# Rise of Wahhabism in J&K And Its Role in The Rising Hindu-Muslim Conflict In 1980s

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## Introduction

The 1980s saw the emergence of Wahhabism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which is a noteworthy period in the turbulent history of the area. During this time, a strict and puritanical interpretation of Islam emerged, changing the religious landscape and escalating already-existing conflicts between the Muslim and Hindu communities. Examining the sociopolitical background of the area, the doctrinal impacts of Wahhabism, and the larger geopolitical dynamics of South Asia in the late 20th century are necessary to comprehend the emergence of Wahhabism in J&K. Despite its reputation as a cultural and religious crossroads, Jammu and Kashmir actually has a rich history of syncretism, with local Hindu practices and Sufism coexisting. Sufism, a religion that prioritizes spiritual unity and mysticism, has a profound impact on Kashmiri society and culture. Wahhabi ideology's entrance disrupted this harmonious coexistence since it was so at odds with the region's customary traditions. On the Arabian Peninsula, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab founded Wahhabism, a Sunni school of thought, in the 17th and 18th centuries. Its followers hold that the truest, most original version of the faith should be restored. The literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, a strong belief in Tawhid (the oneness of God), and a rejection of changes in religious practice (bid'ah) are the trademarks of this school of thought. **(John, 1983)**

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, when world politics underwent significant shifts, Wahhabism emerged in Jammu and Kashmir. In South Asia, radical ideologies spread rapidly due to the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the subsequent rise of political Islam and the Afghan Jihad against Soviet invasion. Pakistan, a key player in the Afghan conflict, was a conduit via which Saudi-funded Wahhabi scholars and preachers reached neighboring J&K. In an attempt to counteract the Shi'a influence in Iran and promote its own version of Sunni Islam, Saudi Arabia provided substantial financial backing to the expansion of Wahhabism. This support included funding for mosques, madrassas, and religious literature **(Commins, 2006).** Muslim frustration with political marginalization, economic inequality, and perceived injustices by the Indian state contributed to an already precarious sociopolitical climate in J&K during this time. Because of this dissatisfaction, extreme ideologies were able to gain traction. Profiting on these frustrations, Wahhabi preachers promoted their ideology as a remedy for the economic, political, and social problems that Muslims in the area were experiencing. The local Islamic customs were deemed corrupt by them, and they demanded a return to the 'pure' form of Islam.**(Schmidle, 2009)**

The violent hatred of non-Muslims and other Muslim groups, especially Shias and Sufis, is a crucial feature of Wahhabism. When applied to the situation in J&K, this resulted in increased hostility against the Hindu minority, which in turn strained relations between communities. Centers for indoctrination, such as mosques and madrassas influenced by Wahhabism, were established, which aided in the radicalization process. Particularly vulnerable were the young people; many fell for the allure of militancy, which they framed as a fight against what they saw as the Indian state's oppression.**(Bose, 2003)** The influence of Wahhabism on the political and social landscape of Jammu and Kashmir was substantial. Militant activity surged in the 1980s as groups influenced by Wahhabi doctrine started to use violence to demonstrate their existence. A number of extremist Islamist organizations, like the Hizbul Mujahideen, which was instrumental in the uprising against Indian control, emerged during this time. Their radical interpretation of Islam motivated them to attack security personnel and expel non-Muslims, especially the Hindu Kashmiri Pandit population, in an effort to establish an Islamic state in which all citizens are Muslims. **(Ganguly, 1997)**

J&K suffered greatly as a result of the rising violence and the ensuing communal unrest. The 1986 Anantnag riots and the ensuing 1989–1990 flight of Kashmiri Pandits serve as sobering reminders of the destruction

caused by extreme Islam. Radical elements planned specific attacks on Hindu properties and temples during the Anantnag riots in order to incite terror and establish their dominance. Thousands of Pandit families fled their ancestral homes in Kashmir during the Pandit exodus, one of the worst periods in the history of the area, in order to avoid persecution and bloodshed. Thus, the 1980s saw the emergence of Wahhabism in J&K, marking a pivotal point in the history of the area where extreme Islam profoundly changed the socio-political landscape and intercommunal interactions. The region's pluralistic traditions were upset by the imposition of a strict, exclusive ideology, which resulted in massive violence and displacement. In order to address the underlying reasons of radicalization and communal strife as well as to understand the current violence in J&K, it is imperative that this time be understood. **(Pandita, 2013)**

