

Anti-Sufi and the Defender of the Cult in Kashmir: A Descriptive Historical Data

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Abstract

Sufism in Kashmir has become an important aspect, Sufism became the main dominant form of Islam in Kashmir but when we look back in the late nineteenth century the criticism to the Sufi tradition also starts and these critics are coming from various groups like *Salafi*, *Wahabi*, *Deobandis* and *Ahl-i-Hadith* even the *Jama'at-i-Islami*. This study gives a historical backdrop of Sufism in Kashmir and also looks at the Sufi tradition in the context of the “reformist” in which Sufi tradition in Kashmir was criticized or attacked by various groups. The author also aims to shed light on how Kashmir is transformed from Sufism to Salafism and what are the challenges that emanate from the radical brand of Islam to Kashmiri Sufi tradition.

Keywords: Sufism, Ahl-i-Hadith, Jama'at-i-Islami, Cult, Kashmir

Introduction

Sufism the dominant form of Islam came into sharp attack of the Muslim “reformists” in the late nineteenth Century Kashmir, when a new breed of Young Kashmiri Muslim of the educated middle class came in contact with the reformist outside Kashmir. Evidently, there has always been some confrontation between Sūfism and the Shariah-centered Islam of the leading Ulamas.

The challenges to Sūfism basically emanate from two sides; one is the modernist reformers, who despised what they considered to be the dens of superstitious belief and backwardness and the other were the Islamic fundamentalist “reformist”, a group that includes *Salafi*. In fact, one of the most important *Salafi* schools of thought in the world, the *Ahl-i-Hadith*, was born in India. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kashmir saw the beginning of the Islamist movement. The roots of the Islamist movement in Kashmir can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century, but it came into being in an organized form when the *Ahl-i-Hadith* of Jammu and Kashmir was formally established in 1923. The *Ahl-i-Hadith* considered themselves inheritors of the legacy of the prophet and his companions, campaigning against Sūfism, the dominant form of Islamic expression in Kashmir. The *Ahl-i-Hadith*, however, offers a favorable ground for the rise of various Islamist ideologies from the 1930s onwards. Islamism in Kashmir found its most vocal champion in the *Jama'at-i-Islami* (Ashiq, 1991).

Making space: Sufism in the Valley.

Kashmir witnessed different type of story of the spread of Islam vis-à-vis other part of the South Asia. Islam did not enter in Kashmir by a forceful means but by a gradual conquest, a gradual process of penetration by the Muslim traders and adventurers (Khan, 1994). However, Islam become well

organized and systematic through missionaries, preachers and Sūfī of central Asia and Persia and was later accommodated within the Kashmiri ethos.

Sūfīsm not to be mistaken as a sect of Islam is best defined as Islamic mysticism involving practices and beliefs allowing Muslims to achieve nearness to God. Sūfī strives to attain direct closeness with Allah (God) through personal experience (**Khanam, 2006**). These beliefs came to Kashmir centuries ago, and today remains especially popular in the Valley. Before the foundation of the Sultānate in Kashmir in 1320, some six centuries earlier, a gradual process of penetration by Muslim traders and adventures had already begun in the Valley. During the Sultānate period (1320-1586), a stream of immigrants from Central Asia and Persia seems to have flowed to the Valley. However, the establishment of the Muslim Sultānate caused a number of devout Sūfīs emigrants to Kashmir along with their followers, basically for the purpose of spreading their faith in a society facing challenges of immense magnitude (**Khan, 2003**). The early Sūfīs arrived when Kashmir was passing through a troubled time, faced as it was with the general social, economic, cultural, and political crisis (**Bamzai, 1994**). In this era of trouble, Sufīs preaching message of social equality and justice won the heart of the masses (**Bamzai, 1994**).

Sūfīsm came to Kashmir in the fourteenth century, and among the first who introduced Sūfī orders in Kashmir was Sayyid Abdur Rahman Sharaf-al-Dīn (d.1327), popularly known as *Bulbul Shāh* in the early fourteenth century (**Rafiqi, 2015**). He entered Kashmir during the reign of Suhadeva (1301-1320). It is reported that: “[The Sayyid] was a leading Sūfī in the Valley at that time. He is credited to “converting the reigning Buddhist ruler of Kashmir Rinchana (A.D.130-1323) to Islam” (**Khoiyami, 2016**) and named it Sultān “Sadar al-Dīn” (**Khoiyami, 2016**). The conversion of the ruler to Islam is considered a turning point in the history of Islam in Kashmir. The spread of Islam during the period of *Rinchana*, could not last long as the ruler died hardly two years after his conversion and the throne was passed into the hands of Hindus, for another sixteenth years, till 1339 when the *Sultānate* of Kashmir was finally established by Shah Mir. Sultān Shams-al-Din Shah Mir and his successor do not appear to have expressed special zeal for the propagation of Islam (**Wani, 2004**). It was under Sultān Shihab al-Din (1354-1373) (**Khoiyami, 2016**), with the arrival of four *Kūbravi* saints along with their families and followers, the process of Islamization started to increase again.

