



## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

### INTERFAITH COEXISTENCE AMONG THE PAHARI TRIBE OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

***“Ik chulhé di roti, kai dharman di khushboo.”***

*One hearth's bread carries the fragrance of many faiths.*

*Symbolizing shared food, family, and diversity in belief.*

The Pahari tribe of the Pir Panjal region in Jammu and Kashmir has undergone multiple religious conversions over centuries, evolving from early **animistic beliefs** to diverse spiritual systems including **Shaivism**, **Vaishnavism**, **Hinduism**, **Sikhism** and eventually **Islam**. Rooted in an ancient worldview that revered natural elements such as mountains, rivers, forests and animals, the Pahari people originally practiced a form of **animism**, where nature was seen as alive and sacred. This deep ecological spirituality shaped their rituals, oral traditions and sacred landscapes.

***“Dua te prarthna, dono pahad ch ghoonjde ne.”***

*Both dua (Islamic prayer) and prarthna (Hindu prayer) echo in the hills.*

*This proverb illustrates coexistence of religious practices in shared landscapes.*

With the spread of **Shaivism** and **Vaishnavism** in the Himalayan region during early medieval times, many Pahari communities began integrating Hindu deities like Shiva and Vishnu into their belief systems, often blending them with their indigenous cosmologies. **Hinduism**, as a broader sociocultural force, brought temple worship and new ritual practices, but remained syncretic in form. Later, with **Sikh incursions and influence** during the 18th and 19th centuries, some segments of the Pahari population adopted Sikh tenets, especially in areas of political or economic exchange with Sikh kingdoms.

The Pahari tribe of the Pir Panjal region in Jammu and Kashmir embodies a deeply rooted **interfaith ethos**, shaped by centuries of coexistence among diverse religious traditions including **Hinduism**, **Islam**, **Sikhism** and indigenous belief systems. Despite religious transitions and external influences, the Paharis have nurtured a culture of **brotherhood**, **mutual respect** and **harmony**, where temples, mosques, gurdwaras and shrines often transcend rigid sectarian and religious boundaries. Shared sacred spaces, joint participation in cultural ceremonies and a common reverence for the natural landscape reflect their inclusive worldview.

***“Sajjna na puchhdé zaat te mazhab.”***

*True friends ask not about caste or religion.*

*Popular in Pahari oral culture, this proverb encourages brotherhood above identity.*

This intercommunal fabric stands as a living testament to the tribe's **syncretic identity and peaceful coexistence**, offering a powerful model of pluralism in the Himalayan context. The final and most widespread religious transition occurred with the gradual **conversion to Islam**, influenced by Sufi saints, regional rulers and trade routes connecting Kashmir to Central Asia. This shift was not abrupt but layered, preserving many earlier animistic and Hindu elements in folk practices, shrine worship (*ziyاراتs*) and seasonal rituals. The Islam practiced by Pahari Muslims today often reflects this syncretic past, where the memory of sacred mountains, rivers and forests continues to shape their spiritual landscape.