**Objective**

1. Analyze the historical emergence of Wahhabism in Jammu and Kashmir during the 1980s:
2. Examine the influence of Wahhabism on the socio-political landscape of the region:
3. Investigate the correlation between the rise of Wahhabism and the intensification of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in the 1980s:
4. Critically assess the impact of radical Islamic ideologies on traditional religious practices in J&K.

**Methodology**

This study involves a descriptive approach, which falls under "analytic research". Using information and data collected from a wide range of secondary sources, this study examines the phenomenon of altruistic suicide: A Sociological Study of Jammu & Kashmir State. Information for this study comes from scholarly journals, popular media, and the opinions of authors working in the same field. For the same reason, people also use reference books, magazines, and the Internet.

**The Rise of Wahhabism in Jammu & Kashmir**

In the 1980s, with the rise of Wahhabism, Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) religious and social climate changed drastically. The ultra-conservative Wahhabist movement, which Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab founded in the 18th century, demands a reversion to what its followers perceive as the most authentic version of Islam. This religious movement, which is known for its strict devotion to the Quran and Hadith and its rejection of practices seen as innovations or departures from early Islam, primarily arose in J&K due to a combination of external influences and internal shortcomings. Saudi Arabia's increasing influence in Jammu and Kashmir has contributed to the expansion of Wahhabism there. Affiliated with the Wahhabi sect Using petrodollars to fund a web of religious missions, educational institutions, and philanthropic organizations, Saudi Arabia began to expand its influence over the globe. One part of Saudi Arabia's Cold War geopolitical policy was to limit the spread of secular and socialist ideas while another part was to increase its sway over the Islamic world. Groups backed by Saudi Arabia constructed educational institutions, mosques, and madrassas in J&K in order to disseminate Wahhabi ideology. These schools attracted many young Kashmiris, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, because of the scholarships and free tuition they offered. Many people were enticed by the financial help and the promise of a better future that came with Wahhabi teachings. The enabling sociopolitical atmosphere in J&K throughout the 1980s allowed radical ideology to flourish. Social instability, economic stagnation, and political instability had long plagued the region. The widespread corruption and human rights violations, along with the Indian government's failure to address the aspirations and grievances of the Kashmiri people, contributed to a climate of estrangement and disenfranchisement. Because everyone was so down and out, radical ideologies had a fertile environment to grow. The promise of a return to a religiously and morally upright society governed by divine law made Wahhabism attractive to many marginalized and downtrodden individuals. **(Ishtiaq Ahmed, 2019)**

The jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union was a major element in the growth of Wahhabism in Jammu and Kashmir. In the 1980s, the Afghan resistance was bolstered by the thousands of Muslim volunteers hailing from Kashmir and across the globe. Many Islamist groups, including those with ties to Wahhabism, provided these volunteers with training, financial support, and ideological indoctrination. These hardened warriors returned to Jammu and Kashmir with not just military expertise but also extreme Islamic ideology, which contributed to the growth of Wahhabism in the area. The local Muslim community also underwent a profound

ideological transformation as a result of Wahhabism's ascent to power in J&K. Historically, Sufism—a mystical and inclusive school of Islam that stresses love, tolerance, and spiritual devotion—has been the prevailing Islamic practice in Kashmir. The cultural and religious life of Muslims in Kashmir was greatly influenced by Sufi practices and shrines. Nevertheless, these Sufi rituals frequently clashed with Wahhabism's strict and puritanical understanding of Islam. The Sufi traditions that the Wahhabi preachers fiercely opposed were the trip to shrines and the devotion of saints, which they saw as innovations, or bid'ah. As followers of Wahhabism attempted to enforce their interpretation of Islam, frequently by force, this doctrinal clash exacerbated tensions within the Muslim community. The advent of Wahhabism in J&K had far-reaching sociopolitical consequences. Community relations in the area became increasingly polarized as a result of the radicalization of large sectors of the Muslim population. The religious divide between Muslims and Hindus was already wide open before the rise of Wahhabi thought, which promoted intolerance and exclusivism. The divisive rhetoric of Wahhabi preachers, who frequently used theological language to describe the social and political conflicts in J&K as a crusade against non-believers and unbelievers, contributed to this division. In the late '80s and early '90s, this story helped fuel a surge in community violence.**(Rai, 2004)**

