

REPRESENTATION OF KASHMIRIYAT IN REHMAN RAHI'S POETRY

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Abstract

Abdul Rehman Rahi, popularly known as Rehman Rahi, is one of the most distinguished poets of Kashmir who has made a significant contribution to Kashmiri literature and poetry. Though a literary figure of diverse interests he eventually consolidated his position as a poet of Kashmiri language. He was awarded prestigious awards like Sahitya Akademi Award for his poetry collection *Nawroz-i-Saba*, Padma Shri and Jnanpith Award. He is the first and the only Kashmiri to be awarded the Jnanpith Award for his poetry collection *Siyah Rood Jaren Manz*. The argument of the present paper is that Rahi as a poet foregrounds the essential inclusiveness of Kashmiri culture across his poetry. It will not be an exaggeration to call him a poet of all Kashmiris—be they Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The present paper attempts to highlight how Rahi blends the pluralistic, cosmopolitan and syncretic ethos of Kashmir represented by both Islamic Sufism and Hindu Shaivism. In his poetical works like *Nawroz-i-Saba* (Advent of the Spring Breeze, 1958) to *Siyah Rood Jaren Manz* (In Dark Downpours, 1998) he has crafted a new poetics of literary modernity which is that of an intellectual engagement with Kashmir's dense spiritual and intellectual history from Abhinav Gupta, Lal Ded and Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani. He is also influenced by the mystic poetry of Lalla and Shams Faqir, modern Persian writers and Western writers like Hopkins and Eliot. He also uses symbols of Greek, Islamic and Hindu mythology. He gives expression to the great, grand, noble, profound and perennial elements of the tradition of Kashmir. The best example of it is his poem which Kashmir University has adopted as its tarana which highlights Rahi's boundless horizon of imagination, his assimilative power and his grasp of the quintessential

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intellectual, spiritual, religious, artistic genius of Kashmir. In short, the attempt of this paper is to foreground what has been called Kashmiriyat by many critics as is manifested in many of his poems.

Keywords: Kashmiriyat, Lal Ded, Sheikh-Nooruddin, Vaakh, Shruk, Mother Kasheer,

Main Paper

At the very outset, the word Kashmiriyat needs some explaining. It connotes an ethos of religious and cultural tolerance and harmony between the majority Muslims and the minority Hindus peculiar to Kashmir. It is also used to denote a syncretic tradition created by the indigenous mystical tradition of Kashmir. Taking a look at this word in the light of books written on Kashmir, like Rattan Lal Hangloo's chapter "Kashmiriyat: The Voice of the Past Misconstrued" in a book titled *The Parchment of Kashmir* edited by Nyla Ali Khan, it unfolds that the concept has largely been used to denote communal harmony, multiculturalism and the tolerance that the majority community displays towards the minority community. And in the recent times it has been defined as a marker of Kashmiri identity that cuts across the religious divide. Hangloo further argues:

Despite the evolution of varied religious and other ideologies in various neighbouring and distant regions, Kashmiris have not been permanently influenced by any of them so the extent of eliminating the presence of local tradition in their lives....As a result the heretical tradition has always remained more powerful and widely spread than any other religious formulation.

(Khan 2012:16)

Similarly, Yoginder Singh Sikand, an Indian writer and academic who has written several books on Islam-related issues in India makes a similar argument in his article "Popular Kashmiri Sufism and the Challenge of Scripturalist Islam (1900-1989)". He argues, "It was precisely by adapting their message to the cultural world of the Kashmiris and promoting a unique syncretic tradition that Islam had been able to make vast number of converts in the area" (490). Similarly Neerja Mattoo claims, "...a kind of fusion of faiths took place, and it is from this fusion that Rishi order of Kashmir was born". (Mattoo, 2012: 93). Pertinently according to some hagiographers the most important representatives of the syncretic tradition of Kashmir were Lal Ded and Sheikul Alam. Lalleshwari, also known locally as

