devrait pas s'appliquer au [Kashmiri]”: 1972:11). This view, from various perspectives and degrees of discussion, has been presented by, among others, Pushp (1996:16) who says that “he [Grierson ] seems to have gone astray at least on two counts.” One of those Pushp considers “the classification of the Kashmiri language as Dardic”. (See also, Ganju 1991, Masica 1991, Pushp 1996, Toshkhani 1996 and Zakharyn 1984).

#### 4.0. THE DARDIC LANGUAGE CONTROVERSY

What complicates the matter further is a larger question about the Dardic languages. The term Dardic traditionally indicates a group of languages or dialects spoken by the Dards, inhabitants of Dardistān [the place of the Dards]. The Dards were of Aryan origin and converted to Islam in the 14th century. The region of Dardistan covers the north of Pakistan and northern Kashmir, in Chitral, parts of the Panjkara river, and the hilly areas of Swat. The word Dard, meaning “a mountain,” is found in the Purāṇas and in Kalhana’s *Rājataranginī*, (River of Kings).

The Dardic languages, as a group, share no linguistic features that distinguish them from the Indo-Aryan languages. The term is generally used for “a bundle of aberrant IA [Indo-Aryan] hill languages.” (Morgenstierne 1961:139). These geographically isolated languages thus escaped contact with the Indo-Aryans of the

*Madhyadēsha* (midland). Dardic is a geographical expression referring primarily to the regional location of these languages without any connotation of shared linguistic features; thus, it is not used in a phylogenetic sense (e.g. Fussman 1972: 11; Strand 1973: 301-302). Grierson's (1919) Pisacha nomenclature for this group also is contestable since he has not made convincing arguments that these languages are derived from the Pisacha Prakrits, nor that these languages are spoken by the descendents of the Pisachas. The connotations of this term Pisacha also are questionable since in common parlance and in Indian mythology Pisacha means a cannibal demon. And even now, in colloquial Kashmiri, the word continues to be used in that sense. In fairness to Grierson, it should be added that he cautions us that "a tribe speaking a Piśaca language is not necessarily of Piśaca descent."

These languages, however, are of considerable typological, sociolinguistic and cultural interest. There is extensive and continuing discussion of their linguistic grouping and affiliation which remains unresolved. The primary question is: are these languages Indo-Aryan or non-Indo-Aryan? In response to this question there are two hypotheses, as discussed below: that these languages belong to a distinct linguistic group called the Dardic group or that these languages belong to the Indo-Aryan group.

#### 4.1. THE DISTINCT DARDIC GROUP HYPOTHESIS

In Grierson's now obsolete view, the Dardic languages form a third group, a sub-family of the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European (Grierson 1919: 1-10), the other two sub-families being Indo-Aryan and Iranian. In his view, the Pisacha languages, including the Shina-Khowar group, "occupy a position intermediate between the Sanskritic languages of India proper and Eranian languages farther to the west." These languages, Grierson emphasizes, are "neither of Indian nor of Eranian origin, but form a third branch of the Aryan stock"(1906). However, he agrees that the Dardic languages share many features with the Sanskritic languages and share still others with the Iranian family of languages. The Dardic family, he observes, thus separated from the parent stem after it branched forth from the Indian languages, "but before the Eranian languages had developed all their peculiar characteristics" (ibid.).

Grierson's controversial classification provides the following major groups of the Dardic languages:

1. The Kafir group (including Bashgali, Wai-ala, Wasi-veri, Ashkund, Kalasha, Gawar-bati, and Pashai);
2. The Khowar (or Chitrali) group; and
3. The Dard group (including Shina, Kashmiri, Kashtwari, Siraji, Rambani, and Kohistani). Kohistani also includes Garwi, Torwali, and Maiya).

This classification, however, is now considered flawed on linguistic and other grounds. (Fussman 1972: 11-14; Masica 1991: 461). The terrain of the Dardic

region has been much more accessible since Grierson's study; therefore, more insightful field work and research in the region has been possible. It is on the basis of such research that Masica, for example, asserts that Grierson's view on the Dardic languages is "now definitely obsolete, and incorrect also in its details, but unfortunately often still given in works of reference" (1991:461). These concerns were originally raised mainly by Morgenstierne.