The insurgency movement in J&K was significantly impacted by the advent of Wahhabism. The armed fight against the Indian state received additional energy and justification due to the ideological movement towards radical Islam. Extremist organizations with a Wahhabi strain, such the Hizbul Mujahideen, became prominent figures in the uprising and promoted the creation of an Islamic state under Sharia law. These organizations gained a lot of assistance from outside sources, such as Pakistan and different international Islamist networks, which strengthened Wahhabism's hold on the area. In J&K, the rise of Wahhabism also brought about profound sociocultural shifts. The extremist Islamist ideas started to have an adverse effect on the old Kashmiri culture, which was renowned for its plurality and syncretism. Wahhabi supporters scrutinized and denounced with growing vigor customs like celebrating regional holidays, dressing traditionally, and engaging in Sufi ceremonies. This cultural change widened the gulf between Muslim communities as well as between various religions, since Muslims who opposed Wahhabi influence were frequently shunned or attacked. **(Roul, 2007)**

**Role of Wahhabism in Escalating Conflict**

Wahhabism, a conservative Islamic doctrine originating in the Arabian Peninsula, has played a significant role in escalating conflicts globally, particularly through its ideological rhetoric, propaganda, and mobilization of militant groups. This ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century, advocates for a return to what it perceives as the purest form of Islam practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Its doctrines have significantly influenced various geopolitical and sectarian conflicts, primarily by promoting a strict, literalist interpretation of Islam that often clashes with more moderate and pluralistic interpretations. **(Commins, 2006)**

Wahhabism's ideological rhetoric is marked by its strict monotheism and rejection of practices it deems as idolatrous, such as the veneration of saints and the use of shrines. This ideology often brands other Islamic traditions, particularly Shia Islam, as heretical. The Saudi state, which adheres to Wahhabi doctrines, has propagated this ideology extensively, funding religious schools (madrasas), mosques, and Islamic centers worldwide. These institutions often disseminate Wahhabi teachings, creating a fertile ground for radicalization. The rigid and exclusivist nature of Wahhabism can foster a sense of ideological superiority and intolerance towards other religious and sectarian groups, thereby fueling conflict. Propaganda plays a crucial role in spreading Wahhabi ideology. Wahhabi clerics and scholars utilize various media, including books, pamphlets, television, and, more recently, the internet and social media, to spread their message. The digital age has amplified the reach of Wahhabi propaganda, allowing it to influence a global audience. This propaganda often emphasizes themes of purity, martyrdom, and jihad, encouraging adherents to engage in violent struggles against those deemed infidels or apostates. Such messaging can be particularly persuasive among disenfranchised and marginalized individuals seeking a sense of purpose and belonging. **(Kepel, 2004)**

Wahhabism's influence is evident in the mobilization of militant groups across the globe. Its doctrines have inspired numerous jihadist organizations, including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS), both of which have roots in Wahhabi ideology. These groups adopt Wahhabi principles to justify their violent activities, portraying their actions as a defense of true Islam against corrupt and apostate regimes. The ideology provides a theological framework that legitimizes the use of violence, often leading to brutal acts of terrorism and

insurgency. Saudi Arabia's substantial financial resources have been instrumental in spreading Wahhabi teachings, particularly during the Cold War when the United States and Saudi Arabia collaborated to counter Soviet influence in Afghanistan. Saudi-funded madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan taught a radical form of Wahhabism that glorified jihad against the Soviet invaders, giving rise to the Mujahideen. After the Soviet withdrawal, many of these fighters, radicalized and battle-hardened, formed the nucleus of groups like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