Lal Ded (1320–1392), was a Kashmiri mystic of the Kashmir Shaivism school of Hindu philosophy. She was the creator of the style of mystic poetry called vatsun or *Vakhs*, literally "speech" (from Sanskrit *vaak*). Known as Lal Vakhs, her verses are the earliest compositions in the Kashmiri language and are an important part in the history of modern Kashmiri literature. There are two famous stories about Lalla Ded. It is said that Lalla used to want naked fearlessly until, one day, she saw Shah Hamdan approaching. Finding no place to hide, she rushed into a baker's shop and jumped into his large blazing oven. She miraculously came out unscathed after Shah Hamdan had left and explained that for once she had seen a true man and had to hide herself from him. This story is recorded by BirbalKachru-the Pandit Historian. The other story is about Sheikh-Nooruddin Noorani (1377–1438); sometimes spelled Nund Reshi), also known as Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani and by the title Alamdar-e-Kashmir ("Flag Bearer of Kashmir"), was a Kashmiri Sufi saint, mystic, poet and Islamic preacher who pays his tribute to Lalla in these lines:

That Lalla of Padmanpore
 Who had drunk to her fill the nectar
 She was an avatar of ours
 O God, grant me the same spiritual power

(Qtd in Singh 2016: 2)

Many Rishinamas narrate the story of Nuruddin's birth and his refusal to be nursed by anyone until Lal Ded happened to pass by and took him to breastfeed him, saying, "when you were not ashamed of being born, why are now ashamed of suckling?" (Mattu, Rishinama, 73). This way Nuruddin receives his first nourishment from the noblest and purest woman of Kashmiri.

Coming to Rahman Rahi, he was born on May 6 1925 at Wazipoora Srinagar, started his career as a clerk in Public Works Department in 1948. He was also an active member of Progressive Writers' Association and he represented it as the General Secretary. At this stage of his life he also became an editor of Kwang Posh, the literary journal of the PWA. Subsequently he did a Master's degree in Persian (1952) and English (1962) and joined the Department of Persian as a lecturer. Though a literary figure of diverse interests he eventually consolidated his position as a poet of Kashmiri language. He was awarded prestigious awards like SahityaAkademi Award for his poetry collection Nawroz-i-Saba, Padma Shri and Jnanpith Award. He is the first and the only Kashmiri to be awarded the Jnanpith Award for his poetry collection Siyah Rood Jaren Manz. He passed away in 2023.

Rehman Rahi is a poet who foregrounds the essential inclusiveness of Kashmiri culture across his poetry. It will not be an exaggeration to call him a poet of all Kashmiris—be they Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. It was he who founded the Kashmiri Cultural Congress in 1947 for the recognition of Kashmiri literature and language across India. Subsequently he played a pivotal role in modernising Kashmiri idiom and divesting it from Persian and other influences. He took it upon himself to promote the Kashmiri language and literature at a time when the language was completely neglected by official/political apathy. He firmly believed that if there is no Kashmiri language, there would be no Kashmiri and therefore no Kashmir. In an interview he once quoted the example of Israelis who were scattered throughout the world but it is their language, which is, Hebrew, that they finally came together, revived it and made it a medium of expression, education and intellectual pursuits. Kashmiri language is also beset with many challenges and Kashmiris hence can take a cue from Israelis and save it from extinction. Rahi held that if we want to have real concepts around us, it is possible only through one's own mother tongue. He like Raja Rao believed that English is the language of our intellectual make up and not our emotional make up. He argues that every word has at least three meanings: the dictionary meaning, the emotional meaning and the cultural meaning and it is possible to understand these three meanings only in one's mother tongue.

Since the main argument of this paper is to highlight how Kashmiriyat is represented by him in his poetry. There are many poems of Rahi in which he exemplifies it. The best example of it is his poem which Kashmir University has adopted as its *tarana* which highlights Rahi's boundless horizon of imagination, his assimilative power and his grasp of the quintessential intellectual, spiritual, religious, artistic genius of Kashmir.

