

## ***Role of Sufi Saints for Spread of Islam and Religious Harmony in Kashmir***

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### **Abstract**

*The medieval period of Kashmir witnessed a great change in religious history of Kashmir. During this, the introduction of Islam in Kashmir Valley by Sufis Saints resulted in conversion of large scale population into Islam. The Sufi Saints from Central Asia and Persia introduced Islam in Kashmir in practical manners. It was only due to the efforts and devotion of these Sufis, Islam became the religion of masses. The Sufi saints have replaced the whole socio-economic structure of Kashmir. The Sufis were not only the articulators of Islamic Ideology in traditional manners but they practically impress the masses from their moral deeds and character. They introduced a culture of learning which consists of life skills and manners of society, which impress the people to accept the preaching of Islam. This paper endeavors to highlight the contribution of Sufi saints for spread Islam and conversion of people towards Islam. This is followed by highlighting the contribution of Muslim Sufi Saints for religious harmony, peace in Kashmir Valley, irrespective of religions and cultures.*

. **Keywords:** Islam, Kashmir, Sufis, role, conversion, harmony

### **Introduction:**

Kashmir is known as heaven on earth by virtue of its picturesque beauty and climatic variability. This beautiful land has always attracted the



people from outside either they were conqueror, visitors or preachers. It is the region which has been a place of cross cultural and civilizational activities. Thus, it is to be claimed that since ancient times, this region is a cultural mosaic with religious history. The ancient religions such as Buddhism survived till 5<sup>th</sup> century AD followed by Hinduism with analogous forms and these religions had a significant influence on the Kashmiri society.<sup>1</sup> Finally, Islam replaced Hinduism in fourteenth and fifteenth century and added new dimension to the life of the people of Kashmir, which later became the populace faith of the people. The conversion to Islam in Kashmir did only take place by virtue of Sufis' interventions and societal characteristics of Islam. Their advent from central Asia and Persia induced the non-Muslim to embrace the Islam. First name amongst the Sufis is Syed Abd-ur-Rehman Bulbul Shah from Turkistan is who started the preaching of Islam. It was the reign of Rinchan who later embraced Islam on the hands of Syed Abd-ur-Rehman, Bul Bul Shah. The king after changing his religion choosed the name of Sadr-ud-din, is also to be claim as the first Muslim king of Kashmir. The conversion of King from Buddhism to Islam was a landmark achievement of Sufi saint Bul Bul Shah, which paved the ways for gradual spread and preaching of Islam.

Actually, prior to king Sadr-ud-din, Kashmir was passing through political turmoil, state and society was totally controlled and divided into casts system by the Hindu dominated class. The highest and dominated caste was the Brahmins (upper class) who were the custodian of religion and beneficiaries of royal patronage. The rigidity of casts and class discrimination of Brahmanism created inequality and exploitation of the masses. Therefore, the lower caste society of Kashmir was only on the mercy of Brahamins, who used to treat the lower class in inhuman manners. In an atmosphere the lower class society of Kashmir valley was ready to accept any of religion that could prove to be the alternative to get rid the exploitation of Barhamanism.<sup>2</sup> To

this, it was an easy for new religion to attract the suppressed class of Kashmiri society and finally Islam achieved it by the devotions of Muslim Sufis.

**Discussion:**

**(a) Advent of Muslim in Kashmir prior to Sufi Missionaries:**

The literature on Kashmir, unanimously reveal that the arrival of Muslims in Kashmir Valley had started the time when Muhammad Bin Qasim attacked on Sindh and he continued towards the Kashmir. He reached the place "Paj Nihyat" (Pujnnad where the River Jhelum, Chenab, Sutlej and Beas merge into River Indus), but he was called back to Arab, due to political development in Ummayyad regime. During this time, an Arab Hmaim Bin Sami (Syrian) entered in Kashmir with the son of Raja Dahir to sought refuge.<sup>3</sup> Later, another unsuccessful attempt was also made to conquer the Kashmir in 757 by Hisham bin Amru, the Arab Governor of Sindh.<sup>4</sup> These attempts became the reasons for Arab traders to start their movements towards Kashmir<sup>5</sup>. The historical record reveals that during the attacks of Muhmood Ghaznavi 1014 and 1016, he plundered one valley in South of Kashmir and converted number of people to Islam. Pundit Kalhan is of the view that there was a presence of Turkic Muslim soldiers in Kashmir<sup>6</sup>.