The impact of Wahhabism on Hindu-Muslim relations is a notable example of its role in escalating conflicts. In India, the rise of Wahhabi-influenced groups has contributed to communal tensions and violence. The Indian subcontinent has a long history of syncretic Islam, with traditions such as Sufism promoting harmony and coexistence with Hinduism. However, the introduction of Wahhabi ideology has challenged this syncretism, promoting a more rigid and confrontational form of Islam. The Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and the subsequent communal riots are illustrative of this tension. Wahhabi-inspired groups have been accused of inciting violence and promoting sectarianism, leading to clashes with Hindu nationalist groups. The Gujarat riots in 2002 further exemplify the destructive potential of sectarian propaganda, with Wahhabi rhetoric contributing to the radicalization of some Muslim youth involved in the violence. In Pakistan, Wahhabi ideology has similarly fueled sectarian violence, particularly against Shia Muslims, but also contributing to broader Sunni-Shia tensions that sometimes spill over into conflicts involving Hindu communities. The proliferation of militant groups espousing Wahhabi doctrines has destabilized the region, leading to cycles of violence and retribution. **(Hegghammer, 2010).**

**Hindu-Muslim Relations in the 1980s (J&K)**

The 1980s were a tumultuous period for Hindu-Muslim relations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), marked by escalating tensions, historical grievances, and significant incidents that further strained communal ties. Pre-existing tensions were rooted in a complex history of political and social inequities. The Kashmir Valley had long experienced friction between its Hindu minority, primarily the Kashmiri Pandits, and the Muslim majority. This tension was exacerbated by a series of political missteps and perceived injustices by the Indian government, which fostered a sense of alienation among the Kashmiri Muslim population. One of the critical turning points in the 1980s was the controversial rigging of the 1987 state assembly elections. This event significantly undermined trust in the democratic process and intensified anti-Indian sentiments among Kashmiris. The rigging, widely believed to have been orchestrated by the ruling National Conference in collaboration with the Indian National Congress, disenfranchised many voters and provided a fertile ground for insurgency. The late 1980s saw the rise of militant groups, such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which initially pursued a secular nationalist agenda aiming for the region's independence. However, the influence of Wahhabi ideology, promoted by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), began to reshape the insurgency. Wahhabism, with its puritanical and often militant interpretation of Islam, found resonance among certain segments of the population, particularly the disaffected youth who were inspired by the mujahideen's fight against Soviet forces in Afghanistan and the broader Islamic resurgence of the period. **(Thorner, 1949)**

This Wahhabi influence manifested in increasing communal rhetoric and violence. The insurgency, initially framed as a struggle for political rights, gradually took on a more religious character. This shift was marked by the targeting of the Hindu minority. The period saw an alarming rise in violent incidents against the Kashmiri Pandits, leading to their mass exodus from the valley starting in 1990. Estimates suggest that over 100,000 Pandits fled J&K during this time, driven out by threats, killings, and the destruction of their properties. The Indian Home Ministry recorded significant fatalities among Hindu civilians during the peak years of the insurgency. The reactions from the Hindu community and associated organizations were multifaceted. Nationally, there was a surge in Hindu nationalist rhetoric, which framed the Kashmir conflict as a defense of India’s secular and territorial integrity against Islamist separatism. Organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) capitalized on the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits to galvanize support for a more hardline approach to Kashmir. This period also saw the politicization of the Pandit exodus, with these organizations advocating for the recognition of the Pandits as refugees and calling for a more aggressive stance against militancy in the region. The Hindu-Muslim relations in 1980s J&K thus encapsulate a tragic narrative of political disenfranchisement, rising religious extremism, and the resultant human suffering. The historical grievances were deepened by contemporary political events,

while the spread of Wahhabi ideology provided a dangerous impetus to the conflict. The reactions from the Hindu community, shaped by both genuine distress and political opportunism, contributed to the broader narrative of communal tension that continues to affect the region today. **(Widmalm, 1997)**