O Mother Kasheer

All founts of knowledge have ever been at your bidding command

O you who flows like a vitasta through our bosoms
 You willed and this seat of learning came into being
 In this paradise on earth
 This fountain of knowledge made a leap at your will
 And yours was the intent which bodied forth into what we behold around
 us here
 You are the wisdom of our past which kindly leads us on today
 This is the land that harbours Khamendras' poignant tale and treasures

Bilhana's fond memories
 Isn't it here that 3 Kalhana's Vitasta sprawls far and wide
 And Abhinava Gupta's ocean of knowledge surges sigh
 You are the refulgent flame of Lalla's verse
 You are the solemnity of the Sheikh's sacred hymns
 On this campus dawns the benediction of Hazratbal
 And the moon and the Dal gift the Dusk's tranquillity
 Each dusky moment the quiet narcissus
 When aspiring souls take their wing
 Badshah comes forth to greet them
 When devotion stirs our souls
 We raise a song of praise to Iqbal
 Gani who tore his skirt to shreds
 Spoke for the conscience aroused
 The fresh and bold imagination of Nehru wrung
 Milk out of perspiring rocks
 It is here that the Harmukh peaks cool the scorching summer
 And the lion's eyes burn bright in the caves of snow
 Under the glory of this lighthouse we turn into various little suns
 Playing ecstatically about this vernal bush
 We have the heightened sense of beauty and realize the dream of love
 This soul shall blossom into diverse hues of the rainbow
 And the firmament shall feel restless as mercury

(Bhat 2018:141)

In the lines above, Rahi invokes/revives the ancient glorious spiritual and intellectual tradition of Kashmir and mentions it boastfully. There are many other poems also from Rahi's anthology of poems in which he highlights the ancient Vedic culture of Kashmir represented by stalwarts. Understanding Rahi is a key to the understanding of Kashmiriyat in terms of its richness, diversity, mystery, complexity and universal values.

Rahi's poem titled "JalvitiZaboor" (Revelations and the Psalms, 1966), highlights his faith that language is an inexhaustible source of revelations, the ocean of meanings for a poet to explore. In this poem, Rahi gradually constructs the Kashmiri language as a symbol of "Kashmiriyat" an identity of Kashmir which represents all the vicissitudes of Kashmiri people. The symbol "Kashmiriyat" communicates continuity of a living speech-community that has been threatened to extinction many a time in the course of history. The language stood like a solid rock defending the speech community and providing a solid base for their cultural mores, ethical values and aesthetic tastes. The very title of the poem "jalvitizabuur" (Revelations and the Psalms) symbolically depicts the existing language as a

world of infinite possibilities of expressions. It turns the poet's expression into prophetic revelations. The poem is a good example of Rahi's myth-making. The poet's mother tongue is presented as a prototype mother that fondly nourishes the poet's imagination, the poet being her darling son. The language is personified as a primeval repository of all individual as well as collective dreams, aspirations, deprivations and strengths. The son, in his gratitude, resolves to defend her piety and ensure her continuity. This poem (1966), though seemingly sentimental, reveals Rahman Rahi's total commitment to his language and through language to his people and their traditions and cultural mores. Professor G.R.Malik, former head of the Department of English, comments on the permanent value of the poem:

The poem also shows how Rahi's original genius is in harmony with his tradition enshrined in Kashmiri language, folk-lore, folk-singing, Lal Ded, HabbaKhatoon, Mahmud Ghami, Rasul Mir - all these, as vital components of the tradition, are interwoven into the fabric of Kashmiri language and our poet is integrally related to it both consciously and unconsciously. This authenticates his originality for it is only an original genius which can grasp the tradition and enter into a meaningful relationship with it. Such a person alone can contribute creatively to the enrichment of language and Rahi's own achievement is a fair testimony to this. (Malik 2013:173-75)

Revelation and the Psalms

O my Kashmiri tongue, I swear by you,
 you alone are my gnosis, you alone my sight,
 you alone are a rainbow-like gleam to me,
 you alone are the harp of my conscience.
 In body and soul we stand related .
 You are a touch of morning ray
 to the bud of garden about to sprout.
 When born, I heard you, auguring good,
 I, unenlightened, got awareness from you.
 While sucking milk from the breasts of my mother,
 you sang me lullabies and many a rhyme;
 you sang me melodious cradle songs;
 when morning rose, light I felt tussled,
 with fall of the dusk you put me in lap of nymphs,
 with the sweet squeaking of the motley spinning wheel,
 you made me soar in the sky on the flying-discs;
 at the waterhole you sang me your rueful lays.
 You and I are long-lasting friends,