**(b) Role of Sultans and their Contribution to Spread of Islam:**

Though, till 14<sup>th</sup> century there was a noticeable presence of Muslim in Kashmir, but it was stimulated by the Sufis and their missionaries who led to the gradual decline of Hinduism in Kashmir. By the introduction of Islamic rule, the Sufis, besides the kings introduced new techno-economic systems that revolutionize the life condition of the people. The conversion to Islam and introduction of new socio-economic system was a great zeal of Sufis and Muslim ruling kings who were instrumental in promotion of Islam thereby transformation of people into new faith. In 1320, Bul Bul Shah paid his 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Kashmir in the reign of Rinchan Shah who after his conversion in to Islam played an important role. The king after conversion in to Islam had

choosed the name of Sadrudin for himself. He was first Muslim King of Kashmir, who created the atmosphere for conversion in to Islam. The king of Kashmir enthusiastically was devoted towards the Islamization in Kashmir. He constructed one Mosque on the advice of his saint. In this mosque Bul Bul Shah used to offer prayers and also started teaching of Islam. Hazrat Bul Bul Shah made almost 10, 000 conversions to Islam<sup>7</sup>. After three years, again the Hindu rule came in power, but could not survive due to internal clashes and revolts. Finally, in 1339, the throne of Kashmir fell into the hands of Muslim king Shah Mir. The king laid the foundation of his rule according to Islamic principle. He heartedly received the Sufis from Central Asia and Persia and allowed to start the Islamization. Shah Mir appointed some religious personalities on governing affairs of the state and he wisely re-ordered the governance to improve the life condition of the people. The Shah Mir like Sultan Alaudin, Sultan Shahbudin, Sultan Qutubudin, Sultan Sikandar and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, etc. have further strengthened the Islamization in Kashmir. These ruling kings placed the Sufi in state affairs who added the Islamic principle in governance as model for justice, equality and improvement of people. The era of Shahmiri Sultans consists over span of 200 years, in which we found the significant developments and achievements to flourish the Islamic culture in Kashmir Valley. Sultan Shahabudin, Sultan Qububudin and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin are famous in this regard. These sultans have not only strengthened their kingships but also developed Islamic culture which has seen its glory and stupendous achievements. It is pertinent to mention that, the Muslim King conquered the areas, neither they destroyed the old traditions nor oppressed the people. For example, Sultan Shahabudin is known as second Lalitaditya of Kashmir by his and expeditions but he did not oppress and discriminate the people on basis of religion. The king was also dedicated for Islamization in Kashmir. In the reign of Shahabudin various Sufi Saints from Persia arrived in Kashmir. Syed Ali Hamdani came to

Kashmir with 700 Sadats.<sup>8</sup> For these Sayyids, Sultan Shihab-ud-Din made all arrangements for their re-habitation. Good numbers of madarasas were opened where the teaching of Quran, Hadith and Fiqah was given to the people. Sultan Qutubudin also whole heartedly promoted the Islamic culture on the behest of Sufi Saints. King obeyed the Mir Muhammad Hamdani in all matters of his life and even he started to dress according to the advice of saint. Sultan Qutubudin became the murid of Mir Muhammad Hamdani. He established the seat of Sheikh-ul-Islam to maintain shariah in the country.

Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin like his predecessors made significant steps for Islamization in valley. His rule was hallmark for achieving the objectives of kingship. The king revolutionized the Kashmir society with socio-economic and educational upliftment. Besides this development, he promoted Islamic principles according to Quran and Shairiah. The appointment of experts on key position was another objective of the king to strengthen the spirit of Islam. The king choosed the right persons for right jobs to create fair atmosphere for all communities. He honored the religious scholars and learned persons. Various translation bureaus, educational and religious centers were established. He was too famous for religious tolerance and communal harmony. He brought Brahmins back to Kashmir, who was then given responsible positions in the Government. His religious tolerance and communal respect and cooperation were the objectives to create peace and stability in valley. He rebuilt the demolished temples and banned cow slaughter, considered sacred by Hindus. During his 50 years of rule 1420-1470, because of significant achievements in valley, his rule is still recognized as the golden period in the ruling history of Kashmir. Thereafter, the later Sultan of Kashmir also made good repute in promoting of Islamic culture in Kashmir.