#### 4.2. THE INDO-ARYAN HYPOTHESIS

Georg Morgenstierne, after extensive research in the region, claims that there is considerable evidence that the Dardic languages are Indo-Aryan. However, he is less assertive of the Kāfir (also called Nuristānī) languages. In his view, the Dardic languages are purely of Indo-Aryan origin and can be traced to a form of speech that closely resembles Vedic. Because these languages did not pass through the Prakrit stage they have preserved archaisms and other features. These features include three sibilants, several types of clusters of consonants, and archaic or antiquated vocabulary. According to Morgenstierne, the fact that there are archaisms present in Dardic that are lost in later Indo-Aryan, or that there is loss of aspiration in Dardic, is not at all evidence for a hypothesis that the languages are not Indo-Aryan.

The Dardic languages, says Morgenstierne, “contain absolutely no features which cannot be derived from old IA [Indo-Aryan]” (1961). Morgenstierne concludes that Dardic languages (Kashmiri, Shina, Indus Kohistani, Khowar, Kalsha, Pashai, Tirahi) are Indo-Aryan languages (see also Ganju 1991).

The Kafir (Nuristānī) languages (Kati, Waigali, Ashkun, and to some extent Dameli) present a different profile. These languages are in a middle position, although “very heavily overlaid by IA (Dardic) words and forms, these dialects have retained several decidedly un-Indian features” (1961:139). There is, says Morgenstierne, “not a single common feature distinguishing Dardic, as a whole, from the rest of the IA [Indo-Aryan] languages, and the Dardic area itself is intersected by a network of isoglosses, often of historical interest as indicating ancient lines of communication as well as barriers” (1961:139).

The controversy of the two major positions is summarized, by among others, Fussman (1972) and Strand (1973). The literature agrees with the major position of Morgenstierne and his evidence that Kafir languages retain some archaic features of (perhaps) proto-Indo-Aryan. These languages have preserved several distinctive “non-Indian” characteristics, including the loss of aspiration, since aspiration is not distinctive in the Iranian languages. The languages preserve a distinction between palatalized velar stops and IE labio-velars, a distinction that no longer exists in Vedic Sanskrit. They also maintain an archaic trait of the dental /s/ after /u/.

Whatever advances have been made in the study of these languages, there is still a paucity of research and empirical data. There is a lack of reliable criteria for the demographic and numerical figures, as well as of typological and comparative studies. The earlier studies, essentially lexical lists and sketchy grammatical outlines (compiled around the 1830s) are not very insightful and often also of questionable authenticity. A majority of these languages and dialects have small numbers of users and no literary tradition, with the exception of Kashmiri, which, as mentioned earlier, has a literary tradition that goes back as far as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For details see e.g., Azad 1959, 1962, 1963 [3 vols. in Urdu], Kaul 1969; Kachru 1981, Toshakhani 1985 (in Hindi).

## 5.0. VARIATION IN KASHMIRI

The language variation within this small Kashmiri speech community is divided on several axes. The regional variation recognizes three major groups: *marāzi* (that of the southern and southeastern region); *kamrāzī* (that of the northern and northwestern region); and the variety used in Srinagar and some of its surrounding environs, which is traditionally considered as standard variety. The only dialect outside the valley is Kashtawari (Kishtwari) spoken in Kashtwar, a town (and a valley) in Southeast Kashmir along the upper Chinab river. Kashtwari has

deep substratum of the Pahari and the Lahanda dialects and is written in T%5akrī characters. The other regional dialects are only partially influenced by Kashmiri. These are spoken in a transitional zone and include Poguli, spoken in the valleys of Pogul, Paristan, Sar ; Siraji, spoken in the town of Doda on the river Chinab; and Rambani spoken in a small area between Srinagar and Jammu. Rambani has restricted functions in a transition zone and contains features of Dōgrī, Kashmiri and Sirāji.

A distinction is also made between the village variety (*gāma kashur*) and the variety (*shahra kashur*) spoken in the summer capital of the state, Srinagar. The Sanskritized and Persianized varieties have been recognized on the bases of the types of lexicalization, the presence of distinct phonological and morphological features, and types of discorsal strategies. These differences were characterized by Grierson as “Hindu Kashmiri” and “Muslim Kashmiri.” In recent years this somewhat controversial dichotomy has been revisited in literature (see, e.g., Kachru 1973: 7-11; and Pushp 1996:16). It can be argued that there are some markers in pronunciation, vocabulary, and word formation that have traditionally been associated with Hindu or Muslim communities. The following are examples of each type.

1. PRONUNCIATION: The two communities share one phonological system; however, the differences are in terms of the substitution (e.g. in Srinagar Kashmiri [rʃ] alternates with [r] in the speech of Muslims, though in the villages it is shared by both the communities). Note the following variation between what Grierson somewhat inaccurately labeled Hindu Kashmiri and Muslim Kashmiri in variety 1 (Hindu Kashmiri) and variety 2 (Muslim Kashmiri).

