

The History of Islam in Kashmir: A Special Focus on Sufi Saint Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s Socio-religious Impact on the Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

This paper delves into the rich history of Islam in the Kashmir Valley, focusing on the profound socio-religious impact of the revered Sufi saint Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam. It traces the early Islamic presence in Kashmir, shaped by figures like Hazrat Bulbul Shah and Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan, and explores the unique integration of Islam in the region, distinct from other South Asian experiences often marked by conquest and trade. The study highlights key milestones, including the pivotal role of Sufi missionaries in embedding Islamic practices and laws. Central to the paper is the transformative influence of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, whose teachings and poetry addressed social justice, ethical reform, and environmental consciousness while promoting Islamic monotheism. His engagement with indigenous traditions, particularly the Rishi order, further enriched Kashmir’s spiritual and cultural landscape. The study highlights Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s enduring legacy in fostering a harmonious and inclusive society, emphasizing his lasting impact on Kashmir’s religious and cultural identity.

Key Words: Islam, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, Sufi, Socio-religious Impact, Kashmir Valley.

Introduction

The history of Islam in Kashmir is a narrative deeply intertwined with the region’s cultural and spiritual evolution. Unlike other parts of South Asia, where Islam is believed was introduced through conquest and trade¹ Kashmir’s Islamic legacy is rooted in the spiritual teachings of Sufi saints who catalyzed the religious transformation of the valley. The journey of Islam in

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Kashmir began as early as the times of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), with initial interactions leading to the formation of small Muslim communities. However, the permanent establishment of Islam in Kashmir is credited to the efforts of prominent Sufi saints like Hazrat Bulbul Shah and Mir Syed Muhammad Hamdaani, who played crucial roles in converting the local population and integrating Islamic teachings into the socio-political fabric of the region².

Among these luminaries, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, also known as Sheikh Noor-uddin Noorani, emerges as a pivotal figure whose socio-religious impact on Kashmir continues to resonate. Born in the late 14th century, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s life and teachings significantly shaped the spiritual landscape of Kashmir. His mission, deeply rooted in Sufi principles, was characterized by an emphasis on purity, piety, and love for humanity. Through his poetry, he created a unique dialogue between Islamic teachings and the local Kashmiri culture, making the religion accessible and relevant to the masses³.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s contributions extended beyond mere religious preaching; he was a social reformer who addressed the inequalities and injustices of his time. His critiques of social hierarchies, moral decay, and the caste system were profound, and his emphasis on unity and brotherhood laid the foundation for a more harmonious society. His teachings, which transcended religious boundaries, were instrumental in the Islamization of Kashmiri society and continue to inspire spiritual seekers today⁴.

This paper aims to explore the history of Islam in Kashmir with a special focus on the socio-religious impact of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam. By examining the historical genesis of Islam in the region and the transformative role of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, the study seeks to highlight how the convergence of Sufi spirituality and local culture led to the formation of a unique Islamic identity in Kashmir. The enduring legacy of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, reflected in his teachings and their continued relevance, emphasizes the profound influence of Sufi saints in shaping the religious and cultural ethos of the Kashmir Valley.

Historical genesis of Islam in Kashmir

The early traces of Islam in Kashmir dates back to the times of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). It is said that He himself has dispatched two envoys to the court of the Hindu King, namely Venadatt, who was much impressed by their invitation '*dawah*' that he not only began to live a simple life but also distributed part of his wealth as '*ushur*' (10th part of the wealth in Islam) amongst the poor. Thereafter Muslim general of Syrian origin, 'Hamim bin Sama' in the army of Jasiya, who was a son of the Hindu king of Sindh, fled to Kashmir with Hamim after his father was defeated by Mohammad bin Qasim around 711 CE. It is said he was warmly welcomed by the Hindu king of Kashmir, where Hamim laid the foundation of the Muslim community and built several mosques⁵.

Arab traveller of ninth-century Buzurg bin Shahryar' also makes us believe that the first translation of the Holy Quran in the Kashmiri language was commissioned by the Hindu king of Mehroke. The notable *Pandit*⁶ Scholar of Kashmir, namely 'Kalhan', maintains that the Harshadeva- Kashmiri Hindu king (1089-1101), employed many Muslims in his army and court. Thus unlike the rest of the Muslim-majority areas in South Asia, Islam came to Kashmir valley from 'Khurasan' and Central Asia, and not through the South⁷. Arnold Walter has traced the origin of Islam in Kashmir to the invasion of Tartar Khan Dalcha in the early twelfth century, around 1128 AD⁸.