**(c) Role of Sufis for Spread of Islam in Kashmir:**

Indeed, Islam introduced in Kashmir not by use of force any compulsion; it was only due to peaceful efforts of Sufi missionaries. Because

of this, Sufism in Kashmir has deep seated roots, have it existence with the advent of Islam. Therefore, the Kashmiris called their native land as “Pir Vaer” means the Valley of saints.<sup>9</sup> The Sufi saints converted the people from Hinduism in to Islam by following the methods of persuasion and spiritual guidance. They won over the hearts of the people by their love-full nature, simplicity, devotion and dedication. The Sufi saints emphasize on the people to accept the message of Islam as new way of life. Besides preaching of Islam, they introduced new techniques to improve the socioeconomic life. It was a fruitful method that inspired the people towards conversion and thereafter reduced the societal injustice.<sup>10</sup> This policy paved the ways for smooth conversion in to Islam, which has everlasting imprints on the religious as well economic life of Kashmiris.

In the advent of Sufis from Central Asia and Iran the first and famous name in Kashmir is Syed Sharf-ud-din popularly known as Bul Bul Shah of Suhrwardi order who started this mission. The next famous Sufi Saint to enter in Kashmir Valley was Syed Ali Hamdani Popularly known as Ameer-i-Kabir, Shah-i-Hamdan of Kubravi order. He was followed by other Sufis like Sayyid Muhammad Hisari, Mir Muhammad, Sayyid Jamalud-Din Bukhari and Sayyid Ismail Shami, Mir Sayyid Haidar, Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din, Sayyid Kamal, Sayyid Kamal-i-Sani, Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din Atai, Sayyid Firuz Alias, Sayyid Jalal, Sayyid Muhammad Qazim, Sayyid Rukn-ud-Din, Sayyid Muhammad Qureshi, Sayyid Azizullah, Amir Sayyid Ahmad Madani, Sayyid Nuru’ d-Din, Baba Haji Adham, Mullah Hasamu’ d-Din and Mulla Parsa much more arrived from central Asia and Persia. The sufi saints from outside were followed by Muslim Rishi saints of Kashmir like Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani popularly known as Nund Reshi, Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom known as Sultan-ul-Arifin, Baba Dawood Khaki, Yaqoob Sarfi, Syed Ahmed Kirmani, Baba Zain-ud-din, Baba Paimu-ud-din Reshi and Baba Bam-ud-din etc<sup>11</sup>. The religious, moral characteristics and devotion of theses saints smoothed the

conversion in to Islam in slow and systematic motion. In regard to the role of sadats in conversion in to Islam, P.N Bazaz says, *it was a consequence of spiritual, ideological and intellectual warfare. The Sadats were expounders of principles, tents, dogmas and philosophy of life*<sup>12</sup>.