(a) vowels

(i) central vowel → front vowel : (V1) rɪkh 'line', tɪkh 'run', khɪn 'nasal mucus'; (V2) rikh, tikh, khin')

(ii) high central vowel → low central vowel : (V1: gɪ:ʃh 'eagle', dɪh 'ten', kɪhvɪ 'tea'; V2: gāʃh, dah, kahvɪ)

(iii) central vowel → back vowel : (V1: mɪʃj 'mother'; V2 mōj )

(iv) initial back vowel → central vowel : (V1: ōlav 'potatoes'; V2: ɪlav)

(b) consonants

(i) v → ph : (V1: kho(h) vur 'left', ho(h)vur 'wife's parents'; V2: khophur, hophur)

(ii) initial cr → c' : (V1: brōr 'cat', krūr 'well'; V2: byōr, kyūr)

(iii) r → r : (V1 gur 'horse', yōr 'here', hōr 'there'; V2 guṛ, yōṛ, hōṛ)

2. VOCABULARY: The dichotomy of Sanskritization (SK) and Persianization (PK) is not necessarily always a basis for the religious differences. There are some Sanskrit words which are present in Muslim Kashmiri and less frequent in Hindu Kashmiri (e.g., tsɪndɪr 'moon').

*Variety 1:* athɪʃchalun 'to wash hands'; bagvān 'god'; bohgun 'cooking vessel', čāy 'tea', darɪm 'religion', gandun 'betrothal'; gosɪn 'holy man', khōs 'cup', krūd 'anger', mɪdrēr 'sugar', mahṛā 'sir', mɪthɪr 'urine', maɪd 'a man', mōl 'father'; neni 'meat', namaskār 'greeting', pōn 'water', pāph 'sin', pūn 'good deed', pɪʃjāmɪ 'trousers', prān 'soul', račh 'amulet', sokṛɪvār 'Friday', sirī 'sun'; sorɪg 'paradise', sopun 'dream', thāl 'dish', vurɪbal 'kitchen for a feast', zukām 'influenza'.

*Variety 2*: athi pʌtʃhrun, khq̄dā, pāfīli, kʌhvī, dīn, niʃʌn', phʌkīr, vāv, pyāli, gʌsi, khand, haz, idrār, mohn'uv, bab, nāʃi (or māz), salām, āb, gonah, savāb, yezāri, ruh, tʌviz, jumah, akhtāb, janath, khāb, trʌm' vāzivān, nʌzli-

3. WORD FORMATION: The differences are primarily in terms of the sources (Sanskrit and Persian), or in frequency of use by speakers of one variety as opposed to the other variety. Note, for example, the use of the conjunction *hargah* ('if') in one variety, but not in Srinagar where the use of *agar* is more frequent. The following declension is restricted to Muslims in Srinagar, although shared by both the communities in the villages:

nʌm (fem.nʌm), nʌmanhund, nʌman, nʌmav.

A word of caution is warranted about basing these variations exclusively on a religious dichotomy. In recent years—particularly after the 1940s—a process of LEVELING is in progress. The reasons for it are social, educational, increased mobility, and the establishment of Radio Kashmir (July 31, 1948) and later television. In the 1990s I noticed that in various interactional contexts between the Pandits and Muslim Kashmiris in Jammu, the Pandits tended to deemphasize the features that mark their variety in pronunciation, vocabulary and in discourse strategies. The distinct features that operate as religious-markers in George Grierson's data are now much less obvious. In other words, these features have been leveled. But that is only part of the story: There is now increased use of Persianization of Kashmiri in the written medium, and it is also evident in social interaction.

In several contexts of interaction this dichotomy between the Pandits and Muslims is misleading. The Sanskritization and Persianization, however, marks

code-alteration for style shift and identity-marking as discussed in the above section. The same creative writer might use both these linguistics resources for stylistic effects, as in the Kashmiri poems composed by Parmananda, Zinda Kaul, and Ghulam Ahmad Mahjur to name just three poets.

## 6.0. THE AGONY OF SCRIPTS

In the choice of a script and in the maintenance and promotion of it for writing Kashmiri, political ideology and religious identities have played an important role. The Kashmiri language historically has been written in four scripts: the Sharda, the Devanagari, the Perso-Arabic, and the Roman. The Sharda script, traced back to the Brahmi (3rd cent. B.C.) was exclusively used by the Pandits of Kashmir; it closely resembles the Nāgaṛī script and is now almost extinct, preserved mainly in manuscripts and horoscopes. The Perso-Arabic script, with several modifications, has been adopted by the state government as the official script of the language (see, Koul, 1995). A number of modified versions of the Devanagari and Roman scripts continue to be used in whatever little is published in the Kashmiri language—and it indeed is very little. The differences in various versions of each script are essentially in the use of the diacritic marks.