However, it was only two centuries later that Syed Abdur Rahman, prominently known as 'Hazrat Bulbul Shah' of Turkestan with his thousand disciples, succeeded in permanently establishing the base of Islam in Kashmir. Hazrat Bulbul Shah's real name was 'Sayyed Sharfauddin Abdur Rahman,' and according to some accounts, he was either from Iran or Baghdad and came to Kashmir first in 1295 CE on a short trip, but later in 1324 CE with his one thousand disciples including prominent Islamic Scholars. Among his first converts was the Buddhist Prince Ranchan Shah', popularly known as Sadruddin, who was married to his daughter Hindu Raja. Having an aversion to casteism, he not only proved a solid figure for the foundation of Islam in

Kashmir but also vigorously assisted ‘Hazrat Bulbul Shah’ in the conversion of Hindu’s⁹. Thus he became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir¹⁰.

After Hazrat Bulbul Shah, Mir Syed Muhammad Hamdaani, notably known as ‘Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan’, arrived in the early 1390s along with seven hundred disciples to spread Islam in Kashmir valley during the reign of Sultan Sikandar’. It is said that it was through his efforts that ‘Sikandar’ was able to establish ‘Islamic law’ or ‘*Shariah*’¹¹ rule in Kashmir¹². He is regarded as the most outstanding personality whose missionary efforts wielded the most extraordinary influence in the spread of Islam in Kashmir. His influence was not only limited to religion, but culture, politics, and economy were also greatly influenced¹³.

Likewise, Aziz Ahmad is of the view that “Hazrat Shahi Hamdaan had made an outstanding contribution in the Islamization of Kashmir. He was also a political theoretician, a champion of Muslim elitism in a composite society, and of a pietistic political concept of the monarchy with its primary responsibility to the Islamic faith. It is more probable that the immediate result of his sojourns in Kashmir was not the ‘conversion’ of non-Muslims but rather the ‘Islamization’ of the ruling dynasty and the nominally Muslim element of the ruling elite. This was followed by the mass conversion of many Hindu Jatis so that they could achieve emancipation from the stigma of pollution”¹⁴.

It is primarily through the efforts of these two prominent Sufi preachers that Islam spread to the whole valley. Through their outstanding spiritual charisma, thousands of Hindus entered the fold of Islam voluntarily. Alone, Hazrat Shahi-Hamdaan, popularly known by Kashmiri people as ‘Ameer-i-Kabeer’ (the great leader), is credited with the conversion of about ‘thirty-seven thousand Hindus’ to the fold of Islam.

Further Islamization in Kashmir was accelerated by thousands of Syeds, Islamic scholars, and other followers accompanied by them. Hazrat ‘Bulbul Shah’ and Hazrat Shahi Hamdaan belonged to the Suhrawardiya and Kubrawiya orders of Sufi’s having a strong intellectual base and tracing their lineage to pious predecessors like Hazrat Umar (RA). Later on, during the

reign of Zayn-ul-Abideen (1420-1470 AD), who was the son of king Sikandar and popularly known as 'Bud Shah', some indigenous Sufi traditions came-fore, among which Rishi order is prominent. Rishi order is traced to 'Nur-al-Din' (Nund Rishi), popularly known as 'Shaikh Nur-ud-Din Nurani' or Shaikh-ul-Aalam. This order was based on mutual tolerance and a mixture of Hindu-Muslim beliefs. Hazrat Shiekh-ul-Aaalm is said to be influenced by his famous contemporary Hindu mystic 'Laala Yogishwari,' popularly known as 'Lal Ded' and Hazrat Shahi-Hamdaan. In the meantime, Sultan Zayn-ul-Abideen disregarded '*Shariah*' laws, approved the reconversion of neo-Muslims to their old faith, visited Hindu temples, and participated in Hindu festivals. This is why he is popularly known as Akbar of Kashmir. All this might have led to the new 'Sufi' order, primarily the 'Rishi' order, based on an intermixture of Hindu-Muslim beliefs with hardly any distinctions between them¹⁵. However, Hazrat Shaikh-ul-Aalam does not himself promote any intermixture or innovation in Islam. It was promoted by fake mullahs, fake Sufis, blind followers and custodians of the shrines to serve their selfish interests. Hazrat Shaikh-ul-Ālam is regarded as the greatest exponent of Islamic monotheism, '*tawheed*'¹⁶.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam

Shaikh Nūr ul-Dīn's, famously known as Shaikh-ul-Ālam (Spiritual Preceptor of the World), and by other titles such as Taj-ul Awliya (the Emperor of Saints), Nund Rishi (Pious Saint), and Alamdar-i Kashmir (Flag Bearer of Kashmir), stands as one of the most revered figures in the history of the Kashmir Valley. Born on 10th Dhil-Hajj 779 A.H. (10th December 1377 C.E.) in Khai Jogipora, Kulgam, to Shaikh Salar-ud-Din and Sadra, a devout couple, he embarked on a profound spiritual journey from an early age. This journey, characterized by intense meditation in secluded caves, led to his ultimate spiritual enlightenment. Upon attaining this enlightenment, Shaikh-ul-Ālam emerged with a touring mission to spread the message of Islam throughout the valley, living in various places and preaching a message centered on purity, piety, fear of Allah, and love for humanity¹⁷.

Despite the political landscape of Kashmir, ruled by the Sultans during his lifetime, Shaikh-ul-Ālam remained detached from active politics, even

though rulers like Sultan Zain al-'Ābidīn Budshah held him in high regard. His focus was on his mission of *dawah*, aiming to establish an Islamic society rooted in love, honesty, tolerance, patience, brotherhood, and moral integrity. His poetry, composed in the local language, played a crucial role in facilitating a dynamic interaction between Islamic teachings and local culture, making his teachings accessible and relevant to the people of Kashmir. Through his poetic contributions, he established a creative dialogue between the great tradition of Islam, as represented by the Sufis and 'Ulamā, and the local peasant society. This interaction was instrumental in the acculturation and Islamization of Kashmiri society, leading to the spread of Islam in the region¹⁸.

Shaikh-ul-'Ālam's legacy is deeply interwoven with the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of Kashmir. Celebrated as a theological genius, a profound scholar, and an influential Sufi poet, his poetry, often referred to as the "Kashmiri Quran," continues to inspire spiritual seekers and mystics. His teachings transcend religious boundaries, resonating with people of all faiths, including Hindus who revere him as 'Sahjanand.' The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on Kashmiri Sufism led to the development of a unique spiritual tradition known as Rishism—a local form of mysticism deeply rooted in Sufi ideals¹⁹.

Shaikh-ul-'Ālam traveled extensively across Kashmir, ultimately settling in Charar-i-Sharief, where he continued his spiritual and social endeavors. He lived for sixty-three years and a few months, passing away in Rupawan village of Charar-i-Sharief on 26th Jamad al-Thani 842 A.H. (corresponding to 1439 C.E.)²⁰ during the reign of Sultan Zain al-'Ābidīn Budshah. His funeral was attended by many well-known Islamic personalities, including the king, highlighting his significant impact on the region. By the formal order of King Budshah, a shrine was constructed over his tomb, which stands at Charar-i-Sharief in the district of Budgam in Kashmir, drawing large crowds to this day²¹.

Shaikh ul-'Ālam's teachings offer a roadmap to replace societal evils with love, respect, and peace, making his message as vital today as it was during his time.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s Socio-Religious Impact on Kashmir

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, was a transformative figure whose influence on Kashmiri society was profound and multifaceted. His contributions, spanning both societal and religious domains, can be understood through the following key aspects:

(a) Societal Impact of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam on Kashmir

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam made a profound impact on Kashmiri society through his extensive efforts in reform and social critique. His influence was felt across various facets of societal life, driven by his commitment to ethical and social reform.

Addressing Social Inequities:

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, was a vocal critic of the social inequalities and injustices prevalent in Kashmiri society. His poetry often highlighted the disparities between the rich and the poor, criticizing the moral and social failings of the affluent classes. He condemned the wealthy for their neglect of the poor and their indulgence in worldly pleasures, which he viewed as morally and socially irresponsible. Through his Shruks, he exposed the exploitation and suffering of the marginalized, advocating for their upliftment and stressing the importance of empathy and support. In one of his Shruks²², he states:

*One gets amused with musicians- melodious
Gleeful all in drowsiness too.
The other is struck violently with whips and batons.
Learn this self, is the discretion of Lord!*

In his verses, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam redefined poverty as a noble condition, a source of virtue, and a path to spiritual elevation, in stark contrast to the materialism and moral decay he associated with the rich. His teachings encouraged respect and dignity for the poor, urging the wealthy to practice generosity and charity. He emphasized that true wealth lies in righteousness and spiritual purity, rather than in material possessions. This sentiment is captured in another Shruk where he asserts²³:

*Poverty is a shield against Hell,
Poverty is the virtue of Prophets,*

*Poverty is the wealth of this and the next world,
 Poverty is sweet and fragrant,
 One who is steadfast in the path of Poverty,
 So will be honored here and the Hereafter.*