In the chain of Sufi saints, the one of the great personality was Syed Ali Hamdani, who arrived in Kashmir thrice in 1372-73, 1379-80 and 1383-84.<sup>13</sup> His visits to Kashmir were essentially an Islamic mission. He introduced the Islamic values and new socioeconomic life to Kashmiris. Though, Shah-Hamdan visited many places of the world like Mazdaqan, Khatlan, Bulkh, Badakshan Khata, Yezed, Syria, Baghdad, Hijaz, Rome, Turkistan, Srilanka for preaching of Towheed. As far as his visit and mission to Kashmir is concerned, the political and socio-religious atmosphere was favorable for his missionary and team work. In Kashmir, he delivered the message of Islam in peaceful manners. Syed Ali irrespective of specific school of thought only he delivered his message based on the pillars of Towheed, the oneness of God, Taqva and Ikhlas. His associates too adopted the method of peaceful persuasion that assembled the caste ridden society of Kashmir under the umbrella of Islam. Even historians of the time have not cited any single example of forcible conversion of Syed Ali Hamdani. He went to people with the vision of religious harmony, equality and justice. His teaching gave the sense of freedom to Kashmiri society that had been living in fear, uncertainty, ignorance and poverty. Shah-i-Hamdan not only uplifted the Kashmiri nation morally and socially, but also gave new hope to life living in peace, respect and dignity.<sup>14</sup> A Hindu historian/writer, "Bamzai" attributes the process of conversion in to Islam as to deep scholarship and attainment of Syed Ali Hamdani. He says *"that the Syed Ali Hamdan's deep scholarship and spiritual attainments were responsible for accelerating the process of the conversion of valley to Islam, goes without saying"*<sup>15</sup>. The following features can be traced behind Sha-i-Hamdan's successful mission to Kashmir, team work, peaceful conversion, communal harmony and no interests in political affairs. So he kept the

mission in straight lines and therefore succeeded to convert almost 37000 people in to Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Syed Ali Hamdani in his three visits to Kashmir; was accompanied with religious scholars and artisan. Some prominent members of his team included Khwaja Ishaq Khatlani, Shaykh Qawam-al-Din, Sayyed Hussain Simnani, Sayyed Kamal and Muhammad Kazim, etc. He was accompanied by seven hundred sadats and most of them were quite experts in different fields of life<sup>17</sup>. In his associates, Syed Kamal was learned person of Shariah, Syed Muhammad Kazim as Chief Librarian,<sup>18</sup> Syed Muhammad Bhaiqui, Syed Muhammad Ainposh, Syed Baha-ud-din and Syed Muhammad Balkhi were too lettered disciples of Shah-i-Hamdan. While visiting the Kashmir, Shah-i-Hamdan selected experts with his mission and by them the people of Kashmir had learned innovative skills who suggested ways and means to improve the life conditions of the people.<sup>19</sup> To this, he is regarded as role model in Kashmiri society for religious contribution, cultural harmony, economy, politics and education.

Shah-i-Hamdan instructs and advice the Sultan Qutubudin to adopt the principle of governance laid down in Islamic Shariah. He devoted some parts of Zakhiratul Muluk to discuss issues of state affairs and politics and also Risala-i-Maktubat is another work on political issue.<sup>20</sup> Syed Ali Hamdani (RA) was not only a traditional religious preacher but he was a learned scholar and reformer with having 170 books and some of them are, *Zakhiratul Mulukm Majmmaa-l-Hadith*, *Minahaj-ul-Arifin Mira-Tultaibin*, *Marif-ul-Zuhud Halu-i-Fasu*, *Adab-ul-Muridin*, *Risala-i-Faqriya*, *Mashriq-ul-Anwar*, *Sharah-i-Asma Husna*, *Risala-i-Talqinia*, *Risala-i-Khawatriya* and *Risal-i-Manqab*, etc. Syed Ali Hamdani was really a great architect of Islamic state and society of Kashmir. The concept of Muslim architecture and Khanqas was also introduced by the companions of Shah-i-Hamdan which was dedication towards the Islam and Islamic culture. Largely the Kashmiri society benefitted from his strategies and involvement in socio-economic activities, which helped the common man to elevate his standard of living and thereby also accepting Islam as new faith.