The Roman script was used by the Baptist missionaries of Serampore (Shrirampur) in Bengal for publishing the Kashmiri versions of the New Testament

(1821) and selected parts of the Old Testament (1827, 1832). This script, in Chatterji's view (1954:77), would have been "the most reasonable and practical thing" for the Kashmiri language. The Perso-Arabic writing, Chatterji continues, "is not at all a satisfactory solution" It is, however, the Perso-Arabic script that has finally prevailed (see Kachru 1981: 6-7).

The above outline of the issues related to Kashmiri literary culture, its linguistic affiliation, and the cultural, attitudinal, and identity related consequences of its regionality tell only part of the complex story. One consequence of these contexts has been language dependence and language attrition. A major onslaught to *Kashmiriyat* came in the post 1980s—actually around 1988—when the Renaissance period of Kashmiri literary culture and literature came slowly to a halt. It was then that a variety of wellorganized fronts of militancy openly surfaced in the Valley. And even now it has not abated.

In 1942, a major poet of Kashmiri, Zinda Kaul recited a poem at a *mushayira* (poetic symposium) at Sri Pratap College, in Srinagar. The poem entitled, "Panin Kath" ("About ourselves") a Kashmiri remorsefully laments that "we have lost our mother tongue, whither can such men go?" But then, there is a prophetic strain of hope:

I feel a hope rising in my heart that God willing, there will come a day when you will be glad to say:...Kashmiris are to be congratulated... They have found some good counselor and have

discovered right path -- they were divided and had lost their tongue, but have now at last found it by great effort.

At present there are no indicators—linguistic, cultural, attitudinal or political—that “the lost tongue,” has been “found” by the Kashmiris in their native Kashmir or in the contexts of diaspora or their status as “migrants” from the state, as that term is used to describe Pandits by the Government of India and by India’s media. The following sections discuss these issues related to the Kashmiri language within the contexts of language shift, decay, and death in the subcontinent and beyond.

## 7.0 SHIFT, DECAY, AND LAST WORDS

My use of this obituarial lexicon of decay, and last words, for Kashmiri is not merely a reflection on an imagined future. It indeed is a reality that we already are witnessing globally. One major initiator of language death is language SHIFT: That is, as mentioned earlier, acquisition of another language due to migration and or the functional, social, or economic power of one or more other languages.

The recent scholarly debate about and predictions of language death in the subcontinent and beyond has shown that a host of culturally and linguistically diverse human languages are passing through escalating critical stages of

endangerment, decay, and ultimate demise. Is Kashmiri a potential candidate for that critical list? A quick answer is that ‘yes’ it is. Given the way events are unfolding, especially for the Pandits of Kashmir, it is only excessive optimism that will halt writing an obituarial note of the language. The indicators show that the next generation of the Kashmiri Pandits will witness a comatose Kashmiri language. And even at present Kashmiri is gradually qualifying to be on the list of “moribund” and “endangered” languages of the subcontinent.

The doomsday prediction world wide is that in the present century we will witness the last words of 50 percent of the estimated 6,000 of the world’s languages. This language extinction will be proportionately shared by India’s 380 languages (if that estimated figure is not too conservative) including Kashmiri. This Cassandra-like attitude is based on a variety of indicators as reflected in the sociolinguistic history of the Kashmiri language.

The first indicator is the current status of the language in Kashmir and beyond its borders. The Eighth Schedule of India’s constitution recognizes Kashmiri as one of the national languages; however, the state has adopted Urdu as the official language, thus, constraining Kashmiri from developing any professional functional domains that would alter its status of being primarily a “home language.” Whatever educational uses are made of the Kashmiri medium, it enjoys hardly any official functional uses, and the attitudes toward the language have not changed during the Post-1947 period. The inclusion of the Kashmiri language in the Eighth

Schedule of India's constitution was not motivated by any numerical or functional considerations, but was primarily a political decision. The ongoing militancy in the state and its ideological, cultural and religious constructs of Kashmir and its people have further weakened the case for support and promotion of the Kashmiri language as an exponent of *Kashmiriyat*.