Our hearts throb in unison
 Our lips whisper in full accord.
 Unflinching is my faith in you, always I shall have trust in you,
 and fondly keep you watching with hope.
 My soul shall remain thirsty for you,
 so always keep watering my verse,
 and never falter in friendship, I beseech.
 May the oyster never keep distance from the little rain drop to produce
 a pearl.
 A half bloomed almond bud I am,
 and you a gale of spring tested by sunlight.
 Never abandon me, be not lost in sand,
 never be a whirlwind to make the lotus shrivel.
 May no one render you dumb again,
 to leave our babes orphaned for meaning.
 Your silence inhibits all my inspiration,
 It is my being in tune with you that I sing my sweet psalms hollowed.
 O Kashmiri tongue, my mother you are,
 I swear by you, for you are my vision,
 you are my awareness.
 You alone rainbow-glimpses of my consciousness,
 You alone are the lyre of my conscience.

(Tr. Shauq)

Similarly in another poem titled "O Zabarwan Hill" Rahi addresses the hill and says that says:

O Zabarwan Hill !
 I waited for my whole life
 that you may break
 your silence, light might spring out
 from my within, O Zabarwan Hill !
 From your stony bosom
 shall gush forth my amorphous primeval shock,
 my dust-ridden eyes might engulf
 the roaring oceans and fill their skirts
 with lotos flowers.
 From Kontilun shall gush out the music of vaakhs,
 and from my bosom there shall spring out
 the music of vatsans;
 the garden gates shall be thrown open,
 the narcissus shall be drenched by morning dew
 like the hovering of the beetle,
 meeting of eyes, and long lasting light!
 O Zabarwan Hill! My childhood pal!

I, with your love in my bone-marrow,
 waited for my whole life.
 Did you ever hear the restive throb of my heart ?
 Yes, I did hear
 many a time your hidden pent up reverberation,
 You shall be allowed freedom,
 (You may not find my foot-prints then,)
 Yet, I shall continue waiting,
 a drifting lonely boat beyond the vortex.
 The warm speech in my bosom is in slumber,
 a smile dawns on the lips of sleep.

The poet addresses the hill personified as the poet's bosom friend. The hill has been a mute spectator of all the cataclysmic changes that the city in its precincts had undergone. The poet has been watching it throughout his life that it would sooner or later break its silence. Yet the hill remains a recluse assuming the resolve of silence. The hill does not reveal anything to the poet. However, the poet has certain personal hope that the hill might stir his imagination so that he could give shape to his experience, and write such immortal songs about the past glory of Kashmir. He looks forward to welcoming the return of days of joy to the city, otherwise overtaken by deadly gloom. It was here in Kashmir that great mystic poetry flourished and great works in many fields of knowledge were produced. Expression in language had the potential to have the desired impact. Kashmir has a glorious tradition in creativity, philosophy and architecture. Reference to Kashmir is given by the name of the hill, Shalimar and Nishat gardens, the local music and poetry of Lal Dyad (14th century) and Habba Khatoon (17th century). He is painfully conscious of the fact that the dust of routine and continuous subjugation have deprived the people of all its pride and pleasure. The poem ends with an optimistic note that a day is sure to come when the poet's country would have its lost glory restored.

The warm speech in my bosom is in slumber,
 a smile dawns on the lips of sleep.

(tr. Shauq)

In yet another poem, Rahi addresses the fourteenth century woman mystic poet, Lal Dyad, in a poem titled "Call Without A Sound: An Ode to Lalla". The text reads:

I

O Wind, be not confounded by stirring thought,
 the ocean is ebullient, the steed's hooves are nail-punched.

The flower-crazy warbling bulbul is struck dumb,
lakes of the fir-covered land's run dry.
Many a constellation sunk into the abyss;

Many a cypress are inundated by tears.
Perchance, O Lalla! if you revisit your garden;
surely you shall prefer to take venom.
Shiva and Shakht, both, fled their abode,
leaving your Kashpmar a deserted land.
Gales ransacked all pleasure rooms,
black daggers fell on all the candles lit.
Lotus-like eyes, casements ajar
are overwhelmed by a murky smog.
Brawny breasts now wind-struck doors.
Every word the Shahnaamah of yore
reads like a mournful elegy;
Gulrez torn to shreds ,
now a thorny creel.
In wee hours begins our everyday
no sound, the pop of guns is heard,
in the eventide flurry of flames are seen.
every soul dumfounded, pent up tales;
news papers reflect but helter-skelter.
All dispersed hopes, musings, and ruminations,
are flooded by sinister premonitions.