Shah-i-Hamdan was followed by prominent Sufi personalities like Khwaja Ishaq Khatlani, Shaykh Qawam-al-Din, Sayyed Hussain Simnani, Sayyed Kamal and Muhammad Kazim. Amongst these Sufis, Mir Muhammad Hamdani, the son Shah-i-Hamdan, travelled to Kashmir in 796 Hijra with 300 disciples<sup>21</sup> and significantly contributed in Islamization in valley.<sup>22</sup> Mir Muhammad Hamdani followed the methods of his father for the Islamization in Kashmir Valley. Mohibul Hassn states, around 30 thousands of people embraced Islam on the hands of Mir Muhammad Hamdani<sup>23</sup>. On account of the conversion of a large population including the ruling class, it became possible to Islamize the state craft, which was one of the main concerns of Mir Muhammad Hamadani.<sup>24</sup> It was the ruling era of Sultan Sikandar who was a staunch Muslim and follower of Shariah. When Mir Muhammad Hamdani arrived, the King received him in great respect. The saint gave first preference to king for winning over his heart. It was the result of saints' influence the king abolished the custom of Sati, banned liquer and also eliminated social evils, un-Islamic ritual and practices. Mir Muhammad Hamdani stayed for 22 years went to every corner of Kashmir to provide religious and spiritual guidance.<sup>25</sup> Just like his father, Mir Muhammad Hamadani was not only a mystic or traditional Sufi, but also a prolific writer both in Persian and Arabic. He is the author of more than 45 books on different religious sciences.<sup>26</sup> The associates of Muhammad Hamdani were also experts in different fields of socioeconomic life who introduced new skills and techniques especially in handicraft sector. Due to this, Kashmir had seen rise in handicrafts sector which later became the main source of earning of the people. It is no wrong to say that the Sufi Saints from Persia and Central Asia not only introduced the teaching of Islam but brought technical skills, education, culture and socioeconomic revolution.

The mystic revolution of Syed Ali Hamdani in Kashmir gave birth to local indigenous Sufi order known as Rishi order. The Kashmiri Rishis too

enormously worked for Islamization and spiritual guidance in Kashmir. They delivered the message of peace, love, harmony and fraternity between all creatures of God, regardless of a specific religion and therefore, Rishi Sufi Saints are honored equally by Muslims and Hindus.<sup>27</sup>

Sheikh Noorudin Rishi is one of the most revered Muslim Sufi of Kashmir. He played a vital role not only founding and popularizing the Rishi order in Kashmir. His role is also important for spread of Islam and character building of Kashmiri society. He visited village to village to preach the message of Islam. His message and teaching attracted the people from all religions. Noorudin Rishi's denunciation to materialistic desires, belief on social equality, justice and communal harmony strengthened the universal brotherhood. Jonaraja, the famous historian represents him as a 'greatest saint of his time' who lived simple and vegetarian life.<sup>28</sup> He delivered the message of love, peace and humanism in his poetry.<sup>29</sup> The saint was much influenced and inspired by the words of Lala Arifa (Lal Ded) and she was initial source of inspiration for him. Noorudin rishi used local language to make his movement as progressive. He used the language of masses (Kashmiri) in persuasion of his movement and made easy for unlettered people to understand the spirit of Quran and Hadith. His poetry (popularly known Shrukh) is full of mystic thought, spiritual guidance, ethics and humanism which served as the holy saying for Kashmiris irrespective of religious affiliations.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the saint is founder composite culture of Kashmir known as Kashmiryat.

The other Sufis of Kashmir Sheikh Hamza Makhdum popularly known as Sultan-Ul-Arifeen/Makhdoom Sahib. The saint like his predecessor followed the Sunnah of Prophet (PBUH) strictly and asked the people to do it. His role for Islamization and spiritual guidance in valley is important. Sultan-ul-Arifeen too intensively worked for eliminating superstitions and social evils in Kashmir society. The teaching and preaching of Hamza Makhdoom reveal

that he tried to build a society purely according to Quran and Sunnah. Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom studied the Jurisprudence, Tradition, Logic, Philosophy, Ethics, and Mysticism and practically applied these subjects to reforms in Kashmir Valley.<sup>31</sup> Makhdoom Saheb also preached religious harmony, peace and love irrespective of creed and cast. There is another revered character of Kashmir Valley is who belongs to Kashmir clan "Ganai" (literate).<sup>32</sup> Baba Dawood Khaki was the popular companion of Hamza Makhdoom He was a learned saint and scholar worked as Chief Qazi of Kashmir during the reign of Ali Shah Chak. Besides his mystic contribution and scholarly inputs, he was a famous poet of the time. He represented Towheed, mysticism and humanism and communal brotherhood in his poetry.<sup>33</sup>