The second indicator is attitudinal: That is, how the creative writers in Kashmiri traditionally have agonized about the attitude and status of the language. It is true that the history of Kashmiri literature shows the excitement of writers when they finally settle on Kashmiri as their medium and at last find “their tongue” for literary creativity. However, we see that a majority of important Kashmiri poets first experimented with Urdu, Persian, Hindi, and some with English. Ghulam Ahmad Mahjur considered Kashmiri a “backward language”<sup>8</sup> though he played the most important role in its literary revival. Dina Nath Nadim in 1974 candidly confessed that, “My language was Kashmiri, but we were ashamed of writing in Kashmiri. We were not just ashamed; we didn't know how to write in the language.”<sup>9</sup> The story of other leading Kashmiri writers is not different and the situation has not significantly altered.

The Kashmiris have historically given the status of literary, cultivated, or elitist languages and literatures to Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and Hindi, in recent years,

to English. One earlier Kashmiri Persian poet, Lachman Raina (d.1989), expresses this attitude in an often-quoted *masnavi*:

Writing verse in Kashmiri  
 is groping in the dark.  
 If you would shine as a candle-flame,  
 write in Persian verse;  
 you would merely waste your talent if  
 you write in Kashmiri.  
 For you would not the jasmine hide  
 in a nettle bush,  
 nor edible oil or spices waste  
 on a dish of mallow wild.  
 But times have changed and Persian is  
 no longer read;  
 and radish and sugar-loaf is  
 relished alike. (See Kaul, 1969:175)

In the 1940s, we notice a tone of reflection and agony on the status of Kashmiri. We see this agony in Mahjur's elder contemporary Zinda Kaul, whose poem, *Panny Kath* (About Ourselves), I have mentioned earlier. In this poem, a sympathetic non-Kashmiri chides a Kashmiri in these words:

You are wasting time sitting at the shore,  
 while other nations are taking to boats eager to cross over.

To which the Kashmiri responds:

We are like a house divided against itself, and have lost our mother tongue. Whither can such men go? The wise have said that food prepared by (disagreeing) partners goes to dogs (since each thinks it is the other's duty to watch it).

(Tr. by Zinda Kaul)

And, yet another indicator of this attitude toward Kashmiri is reflected in the preference and search of Kashmiris for external models of comparison for excellence as creative writers. The lingering legacy of earlier Persian cultural domination is evident in such comparisons: the Kashmiri poet Mahmud Gami of Shahbad (d. 1855) was called the Nizami of Kashmir, and Wahab Pare (1846-1914) was favorably called the Firdausi of Kashmir; both were notable poets in Persian. The markers of literary status are thus constructed by comparison with, for example, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, and English. There has traditionally been a kind of insecurity in being a Kashmiri writer—insecurity in terms of position and in terms of recognition.

And in functional terms, the Kashmiri language in Kashmir is a prisoner of its own two borders—on the one side the present “line of control” near Uri and on the other side the Banihal Pass. The currency of the Kashmiri language—whatever functional domains the language has acquired—is within that limited territory and ceases at these borders, one artificially created and one a natural boundary. Beyond that, in India and Pakistan, Kashmiris are in diaspora--both real and imagined, forced and voluntary, recent and of past

generations. In some Kashmiri homes, on the plains of India and Pakistan, the language is already in a comatose state; in a majority of diasporic families one can see gradual decay and death of the Kashmiri language as shown in Bhatt's study of Kashmiris in Delhi (1989; see also Kak 2001).

I see this happen in my own family, in my children and in the Kashmiri *barādarī* we interact with in the Midwest of the United States and in other parts. In India one observes an identical linguistic behavior and language use in younger generations of Kashmiris in Jammu and in the Pamposh Colony, in South Delhi, where several Kashmiri speaking Pandit families relocated after the 1950s. This observation is confirmed in other parts of India too.

We have no reason to believe that in the United States, Britain and other countries outside India the language of diasporic Kashmiris will have a different fate than that of such other diasporic minority languages. I am reminded of the users of transplanted Armenian language in the USA by the “smoldering generation: a generation who have almost lost their language.” The Armenian culture revivalists have finally recognized that “the slide of obliteration” of the culture and language cannot be checked.

The Kashmiri language has become the language of yet another diasporic “smoldering generation,” in both their native land and beyond the borders of India in other adopted countries. What I have said about the Armenian and Kashmiri

languages is the fate of a significant number of other languages—diasporic or non-diasporic—in India, in Asia, and beyond.

This has happened in the past, and this doom is hovering over South Asia’s languages now—slowly but visibly a host of languages are passing through various stages of extinction. These “moribund” or “endangered” languages in the region include the following.