II

Yesterday's music in moonlit chambers,
held as ocean all isles in thrall.
rapturous dance in golden row-boats,
verdure and tranquillity in plenty we beheld.
Resplendent looked the Zabarwan cliffs
in the dawn, in the dusk, the waters of the Wullar
thrived and thrilled in crimson glow.
What sweet dreams accompanying swans,
soared freely high in the skies !
Desire fluttered with wings of the hawk!
Imagination descended unhampered,
lightning-like thoughts shone golden bright;
the unconscious gushed forth swelling founts.
Awakened mind, a tome hallowed;
breath a mystery, heaved with meaning.

Having shone like a lamp-lit niche,
not-having encouraged strife and sweat.

When rooms were fondly clay-laved clean
 the flower vendor anon they called in.
 When smoke was inhaled, nymphs' lays were heard.
 Buds of the garden bush hurried to burgeon;
 steps on the road, a berserk brigade;
 curls unfurled cascaded down,
 intimated, a booty hidden was unveiled.
 Beauty a passionate welcome note,
 expressed love, destiny in hand.
 A place of shrines and temples sacred,
 made the sun, the moon and the stars envy.

III

Having many a spring-dream,
 The frenzied grows wilder, breaks his chains.
 Snow-clad Harmwakh melts down,
 a lamp lights up there on the windy peak.
 O Iris, you brightening like poppy blooms,
 in graveyards wakeful nights in abandon.
 Without asking my soul intimates
 in full swing a fete is on again.
 I quaffed a flame, like Aazar I dance.
 Frenzied lovers took their prank scarves,
 founts of magical crooning gush forth.

With death-defying fervour the open is filled up,
 streets and markets humming with crowds.
 The starling shall carry the hill on its wings,
 slumbering Kashpmar has re-emerged,
 it seemed. Suddenly the weather took a whimsical turn,
 freezing wind blasted the almond bloom.
 The cynic's eyes, these mourning processions;
 morbid reflection, treason in a story of love.
 Evil-hearing ears hear volleys of abuse.
 Some unseen worm gnaws the bulb of the crocus.
 Gog's designs and Magog's hill:
 the sages' jungle turns into a thicket of swords.

At every doorstep there is beating the breasts,
 headless carcass lies at every threshold.
 In cypress's shade the narcissus is uprooted,
 in sultry sunshine all flowers are ripped.
 Oh, every village is under Nadir's rule,
 Oh, every town falls to Hitler's command.

Sight is captive in a gash-less dome,

in all directions these stifling barricades.
 Hubbub that all are jinxed by eclipse,
 the oceans is engaged in its own vortex.
 Late-hour moon is engulfed by gloom;
 no sage is there to augur some good.

IV

“Why don’t you awaken your consciousness?” She said.
 “The pearl,” I said “is in a cracked oyster.”
 “Your inmost dark you raze.” She said.
 “Outside,” I said, “is turbid and vexed.”
 “Unheard calls I hear.” She said.
 “Open the doors,” I said “of the cells under-hill.”
 “In spaces I resound a buzz.” She said.
 “A swimmer,” I said “I’m of the lake of truth.”
 “Your thought traverses all skies.” She said.
 “Under my feet,” I said “a dragon there lies.”
 “Consign your tongue to winds.”
 She said. “My maimed limbs,” I said “Oh! I could stretch.”
 “You crazy one, be not so annoying.” She said.
 “Ecstatic Lalla ,” I said “ you dance nude again”

V

White doves soar over hyacinth decked hills;
 red glow-worms move in green shadows.
 There that fragrance hid in the Hades,
 Here a free zephyr over the tops of pines.
 Mercurial waves in the skies we arise.
 A flag without a colour we shall flutter all around.
 Alexanders are irate, Hilakoos berserk.
 This world of men and that verdant forest,
 birth and rebirth, a music unending:
 tatamtatamthay, tanantanaahuu.
 O gales without form, you dance and dance!
 Go on resounding, O soundless call!