**Role in Escalating Hindu-Muslim Tensions in J&K**

Wahhabism, a puritanical Islamic reform movement, has contributed significantly to ideological polarization in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Wahhabism promotes a strict interpretation of Islam that rejects traditional practices such as Sufism, which has deep roots in the region. The spread of Wahhabi ideology has led to a stark division between the traditional Sufi followers and those influenced by Wahhabi teachings. This division has disrupted the historically pluralistic and syncretic nature of Kashmir's Islamic traditions, fostering an environment ripe for communal tensions. The ideological rigidity of Wahhabism contrasts sharply with the more inclusive and mystical practices of Sufism, exacerbating religious divides and fostering a climate of intolerance and suspicion.

The rise of Wahhabism has significantly altered social interactions in J&K, undermining the communal harmony that once characterized the region. Traditional Sufi shrines, which served as communal spaces for both Muslims and Hindus, have come under attack from Wahhabi-influenced groups who view such practices as un-Islamic. This has led to a decline in interfaith interactions and increased segregation along religious lines. The erosion of these shared spaces has diminished opportunities for dialogue and understanding, further entrenching communal divides. The Wahhabi insistence on religious purity and the rejection of local cultural practices have marginalized moderate voices and increased social friction.

Politically, the spread of Wahhabism in J&K has had far-reaching implications. The movement's influence has contributed to the radicalization of certain segments of the Muslim population, which in turn has been exploited by political actors to further their agendas. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other Hindu nationalist groups have used the rise of Wahhabism to justify hardline policies and rhetoric, portraying the Muslim population as increasingly radical and a threat to national security. This has led to the implementation of stringent security measures and policies that disproportionately affect the Muslim community, exacerbating feelings of alienation and resentment. Furthermore, the polarization has hindered political dialogue and compromise, making it more difficult to address the region's complex issues through peaceful means.

Several specific incidents of conflict in J&K can be attributed to the influence of Wahhabism. Attacks on Sufi shrines and other symbols of traditional Islamic practice have been reported, often carried out by militant groups inspired by Wahhabi ideology. These attacks not only target religious sites but also aim to intimidate and coerce the local population into conforming to their strict interpretation of Islam. Additionally, there have been instances where communal riots have been incited by inflammatory speeches and actions by Wahhabi leaders, leading to violence between Hindu and Muslim communities. These incidents have contributed to a cycle of retaliation and mistrust, further deepening the communal divide

**Factors contributing to the rise of Wahhabism in J&K**

The ascendancy of Wahhabism in Jammu and Kashmir during the 1980s was not a sudden phenomenon but rather the result of a complex interplay of various factors. These factors, both internal and external, created an environment conducive to the spread of this puritanical ideology. Let's examine the key elements that contributed to the rise of Wahhabism in J&K:

- **Economic Stagnation and Unemployment:** The 1980s saw J&K grappling with significant economic challenges. Despite being a strategically important state, it lagged behind in industrial development and job creation. The educated youth, in particular, faced a severe unemployment crisis. This economic disillusionment created a sense of frustration and alienation among the populace, especially the younger generation. Wahhabi ideologues capitalized on this discontent, offering a sense of purpose and identity to those feeling marginalized by the existing socio-economic order.
- **Political Instability and Governance Issues:** The political landscape of J&K during this period was marked by instability and allegations of corruption. The dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah government in 1984 and the subsequent political maneuvering eroded public faith in the democratic process. This disenchantment with mainstream politics created a vacuum that Wahhabi groups sought to fill. They

presented themselves as an alternative to the perceived corrupt and ineffective political establishment, promising a return to 'pure' Islamic values as a solution to societal ills.