There is another Sufi saint and religious scholar Sheikh Yaqoob Sarfi' whose contribution is enormous in promoting Islamic teaching and culture. G.M.D. in his work Kasheer represent him as 'Alama'' learned man.<sup>34</sup> He memorized the Quran in his early age and later became the student of famous religious scholar and Sufi saints like Alaf Tani. Sheikh Yaqoob Sarfi is author of famous works, Maslak-I-Akhyar, Wamiq-va-Azra, Laila-va-Majno, Mughaz-i-Nabi, Muqamat-i-Murshad, Sharah-i-Bukhari, Munasiq-i-Haj, munaqib-i-Oliya and Tafseer-i-Sarf, etc. Because of contribution of Sheikh Yaqoob Sarfi in religion and literature, various scholars remembered him as famous religious scholar, mystics and poet of the time who had true dedication towards religion. These Sufi Saints not only worked for Islamization in Kashmir but also promoted religious harmony according to the spirits of the teaching of Islam.

#### **(d) Role of Sufis for Harmony and Peace in Kashmir:**

Islam introduced in Kashmir by Sufi Saints in organized and softer form. Unlike to other parts of subcontinent Islam only spread in Kashmir by love-full dealing of Sufis who promoted the concept of religious humanism. When Islam reached, Kashmiri society was passing through political turmoil,

division of casteism, hypocrisy of dominant class and exploitation of lower class. In such atmosphere, Islam and Sufi saints have provided relief to people to get rid from casteism and social injustice. To this, the Sufi saints by their moral characters won upon over the hearts of people. In a result they attracted a large number of people under the umbrella of Islam.<sup>35</sup> They promoted the culture of religious independence and communal respect that provided collectiveness and religious harmony between Muslims and Hindus.

The saints right from Syed Ali Hamdani to Sheikh Yaqoob Sarfi, were ardent promoter of communal harmony and respect. In aforesaid lines, we exemplified the role of Sufi saints who preached the message of peace and communal harmony. This was the real essence of Islamic teaching which was truly spreading the message of Islam and sowing the seeds of the concept of religious-humanism. None of the historical evidence reveals that these Sufis made any forcible conversion in to Islam. Their tolerance in regard to conversion was a quite valuable contribution in building of composite culture of Kashmir irrespective of religions. The concept of religious harmony was further strengthened by other Sufis like Lal Ded, Sheikh Noorudin. They advocated mutual love and respect between high and low and Hindus and Muslims. The sayings of both of these saints are in the language of masses which are full of humanistic values and love. Despite of varied political oriented conflicts throughout the course of history, the communal harmony between the peace loving people of Kashmir continued to have documentable history in everyday life. This is the result of the preaching and teaching of Sufi Saints. The history of Kashmir never witnessed communal conflict between Hindus and Muslim after the spread of Islam in Kashmir. Like Sufi saints the Muslim king of Kashmir were too supporters of religious and communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

**Conclusion:**

The above discussion shows that Islam introduced in Kashmir not due

to any conquest or invasion but only through traders and Sufi saints. Though, the presence of Muslims in Kashmir is traced back to 8<sup>th</sup> century, but after the arrival of Sufis from central Asia and Iran in 14<sup>th</sup> century Islam became populace religion. In regard to conversion of people in to Islam, the Sufi saints used the method of persuasion and religious harmony. They articulated the message of Islam in practical manners than traditional. Their actions and moral characteristics attracted the people under the umbrella of Islam largely. Further, the message of religious tolerance and communal harmony of Sufis Saints acted as concrete force between Kashmir societies to accept their preaching. The Muslim and Hindu too greeted upon their moral and love-full nature, which ultimately became another reason for conversion of large scale population of Kashmir Valley in to Islam. For this, the role of Syed Ali Hamdani and his associate was much important. Besides this, another important reason behind the conversion was the socioeconomic upliftment of the Kashmiri society, which was earlier exploited by Hindu dominated class. Apart from the role of Sufi saint the credit is also to Muslim king of Kashmir who extended their patronage for Sufi saint and scholars, which created the favorable atmosphere for smooth preaching of Islam without any oppression. Currently, almost seventy percent population of Kashmir is Muslim this is because of Syed Ali Hamdani and his associates.



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