(Tr. Shauq)

The above lyrical poem in extremely obscure idiom has five sections. In the first section the poet portrays the outbreak of violence that has left the valley of rishis and saints completely disorganised and fragmented. There is hopelessness pervading everywhere. Rahi uses an image of a fir-covered Himalayan valley which is devastated by a catastrophic cyclone. As a result of it, the sweet chirrup of the Bulbul is no more heard. The land has become dry, barren and is in a state

of oblivion. There is an apostrophe to Lal Dyad, the spiritual guide of the people. Lal Dyad who is famous for having sung of the union of Shiva and Shakti in Kashmir is sure to commit suicide. There is destruction all around. The poet recounts the pleasure and glories of the collective past of the people in which simple living, ordinary pleasures, fun, festivity, reading tales of romance and carefree frolicking were the hallmarks of society with a history of its own. Those pleasures of the past like reading and enjoying the epic of Firdausi (a famous Persian poet) *Shahnama* is no more there. It has been replaced by elegy expressing mourning. People have forgotten their cherished versified tales like *Gulrez* of Maqbool Shah Kralawari (a 19th century Kashmiri poet).

In the second section again there is a poignant nostalgia. Kashmir in the past was a land of pleasures, fun, frolick, music and art. The poet painfully remembers how people used to get enchanted by the natural beauty. When in spring the Zarbaran mountain in the vicinity of Srinagar city was covered with greenery, common people, rich as well as poor, could not sit indoors. The poet is reminded of the times when Kashmir was a land of great saints and Sufis who shone so brightly that the stars in the sky envied them.

In the third section, the poet speaks of the cataclysmic political uprising when teeming thousands came out to the streets demanding freedom. It appears to the poet as if the snow-clad mountains melted, the primeval lake of Sati Sar roared as a massive deluge, and all the shackles of subjugation were torn asunder. The whole atmosphere is filled up with hope and enthusiasm for assertion. But, all of a sudden, the revolution took an ugly turn and bloodshed, massacre, mayhem, intimidation, extortion and intellectual suffocation became the order of the day. All the cherished values of the Valley were gone with the wind. Every family is bereaved as thousands of young men and women are killed. As a result of this, the Valley of saints became the target of the angels of destruction Gog and Magog who ransacked it thoroughly. It appeared as if tyrants of the past like Nadir and Hitler were reborn to destroy all.

In the fourth section, the poet, completely disillusioned and dejected, has a dialogue with the great spiritual woman poet Lal Dyad who advises the anguished soul to have a journey from the great without to the great within. It is only withdrawal from the external and dive into the ocean of spiritualism that can relieve the anguishing soul from the horrors of the social reality.

In the fifth and concluding section, there is a sense of hope again. When we evaluate Rahi's poetry in its totality, although it has two

distinct phases, we find continuity in it in terms of poetic diction and use of symbols. There are numerous recurring symbols that form a pattern and constitute what G R Malik calls Rehiesque style. Some of his favourite symbols are gulaab (rose) yimbirzal (narcissus), van (forest) syieminy (a lioness), peez (hawk), kootarrath (pigeon's blood), mitsirykond (bramble thorn), tsoong (an earthen lamp), ryeh (flame) aavilun(a vortex), vyath (river Jhelum), kashpmar (Kashmir) zabarvan (name of a mountain), kartal (a dagger),and swaniherygaad (golden fish). Many of his poems are extended symbols in which Rahi selects an image and describes it according the semantic correspondence that gets birth from the mental associations with that image. Rahi is a symbolist par excellence. He has given a new dimension to Kashmiri poetry. In this connection, Bashir Manzar rightly said, "He protected the Kashmiri language from Persian and Urdu influences. With his every written and spoken word he tries to bring forth the essential inclusiveness of Kashmiri culture-the Kashmiriyat". (Qtd by Majeed 2020:1365)

Rahi begins his other poem "SuonGaam" (Our Village) by referring to the entire village as his own and urges the anonymous reader to never call his village "A City". He is of the opinion that while the village is the hub of religious harmony, the city is "thirsty" because of the conflict. According to Rahi, the village is better off as a village, without the touch and contamination by modernism. It is in the villages that people appreciate what they have and pray for the springs to be promising, it is in villages people are real and do not participate in harmony for the sake of it. Rehman Rahi, satirically represents the village as having direct connection to the eternal, God, by asserting that "the Villages" receive "sap from deendharma". By subjecting it to modernism, it will be rendered "impure" and "thirsty".