It was during the reign of Sultān Qutubuddin (**Khoiyami**) in the year 1384 which marks a turning point in the history of Islam in Kashmir when Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdānī, accompanied by 700 of his followers arrived in Kashmir. Sayyid Ali Hamdānī (1314-1385) popularly known in Kashmir as “*Shāh-i-Hamdān*” (**Sufi**); “*Amīr-i-Kabīr*” (**Sufi**) and “*Bānī-i-Musalman*” (**Rafiqi**) was a *Kubrāwī* saint who launched a vigorous movement of Islamizing Kashmir (**G.M.D Sufi**).

Hamdānī played a key role in the transportation of *shariah*-oriented Islam in Kashmir. In addition to spreading Islam, he introduced to Kashmir certain renowned arts and crafts such as carpet making and shawl manufacturing and also calligraphy. Besides instructing their followers in the new arts and crafts, many Sūfīs also gave the poor new opportunities for economic success. In this sense, the centres that the Sūfīs founded also functioned as free schools and played a major role in the development of society. Hamdānī is not only the first Muslim missionary to have converted a good number of people to Islam but he is also pioneer Muslim preacher the other way round too. He was the first to have launched a movement of total Islamization of the life patterns of the people; it is no wonder that in Kashmir he is popularly known as *Bānī -i-Islam* (founder of Islam in Kashmir) or *Bānī-i-Musalman* (founder of the Muslim creed in Kashmir) (**wani**) though Islam came into Kashmir long before Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdānī.

Syncretizing the Order

As the process of Islamizing Kashmir Valley started by the Sūfīs from Central Asia and Persia region, an indigenous movement known as Rishi tradition started to progress side by side. This indigenous syncretic Sūfī tradition known as Rishi movement branched out in Kashmir under the leadership of its founder Shaikh Nūr-al-Dīn (1379-1442) (**Rafiqi**). Notwithstanding the mystical dimension of their speculative philosophy, Lal Ded and Sheikh Nūr-al-Dīn Rishi considered an important representatives of peasant society. Kashmiri Muslim Rishism may be regarded as the Kashmiri expression of Islam. It is the only indigenous Sūfī order in Kashmir, which help to a large extend in spread of Islam (**Ahmad, 2011**). Long before, Kashmir had been the practicing center of Buddhism before and after its decline. When *Vedanta* philosophy spread in India, in Kashmir a new philosophy known as *Trīkā* or *Shiva Śiddhānt* was established in the early 9th century, and with the coming of the Sultānate, Islamic sciences and culture gained prevalence. Since the Buddhist and *Shīvā Śiddhāntā* were still intact, the tradition of Islamic Sūfī tradition of the sages and saints of these religions had a chance to have interaction. This interaction resulted in the absorption of this composite influence on the local Sūfīs, who were called *Rishis* or *Bābā*. The emergence of the indigenous movement in Kashmir as a result of Islamic influences led to a new socio-religious ethos in Kashmiri society and culture. The inspirational lives of these saints led to the adoption of Islam by a large number of Kashmiri people after the demise of these revered saints. Over time, Islam merged into and accommodated itself with the existing community life, including religious practices and belief in the holy spirits, holy places, and saints who were venerated by both Muslims and others. With the spread of Islam in Kashmir, various shrines came into existence which were named after the saints and scholars of various Sūfī brotherhoods (**Amin**). The main reason for the success and popularity of the Sūfīs and their shrines in the valley could be their role as mediators in religious (between humans and God) as well as worldly matters. Regarding the popularization of the Rishi movements, Wani, writes, “The most effective means which made his movement pervasive throughout the Valley was the language and the genre Nūr-al-Dīn used to bring home to the people his message. He used common man’s language-*Koshur*-and the piercing mode of expression-poetry” (**Wani**). It may be because of his simple personality and usage of Kashmiri language helped many to convert into Islam. While highlighting the role of Rishis in winning conversion Prof. Ishaq Khan believes that, “the majority of the commoners, especially the rural folks, were brought to the fold of Islam not by the missionaries of Persia and Central Asia, but by the Rishis” (**Khan, 2002**). The early Sūfīs like, Sayyid Ali Hamdānī, Mir Muhammad Hamdānī and his disciples used Persian as a medium of instruction which remained beyond the understanding of the common people, mostly the people who belonged to the rural areas. Though they managed to convert large number of people to Islam from the elite and the courtly people and those who are attached to it. But the conversion from the rural areas, the illiterate folks to Islam is credited to Nūr-al-Dīn, using his skill of preaching and the Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction. “It is probably for this reason that the didactic poetry of Nūr-al-Dīn has been elevated to the position of *Kōshur Qur’ān* (Qur’ān in Kashmiri) by the Kashmiri Muslim folks” (**Wani**).