<b>BANGLADESH</b>		
Language	Speakers	Year of Census
Mru	18,000	
Phalura	8,000	
Chak	6,000	
Pankua	3,000	
Khyang	<b>2,000</b>	
Kumi	<b>2,000</b>	
<b>INDIA</b>		
Agariya	98	1961
Aimol	108	1961
Anal	11,074	1981
Andamanese	17	1961
Angika	473 or 502	1971
Ao	101 or 302	1981

**NEPAL**

Sherpa	140,000
Danuvar	28,000
Dhangar	20,000
Derai	7,000
Thakali	7,000
Kumal	1,000
Byangsi	1,000

**PAKISTAN**

Brahui	1,400
Khowar	250
Wanetesi	80,000
Bashkarik	40,000
Bateri	30,000
Kati	5,000
Dameli	5,000
Gourarbatl	1,000
Palasi	1,000

The colonization of America and Australia is responsible for the greatest extinction of indigenous languages, and closer to its home in the British Isles English caused the extinction of Cornish, a Celtic language, that lost its last speaker almost 200 years ago. Manx as a native language became extinct in 1900 on the Isle of Manx. I must, however, add that I do not imply that some pockets of Kashmiri users will not survive, as do some Irish-speakers in parts of Ireland.

The numerical profile, and functionally restricted domains of a particular language tell only a part of the story of the threatened decay or death of India's minority languages. There is yet another initiator of the loss of India's linguistic

heritage: It is the post-1947 language initiatives embodied in the Eighth Schedule of India's Constitution.

The underlying assumption of the Eighth Schedule seems to be that of language reductionism and selection so that the pluralistic linguistic profile of India could be reduced to a “manageable” number of national languages. This was one agonizing initiative in response to earlier characterization of the subcontinent as “a Tower of Babel,” and a land of linguistic “confusion” and “anarchy.” This response resulted in a much-debated and controversial selection of languages—now eighteen—for the designation of national languages.

The critique of India's language management has resulted in an on-going debate that faults these initiatives on a variety of counts (for an overview see, e.g. Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal 1995). I shall identify the following.

First, *conceptual prescriptivism*, that is, adoption of a language policy model, essentially duplicated from what was then the USSR. It is debatable whether this model was appropriate for a democratic state like India. Second, *hierarchical identification*, that is recognition of a hierarchy of languages that ultimately led to divisive reorganization of India's states. Third, *functional isolation*, that is, non-recognition of the functional range of viable linguistic and literary cultures within a linguistic culture. A consequence of this ‘isolation’ is continuous demand for language rights in a several states in India—both in the South and North. Fourth, *identity suppression*, that is, non-recognition of language

as an exponent of cultural identity (e.g., the tribal languages, and a variety of other languages). Finally, *role marginalization*, that is marginalization of the functions of minority languages by the majority language users.

What this digression shows is that in spite of recognition of Kashmiri among the India's eighteen national languages and the patronage the language receives due to this status, the attitude of Kashmiri's toward their language has not changed. In the Jammu and Kashmir state, Kashmiri does not have the status of the state language. That status is given to Urdu, and thereby hangs yet another linguistic tale.

It is indeed true that in diasporic contexts, by acquiring other languages, English, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and so on, we Kashmiris certainly become more than we are --linguistically, culturally and functionally. We encounter other traditions and acquire other identities. One might, however, ask: By losing our language, culture, and traditions are the Kashmiris also becoming *less* than we are? We have yet to respond to this question in a constructive, pragmatic, organized and realistic way.

## 8.0. THE RESCUE BRIGADE

The scenario of looming doom confronting the Kashmiri language, particularly in diaspora, is indeed based on the past diasporic destinies of the worlds' many other minority languages. And in reality, the diasporic Kashmiris are not even a "minority" in any significant numerical sense. We are somewhat like the

Parsis (who emigrated to India in the 8<sup>th</sup> century to avoid Muslim persecution) more visible than numerically countable. Therefore one has to consider what type of language input from other languages and interactional contexts the speakers of Kashmiri receive in “melting pot” situations.<sup>10</sup>

In contextualizing the Kashmiri language in our diasporic life and living, we must ask: What functions does Kashmiri serve? What competence in the language do we develop in our younger generation the “melting pot” generation— for using the Kashmiri language as a medium to open doors to what we believe are the canonical texts of Kashmiri culture, legacy, and heritage.

By imparting some minimal knowledge in Kashmiri to our new generation—who generally receive it grudgingly anyway—are we providing them an effective tool to understand any *cultural resources* through the Kashmiri medium? Such literary resources are, for example, the mystic poet Laleshwari, the Bhakti poets Parmananda, Krishna Razdan, Zinda Kaul “Masterji”, the pioneers of modernism Ghulam Ahmad Mahju and Abdul Ahad Azad; and the major initiators of the Renaissance in Kashmiri literature Dina Nath Nadim and Abdul Rahman Rahi.