Rehman Rahi depicts modernism as 'crossroad' between tradition and modernity. He regards it as something that has derailed the children of the nation, drawn people away from each other and without good council.

Rehman Rahi, while depicting the qualities of village, calls it "free and good. He is of the opinion that while there are certainly some good qualities that people possess, modernism mars these qualities and replaces them with selfishness, self-centeredness and deception of modern man. It is clearly shown in the lines from "SuonGaam"; (Our Village) The loss of religious values can also be seen very clearly in the lines:

It is here I saw in a garden Shakti in embrace of Shiva held,
It is here in tightly draped rooms that blue films are beheld

(smartenglishnoes.com)

Rehman Rahi draws a figure of sadness when he talks about how religion and religious ceremonies in the village have been replaced by vulgarity, deceit and an addiction to pornography. Rahi, through his poem, creates a human voice and urges the people to not forget that this is the land of "Rishis and Dervishes", the Mountains and the Temperament, the Tradition and the Philosophy. He says, "This is the land of Rishis from every corner are expected offerings" (Majeed 2020:1367). He advises people not to get trapped in the vicious circle of modernity. He enlightens his men by reminding them that "We nurture faith, to whatever rises like a sun we offer our prayers". He reminds the modern man of his "village" and that he is a Kashmiri, wearing a "Pheran".

Our village is better off as a village; call it not a city
It receives sap from deen-dharma; make it not thirsty
Even a dove from round here invokes God, hark!
And Qur'an is recited by our every swift and lark
Jhelum's water itself is pure, why shouldn't it clean us?
Why lose minds over VetsarNaag's growing murkiness?
Only upon seeing a tigress does learn to run a doe
Partook it of God's sustenance, if eats worms a hoopoe
Today also I tie votive rags at Tsrar, why not come over
Today also here from heavens descends a golden shower
Appear the billboards where, let's look and, as instructed, love
Ooze hands poison whose, why ponder pointlessly over above
Our own children they are, counsel them and they'll turn gold
Our own nation this is, fill the crossroads and make them roar bold
Should we be leaving Rahim Uncle standing with a gun?
Meanwhile, let our brother Makhan bask in the Delhi sun
That you didn't let on to your wife a secret, it is your goodness
That you broke your promise to me, I take it was in duress
Verily, your mind have been scalded by envious neighbours
The ones I earned my profits from, though, were foreigners
I practiced parsimony and started increasing the nation's prosperity
You picked pockets and acquire will new weapons the army
Qur'an I've heard as well, but I've got to place on market my daughter
Throw a recitation party too I will, if successful is my charas venture
This village of ours is free, shrewd people here inhabit
I have never lent a loan to anyone, go and endure it
I did not cast my vote, the elders of my locality were eyeing me
The haggard hag's opinion got broadcast, didn't it hearten thee?

This farmer friend diverts the village canal for his urgent use
 This travelling trader sells woollen shawls as authentic shahtoos
 Eating and drinking too only us, living and dying too we only
 Playing and prancing too only us, laughing and weeping too we only
 It is here I saw in a garden Shakti in embrace of Shiva held
 It is here in tightly draped rooms that blue films are beheld

Tourists will be camping there, if this saw goes to the jungle
 And if your eyes are irritated, it is I who is burning diesel
 In the bedroom itself, on a worldwide tour the TV takes me
 You cool yourself at the river bank, fetches you the news BBC
 Bombs may burst in the Gulf, why should we increase the bus fare?
 Let Germans launch missiles, we'll take a boat to Nishat from here
 This is the land of rishis, from every corner are expected offerings
 Bedlam is unleashed when a dervish releases from his chilum smoke
 rings

Elderly men here and they with every breath lofty ideals uphold
 Young men here and they set a price for conscience with every word
 Mind alert, the cat is poised to a meal of the rat make
 Pure of words, they say on oath the tongs are a snake
 If we believe them, they will dub us fools from a place outlandish
 If we expose them, they will our love affairs in newspapers publish
 The multitude masses that never had any use for identity
 The political parties that never spoke any language consistently
 We nurture faith, to whatever rises like a sun we offer our prayer
 As you only have a fire in the belly, you only be our leader
 Our mountains are as old as time, our temperament is the oldest
 Our tradition is of the rishis, our trika philosophy too is the greatest
 This is a gathering place, lo! The whole village here has come
 Shout a few slogans, will you, why recite a meaningless poem?
 Sitting here you are in Kashmir, but you are talking American
 An ancient pheran you wear on you, don't claim to be modern!