Anti-Sufi and the Defender of the Cults

Till the end of the 19th century, Sufism remained the dominant expression of Islam among the Kashmiris. Most Kashmiri Muslim owed allegiance to one Sufi order or other (**Sikand**). All over the

Muslim world, from the late 19th century onwards, Sufism has come under sharp attack from the Muslim reformer, both Islamist and modernists (**Sikand**). The challenges to the Sufism basically emanate from two side; one is the modernist reformers, who were despised what they considered to be the dens of Superstitious belief and backwardness and the other were the fundamentalist reformers, a group that includes *Salafi*. In fact, one of the most important Salafi schools of thought in the world, the *Ahl-i-Hadith*, was born in India (**Khan 2000**).

The position of the Shrine in the religious, social and economic life of the valley is legendary (**Zutshi, 2004**). Kashmir is hardly the only place in the subcontinent where Shrines have played a key role in defining religious expression (**Zutshi**). The changing economic context of the valley led to the manifestation of social and political tussles around the Shrine and the saint worship (**Zutshi**). This disputes starts when the two *Mirwaizs* (head preacher) of Srinagar, Mirwaiz Kashmir and Mirwaiz Hamadani claims over the preaching centre of the city. ‘Shrine disputes in late 19th century Srinagar is articulated precisely around the issue of whether or not Shrine worship was sacrilegious to Islam, an issue that had never before been contentious among Kashmiri Muslims’ (**Zutshi**).

With the dawn of the twentieth century many Kashmiri Muslims came in contact with other parts of India, mainly Delhi, Punjab and Aligarh which brought many new educated Kashmiri youth in touch with Islamic stirring outside the state. With this contact many youths brought them in form of *Ahl-i-Hadith*, a Muslim reformist which, in South Asia started in the late eighteenth century.

In Kashmir, it was Sayyid Husain Bhatkhu¹, a Kashmiri student of an *Ahl-i-Hadith* madrasa in Delhi, returned to Srinagar and began his campaign of what they called “unlawful innovations”. (*bidah*). He was the first who start the *Ahl-i-Hadith* movement in the Valley. The *Anjuman-i-Ahl-i-Hadith Jammu and Kashmir* was formally inaugurated in 1923 (**Wani, 1997**). The *Ahl-i-Hadith* saw the decline of Muslim as a result of having strayed from the path of true prophet (P.B.U.H) and from the strict monotheism (*Tauhid*) and notably (what they called) blind following (*Taqlid*) of the four school of Jurisprudence and belief and practices associated with Sufism(**Sikand**). This brand of reformer is much active in Kashmir from the late 19th century and considers Kashmiri Sufi as irreligious (*Be-din*). They saw Muslims had straying from true Islam and added many innovations which had no any validity in Islam.

Since Kashmir was deeply rooted by the Sufism and their cultures, rituals at the Shrines like, prostration, music and other offering and the celebration of the Urs of the great Sufi saints and the *milad* (Birthday) and the *wafat* (death anniversary) of the prophet (SAWW) is common in all Shrines of Kashmir. The attack on the custodians of the shrine accusing of hiding the true message of Islam and condemned that the shared religious traditions and space where both Hindu and Islam joined together to common worship, such as shrine of the saints, were seen as threatening the purity and integrity of community.