One might also ask whether this transmission of awareness about this literary tradition—oral and written—has now to be done essentially through translations. The question of translations raises a string of other important questions. Perhaps one initial practical initiative is to plan one or two Kashmiri culture centers, where present and, it is to be hoped, future generations can locate resources to study what

we believe represents this legacy of Kashmiri culture and what we so fondly call *Kashmiriyat*. I will not go into those details here.

One major center of the Pandit community is Delhi, both numerically and in terms of sociopolitical activism. However, within Delhi there is no center which in any serious sense qualifies as a repository of Kashmiri cultural resources—historical, social, intellectual, and literary.

We have no organized access to valuable papers of Kashmiri Pandits and other thinkers, writers, and artists that reflect their perceptions of Kashmiri social, political, and ideological movements. We have no coordinated archives of the sociocultural history of the past and the present of our community and of the communities that played a vital role in our lives.

The younger generation of Kashmiris should have access to the major studies and debates about Kashmir and Kashmiris as chronicled and represented in the published—and oral—sources from Srinagar before and after the 1980s. These resources—if these have not already been destroyed—include, for example, the daily *Martand*, representing one articulate voice of the Pandits of the Valley; the *Hamdard*, edited by a provocative—and often controversial—political activist Prem Nath Bazaz; the weekly *Desh* associated with the pioneering social reformer and visionary leader Kashyap Bhandu; the weekly *Vitasta* edited by Amarnath Kak; and the *Jyōti* organ of the Kashmiri Pandit Samaj Sudhar Samiti under the dedicated

leadership of Pandit Gopi Krishna, who earned international reputation as a proponent of the *Kuṇḍalini* yoga (“path to higher consciousness”). This list is long and the above examples are just illustrative.

If we agree with the Cassandra-like belief that this wave of doom is resulting in *linguicide*, *language death*, *language suicide*, and *language decay* of the world’s minority languages and cultures, and if we believe that our mother tongue Kashmiri is already engulfed by this wave, now is the time to pause and ask: What role can the “rescue brigades” of the Kashmiri language and culture play?

It appears that the wave has already engulfed the Kashmiri language so far as the Kashmiri Pandit community is concerned. It is present in the refugee camps which the Indian government and media, in a semantically offensive and demeaning way, have termed camps for “migrants” from Kashmir. The doom is active in the diasporic contexts, permanent and temporary, and it is noticeable in the “melting pot” contexts in the United States, Britain, and in several Asian countries where Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims, have relocated in small very small—numbers.

There, however, is certainly some excitement—often muted—about preserving the “beloved language.” I see this excitement in the letters I receive requesting copies of the manual *An Introduction to Spoken Kashmiri*

(2 vols. 1973), and in initiatives started in Boston, in San Francisco, in Washington DC, in Kolkata, and in Delhi. I see it also in the interest shown in my website for

learning spoken Kashmiri. (The credit for creating this website goes to Sunil Fotedar of Texas, who proposed it, developed it, and is still refining it with dedication and commitment).

The doom I have discussed above is Hydra-like: It has many faces and the decay of the Kashmiri language is only one face. A more ominous face is that of the extinction of the Kashmiri Pandits as a community. We see indications and a warning of this threat in a survey report recently released by Medical Aid, a non-governmental organization, auguring that the population of displaced Pandits is not only “declining fast” but also that the community is “sure to face extinction.” This survey, submitted to the National Human Rights Commission, was conducted in one of the “migrant” camps in Jammu.<sup>11</sup> (see Wani 2001).

In the past decade over 200,000 Pandits have been forced to leave the Valley due to increasing militancy. The survey further shows that 13,708 “migrant” Pandits have died in the camps, compared to only 4735 births. Dr. Choudary tells us that “if the present death rate continues, the Pandits are sure to face extinction.” These indeed are chilling words, and if this doom of the community is not controlled, the next generation of the Pandits may not have to worry any more about saving the Kashmiri language.