- **Educational Influence:** The establishment of Saudi-funded madrasas and educational institutions played a crucial role in spreading Wahhabi ideology. These institutions offered free education, often coupled with stipends, which was particularly attractive to economically disadvantaged families. The curriculum in these schools emphasized Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, gradually influencing the religious understanding of a new generation. This educational network became a powerful tool for ideological dissemination, creating a cadre of young individuals well-versed in and sympathetic to Wahhabi teachings.
- **Changing Demographics:** The 1980s witnessed demographic shifts in certain areas of J&K, particularly with the migration of populations from rural to urban areas. This urbanization often led to the disruption of traditional social structures and support systems. In this context of social flux, Wahhabi organizations offered a sense of community and belonging, especially to those feeling uprooted or alienated in their new urban environments.
- **Global Islamic Resurgence:** The 1980s saw a global resurgence of Islamic identity and politics, partly in response to events like the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Soviet-Afghan War. This worldwide Islamic revival resonated in J&K as well, with many Muslims seeking to assert their religious identity more strongly. Wahhabism, with its claim of returning to a 'purer' form of Islam, appealed to those caught up in this wave of Islamic resurgence.
- **The Afghan Jihad and Its Impact:** The Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) had a profound impact on the region. Many young men from J&K were inspired by the Afghan mujahideen's struggle against the Soviets, which was often framed in religious terms. Some even traveled to Afghanistan to participate in the conflict. Upon their return, these individuals brought back not only combat experience but also exposure to Wahhabi ideologies prevalent among certain mujahideen groups. This influx of radicalized youth contributed to the spread of Wahhabi ideas in J&K.
- **Increased Connectivity with the Gulf:** The 1980s saw an increase in the number of Kashmiri Muslims traveling to Gulf countries for employment opportunities. This expatriate community was exposed to Wahhabi ideology, which is dominant in countries like Saudi Arabia. Upon their return, many brought back not only remittances but also Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, influencing their local communities.
- **Weakening of Sufi Traditions:** Historically, Kashmir was known for its Sufi traditions, which emphasized mysticism, tolerance, and syncretism. However, various factors, including modernization and changing social dynamics, had begun to weaken these traditional religious structures. Wahhabism, with its straightforward and rigid interpretation of Islam, filled this spiritual vacuum for some, especially those seeking clear-cut religious guidelines in a rapidly changing world.
- **Technology and Media:** The 1980s saw an increase in access to technology and media in J&K. Cassette tapes carrying sermons of Wahhabi preachers became popular, allowing the ideology to reach even remote areas. Later in the decade, the advent of video technology further facilitated the spread of Wahhabi teachings.
- **Funding and Material Support:** The influx of funds from Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, played a significant role in the propagation of Wahhabism. This financial support enabled the construction of mosques, madrasas, and charitable organizations aligned with Wahhabi ideology. The material benefits provided by these institutions, such as financial aid, healthcare, and educational support, made Wahhabism attractive to many, especially in economically disadvantaged areas.
- **Reaction to Perceived Cultural Degradation:** Some segments of the Muslim population in J&K viewed the increasing influence of Western culture and perceived moral degradation as a threat to Islamic values. Wahhabism, with its emphasis on strict adherence to Islamic principles, appealed to those seeking to 'purify' their faith and society from what they saw as corrupting influences.
- **Political Patronage:** In some instances, local political actors, seeking to consolidate their power base, provided tacit support to Wahhabi groups. This political patronage offered legitimacy and protection to these organizations, allowing them to expand their influence more freely.

- **Generational Shift:** The 1980s saw a new generation coming of age, one that was more disconnected from the syncretic traditions of their forebears. This generation, facing unemployment and political uncertainty, was more receptive to the clear-cut narratives and promises of empowerment offered by Wahhabi ideology.