The *Ahl-i-Hadith* condemned Sufism for not making any distinction between the Islamic and un-Islamic, arguing that neither prophet nor his companions were Sufi and that Sufism was a later development, an un-Islamic accretion that had no sanction whatsoever in Islam. For them Kashmiri Muslim society strayed from the path of Islam, indeed as hardly different from their polytheist (*mushrik*) Hindu neighbour(**Sikand**). Any innovation from the path of prophet, as represented by Quran and the Hadith were condemned un-Islamic. *Ahl-i-Hadith* did not emerge as a mass movement, because of their fierce opposition to the Sufi tradition, which enabled Islam to win masses of converts among Kashmiri. The loud (recitation of benediction on the prophet (*durud*) and invocatory prayers (*award*) on the eve of Urs were considered *bida’at* by the *Ahl-i-Hadith*(**Khan**). While the custodians of the shrines and the

devotees considered this shrine as a place of social integrity and brotherhood, where people having any religious difference come and pray together. The custodians and the devotee's accused the Ahl-i-Hadith of being irreligious (*be-din*) and the deniers of Sufis (*Munkir-i-Auliya*). Taking pride in calling themselves *Ahl-i-itiqat*,² they highlighted the historical role of the Sufis and the Rishis not merely in the spread of Islam in Kashmir, more importantly, in the formation of the Kashmiri Muslim identity (**Khan, 2018**). The members of Ahl-i-Hadith were bitterly criticized and condemned what Sikand noted, as 'Brahman in Muslim guise'.

In mid of the nineteenth century a new wave of change start to come when Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi founded a new organisation named *Jama'at-i-Islami* in 1941³, Influenced by Maududi's ideology of the establishment of a state, based with the directive outlined in the Qu'rān and Sunnah, the *Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir* was established.⁴ *Jama'at-i-Islami* was the first to assert political Islam and rather than picking up few patches of Islam focused on the entire Islamic arena and asserted Islam as a complete way of life (*Mukamal Zabithah Hayat*) (**Maqbool, 2017**). Challenge the popular Sufism is one of the Salient features of the ideology of *Jama'at*, in which Sufi saints, living and dead are believed to be able to intercede with God on behalf of believers. This belief is seen as standing in sharp contradiction to Islamic monotheism (**Sikand, 2002**). 'The early ideologues of *Jama'at* of Kashmir attempt to present a form of Sufism which they saw in accordance with the Sunnah, and above all, as a means for the Islamic revolution, to bring the state and society under the law of Islam'. Unlike Ahl-i-Hadith, the *Jama'at* members were much moderate in case of Sufism. They did not attack Sufism openly as such. Sikand noted in his article, "*emergence and development of Jama'at-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir*", that, '*Jama'at-i-Islami* appeared as a movement not only sought to rescue the Kashmiri from their un-Islamic ways, taking them back to pristine Islam, but also enabling them to cope with contemporary challenges'. Instead of directly attacking the Sufi cults the *Jama'at* sought to operate from within existing Sufi frameworks in order to present what it saw as the true monotheistic teaching of the Sufis, which had, over the centuries, been covered with layers of superstition (**Sikand**). But the *Jama'at* cannot be spared from the attack of custodians of Sufi Dargah. The custodians of the Shrines and the class of Pirs, who gained much respect among the Kashmiri people, seem the growing popularity of the reform movements were threat to their authority. Others accused it of being 'deniers of the Prophetic traditions' (*Munkar-i-Hadith*), 'obscurantist' (*qadamat Pasand*), 'communist' (*firqa Parast*), 'anti-national' (*Mulk dushman*) and even being agent of CIA (Saifuddin) (**Saifuddin**). Allegation was labeled against the *Jama'at* by what it called 'monopolists of religion', of promoting wrong belief (*bad ayteqadi*) and of 'denying the Sufi' (*auliya-i-allah ke munkar*) (**Sikand**).

Conclusion

Throughout the world Kashmir is either known for its beauty or for the most dangerous conflicting zone on earth. But for the historian and researchers it become a very interesting area of research that helps in bringing Kashmir out of the above two context. Sufism which makes the valley much rich in culture and highly tolerable place on the universe, entered in Kashmir when it was passing through much troubled time. Sufism becomes the main dominant expression of Islam among the Kashmiris. In fact, Sufism led to the development in the formation of Kashmiri Identity or Kashmiriness. Shrine in Kashmir have played a key role in defining the religious expression. The changing economic context of the valley led to the manifestation of social and political tussles around the shrine and shrine visitation. In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, with the coming of the "reformists" in Kashmir Sufism came

under attack. The terms that would form the core debate among Muslims over sectarian issues in subsequent decades were: *tauḥīd* (unity), *shirk* (assigning partner to God), *sunnah* (prophetic traditions) and *bida'at* (innovation). Robinson pointed out that, “The theme of emphasizing *tauḥīd* (the unity of God) and condemning *shirk* (actions that compromised the unity of God) ran through all the movements of the time.

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