Rahi in his other poem "Wanvun" (Choral Song), again refers to the tradition of Kashmir.

We did not stick to any religion
 We rose above the traditional religions
 We saw the page of Vedas and performed pooja
 We heard the Kalima and recited it chorally
 We believe in these teachings since ancient times
 We tied a wish thread and left for our business

(Tasleem 2023:314)

Likewise in his other poem titled "O Rishi!" Rahi again highlights the ancient glorious spiritual syncretic tradition of Kashmir in the following way:

You radiated your bosom with the knowledge of eternity
 You illuminated the cave of darkness with a clear light
 You attained this vision in the cradle itself
 From a mere speck you shook the skies

From an insignificant dewdrop you became like a clear sun
 The sixth sense dissolved into a pure intuition
 Kashab Rishi's teachings received a fresh air of Shah-i-Hamdan's breeze
 Shaivism was embraced by Islam
 Interweaving chains of time forms a lock of timelessness
 Endless river surrounding all around
 Sheikh's shruk, the heir of Lalla's vaakh, was thus born

O Rishi! You created this awakening among us
 You rendered the Arabic Quran in Kashmiri language
 Dust of your threshold is like a big kingdom
 Like Nilnag lake you reflect/condense the blue sky into yourself

O Rishi! You are the melody of our music
 You are the knower of the secrets of underworld
 You darn/sew up the scattered leaves
 You are the torch bearer of our nation

(Tasleem 2023:238)

To conclude, Rahi explores the theme of "Kashmiriyat" in the above poems reflecting the cultural and spiritual essence of Kashmir. His verses delve deep into the rich heritage, communal harmony and shared traditions of the Kashmiri people, fostering a sense of unity despite diverse backgrounds. His poems celebrate the cultural mosaic of Kashmir, emphasizing peace, coexistence and the unique blend of influences that define Kashmiriyat. All this is inextricably interwoven into his poetry and embodies in the cultural, social and spiritual ethos of Kashmir. Kashmiriyat as an all-encompassing theme manifests itself in Rahi's poetry in the following ways:

1. Cultural Plurality: Rahi's poetry underscores the diverse cultural elements that contribute to the unique identity of Kashmir. He celebrates the syncretism of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traditions, portraying a cultural tapestry that transcends religious boundaries.
2. Harmony and Coexistence: A central theme in Rahi's poetry is the idea of communal harmony. He emphasizes the historical coexistence of different communities in Kashmir, highlighting a shared cultural heritage that unites people beyond religious affiliations.

3. **Spiritual Essence:** Kashmiriyat, for Rahi, goes beyond the tangible aspects of culture. It encompasses a spiritual dimension, portraying the serene landscape of Kashmir as a metaphor for a deeper, collective consciousness that transcends differences.
4. **Resilience in Adversity:** Rahi's poetry often reflects the resilience of the Kashmiri people in the face of adversity. Despite the challenges and conflicts in the region, he envisions Kashmiriyat as a force that can withstand external pressures and maintain its intrinsic values.
5. **Love for Nature:** Kashmir's breath-taking natural beauty is a recurring motif in Rahman Rahi's poetry. He uses the landscape to symbolize the purity and timelessness of Kashmiriyat, suggesting a connection between the land and the cultural ethos of its people.
6. **Socio-Political Commentary:** Rahi's verses sometimes delve into the socio-political landscape of Kashmir, addressing issues like conflict and displacement. Through his poetry, he advocates for a return to the core values of Kashmiriyat as a means to heal and restore balance.
7. **Language and Identity:** Language is crucial in Rahi's exploration of Kashmiriyat. He often uses Kashmiri language and folklore to reinforce the distinct identity of the region, contributing to a sense of pride and belonging among the people.

Thus it can be said that Rahi's poetry on Kashmiriyat is a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted identity of Kashmir. Through cultural diversity, communal harmony, spirituality and a deep connection with nature, he juxtaposes a narrative that transcends the socio-political challenges, presenting a vision of Kashmir as a symbol of resilience, coexistence and cultural richness.

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