**Impact on Hindu-Muslim Conflict**

The influence of Wahhabism on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the 1980s was immense and had far-reaching consequences. It heightened communal tensions, led to further violence, and displaced many people, changing the sociopolitical dynamics of the region. Hindu and Muslim communities were even more religiously divided and violent after the advent and propagation of Wahhabi ideology, which promoted an extreme and exclusive view of Islam. Ideological polarization was one of the main effects of Wahhabism on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. The Kashmir Valley has long been a stronghold of Sufi Islam, a school of thought that promotes religious plurality, tolerance, and a syncretic spirituality that permits harmonious cohabitation with different faiths. There would have been no religious or cultural life in the area without the Sufi shrines and rituals. But these traditions were threatened by the rise of Wahhabism, which advocated a strict interpretation of Islam and condemned Sufi rituals as heretical. Wahhabi preachers fought tooth and nail against Sufi practices, calling on Muslims to embrace what they saw as the authentic and unadulterated religion of Islam. Deep schisms emerged within Muslims as a result of this intellectual shift, which in turn fueled religious intolerance. Hindu-Muslim relations suffered as a result of the ideological schism that Wahhabism caused. Wahhabi leaders portrayed the region's political and social problems via a religious lens, dividing the population into believers and nonbelievers **(Chadha, 2005).** Non-Wahhabi Muslims were further alienated and hostility against the Hindu community was ratcheted up by this story. Consequently, the Hindu-Muslim dispute became more violent and unsolvable, and religious identity became more politicized. Both groups saw an increase in the frequency of violent incidents, which caused heavy loss of life and property. Displacement and demographic shifts in J&K, especially the flight of Kashmiri Pandits, were accelerated by the advent of Wahhabism. Militant organizations motivated by Wahhabi ideology threatened, intimidated, and violently evicted a large number of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The social fabric of J&K was profoundly affected by this migration, which changed the demographic makeup of the area. There was less cultural diversity and more antagonism between the remaining Muslim population and the displaced Hindu community as a result of the Pandits' displacement. There is still a lot of animosity and distrust between communities due to the trauma of the past, which includes recollections of violence and displacement. Wahhabism had a role in radicalizing militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir. The militant and puritanical Wahhabi ideology, which many of these groups embraced, legitimized the use of force for political and religious ends. Attacks on security personnel, political figures, and civilians were among the many targets of the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, which began to gather steam in the late 1980s. In contrast to India's secular and democratic system, the Wahhabi-inspired militants aimed to create an Islamic nation ruled by Sharia law. Losses in life and property aside, the insurgency served to further polarize Hindus and Muslims, who came to see each other through the prism of religious animosity. As a result of Wahhabism's influence on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, traditional cultural traditions and social standards were eroded, which in turn contributed to violence and displacement. Wahhabi preachers' strict and austere view of Islam stifled the region's formerly vibrant cultural traditions, which included Hindu and Muslim celebrations of music, dance, and festivals. Hindus were already estranged from one another, and Wahhabism's push for cultural uniformity only served to drive a wedge between them and the region's traditionally cohesive society. A feeling of alienation and distrust developed between the two groups as a result of the disappearance of common cultural places and activities. Also, we can't ignore the fact that Wahhabi influence in J&K has political consequences. A direct threat to governmental authority came from the emergence of extremist Islamist groups that were impacted by Wahhabi philosophy. In addition to armed insurrection, these groups' goals included undermining the region's secular and democratic institutions. As a result of political unrest, communal tensions rose to new heights, with members of both the Hindu and Muslim populations becoming casualties of the gunfight between extremists and the government. The government's reaction to the insurgency, which frequently included brutal

military measures and violations of human rights, further fueled the vicious cycle of bloodshed and reprisal.**(Ahmed, 2019)**

## Conclusion

The rise of Wahhabism in Jammu and Kashmir during the 1980s marked a critical turning point that reshaped the region's socio-political landscape and intensified Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Wahhabism, a puritanical and often militant interpretation of Islam, found fertile ground in the socio-economic and political upheaval of the time. The influx of Wahhabi ideology, facilitated by external influences such as the Afghan jihad and Saudi funding, disrupted the traditionally syncretic and pluralistic culture of Kashmir, which was heavily influenced by Sufism. This shift not only polarized religious communities but also fueled insurgency and violence, particularly targeting the Hindu minority, leading to the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The radicalization of youth, erosion of traditional practices, and the rise of extremist groups undermined the region's stability, exacerbating communal tensions and contributing to a cycle of violence and mistrust. The historical grievances, coupled with contemporary political dynamics, highlight the profound impact of Wahhabism on Jammu and Kashmir's conflict-ridden narrative.

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