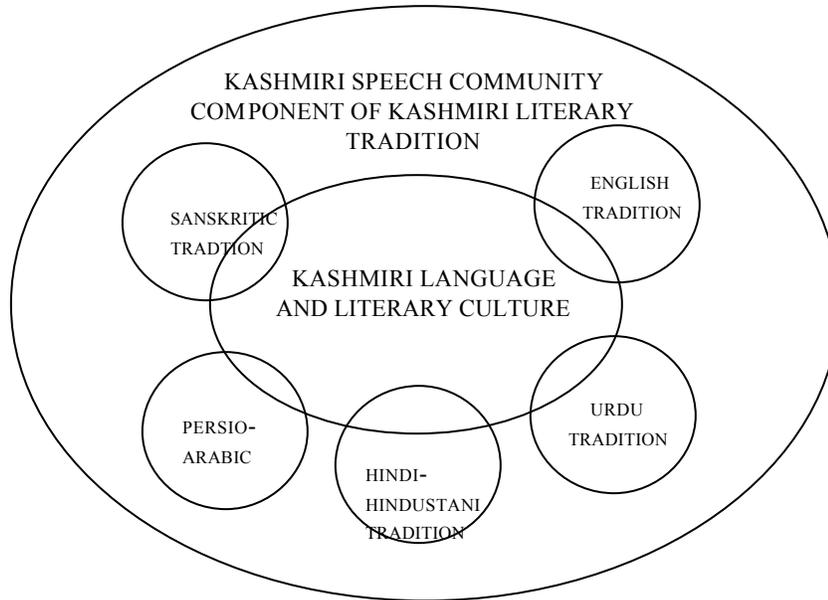
We do not have to be reminded that a language does not have a life of its own, nor does a language die or decay through any natural aging process. A

language lives because it has users for whom it articulates certain identities or becomes a tool of functional power.

A language dies or decays because its users believe that it has no vital uses for them for preserving their cherished identities. The speakers gradually shift to other languages—languages that provide access to, functionally and attitudinally, greener pastures. In other words, the “melting pot” finally consumes them. That is when obituaries of languages are written. In the case of Kashmiri, and what may be called Kashmiri literary culture—certainly in diaspora—that melting pot hypothesis has already become an observable reality.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

In the history and evolution of literacy and literary culture in Kashmir, and in the formation of Kashmiri literacy, culture, space and time have determined the linguistic form and functions of the language. One major—and lasting—impact of this interplay of space and time is evident in layers of the hybridization of Kashmiri language and literature. These multiple linguistic identities may be represented as follows.



In the formation of Kashmiri literary culture, then, each cultural, linguistic and literary strand has added yet another dimension of canonicity and linguistic hybridization: This is also evident in the range of thematic and formal traditions in Kashmiri, for example, the Śaivite (or Brahmanical), the Bhakti (devotional) and the Islamic (Sūfi) (for references see Kachru 1981: 7-13). It is the composite of these traditions, and their coexistence that ultimately has developed into what is meant by *Kashmiriyat* (*Kashmiriness*). What future direction this literary tradition will take only time will tell.

## NOTES

1. A version of several sections of this study have appeared earlier in *Vitasta* (Kolkata), 2001.
2. For more details of some selected aspects of Kashmiri literary culture and its history in English, see, e.g., Grierson and Barnett 1920; Kaul 1969, Kachru 1981. There are several studies available in Urdu. (e.g. Azad [3 vols], 1959, 1962 and 1963), Hindi (e.g. Toshakhani).
3. For extensive studies of the “Areal characteristics” of the subcontinent see, e.g., Chatterji 1963; Das 1973; D’souza 1966; Emeneau 1956, Gokak 1957, Kachru 1992; Kosambi 1956; Masica 1976; Mukherji 1975; Nagendra 1959; Pandit 1972.
4. See e.g. Emeneau 1956; Masica 1976.
5. See D’souza 1992; Ferguson 1992; Masica 1992; Bhatt 1992.
6. See Kachru 1983 and 1992.
7. See Kachru 1981.
8. Mahjur used this expression in a published letter. See, Kaul (1988:168) . In this joint letter, written by Mahjur and Gangadhar Bhatt Dehati (journalist and writer), they say that “one of the undersigned writes poetry in a *backward language* like Kashmiri and the other is a writer in Urdu, and both belong to *a neglected country*.” (Emphasis added): no date given. This letter was written in response to an invitation to attend a literary conference outside Kashmir.

9. In an interview in his Jawahir Nagar home in Srinagar.
10. The “melting pot” generation refers to the attempts of minority groups (e.g., ethnic, religious, linguistic) for assimilation with what is called “the main stream,” particularly in diasporic contexts. This term was originally used almost a century ago by Israel Zangwill, and it continues to evoke both positive and negative reactions, for example, in the U.S.A.
11. This news item appeared in The newspaper today.com (India Today News Group) under the caption “The population of Hindus declining dangerously: Survey” by Izhar Wani, dated February, 25, 2001.

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