Critique of Social Practices and Morality

Shaikh-ul-Ālam used his poetry as a powerful tool to critique social practices he deemed unjust or immoral. His Shruks reflected his disdain for the caste system and social hierarchies, condemning caste discrimination and advocating for the equality of all humans as descendants of Adam and Eve. This stance was a call for unity and equality among all people, regardless of social or economic status. This is reflected in his Shruks²⁴:

*He does not consider the creed and color
 His eye is always on the heart
 Ādam is the progenitor of the human race
 From him came wife, our mother Eve
 From where have the low castes descended?
 How can a high born taunt the low born badly?*

He also critiqued the moral and ethical decay he observed in society, warning against indulgence in immoral behavior and highlighting the destructive consequences of such actions. His verses urged individuals to uphold their character and integrity, emphasizing that moral corruption undermines the foundation of a just and harmonious society. This is reflected in his Shrukh²⁵:

*Don't stare at strange women
 Because you're pious and piety will get lost
 Your faith too will get stained by it
 Pride does not behave a Muslim*

His criticism extended to religious leaders, and scholars, whom he accused of hypocrisy and deceit, challenging them to live according to the true principles of Islam rather than exploiting their positions for personal gain. Besides he has also highlighted the deceit of Brahmans. In a particularly striking Shrukh, he remarks²⁶:

*Müllāhs have become merchants of mosques,
 The Pandit steals the idols from the temple.*

*One among thousands of them may deserve salvation,
Others are all the disciples of Satan*

Promoting Unity and Brotherhood

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam was a strong proponent of unity and brotherhood among people of different faiths and backgrounds. He sought to bridge the divide between Muslims and Hindus, advocating for mutual respect and a shared sense of humanity. His teachings emphasized that religious and social divisions should not hinder the establishment of a harmonious and inclusive society. Through his poetry, he called for solidarity and unity, encouraging people to transcend sectarian barriers and work together for the common good. Likewise he has highlighted in his Shrukh²⁷:

*We belong to the same parents, then why this difference?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together) worship God alone.
We came to this world like partners;
We should have shared our joys and sorrows together.*

His approach to promoting communal harmony was rooted in his belief in the universal message of Islam. By focusing on the core teachings of the Qur’an and Hadith, he aimed to create an environment where love, respect, and cooperation could flourish. His efforts to unite different communities under a shared vision of ethical and spiritual values contributed to the creation of a more cohesive and supportive society.

Environmental Consciousness

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam was a visionary in his recognition of the intrinsic connection between humanity and the natural world. Long before environmentalism became a recognized global movement, he emphasized the importance of preserving and nurturing the environment. His poetry reflects a deep awareness of ecological balance, advocating for the protection of nature not just as a practical necessity but as a spiritual duty.

One of his most famous verses, “*Ann poshi teli yeli wan poshi*,” which translates to “*Food or life will sustain only as long as forests will survive*,” encapsulates his belief in the critical role of nature in sustaining human life²⁸. This simple yet profound statement emphasizes the interdependence between

human survival and the health of the environment, highlighting the necessity of preserving forests and natural resources for the well-being of future generations.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s reverence for nature extended beyond its utilitarian value. He saw the natural world as a source of spiritual solace and inspiration, a reflection of divine beauty that nurtured the soul. As Ahmad M. observes²⁹, *“It is these surroundings of thick forests, huge mountains, wider valleys which provide eternal solace, comfort, and concentration for Gnostic practices, aesthetic tastes, and devotional meditation.”* The natural landscape was, for Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, not only a physical environment but a spiritual sanctuary that facilitated deep reflection and connection with the divine.

His reverence for nature serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness between the environment and spiritual well-being.

Legacy and Lasting Influence

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s impact on Kashmiri society is evident in the enduring relevance of his teachings. His poetry continues to resonate with people, offering guidance on navigating social and moral challenges. The principles he espoused—justice, equality, compassion, and integrity—remain central to his legacy and provide valuable lessons for contemporary society.

His work as a reformer and poet has left a lasting imprint on the cultural and spiritual landscape of Kashmir. By addressing social injustices, advocating for the rights of the underprivileged, and promoting ethical living, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam has profoundly shaped the values and ideals of Kashmiri society. His contributions to social and moral reform continue to inspire individuals to strive for a just and compassionate world.

(b) Religious Impact

Dawah Mission

During the era of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, Kashmir was undergoing significant cultural assimilation, and Islam had not yet fully overcome the resistance from local Hindu and Brahman communities, who still held considerable power and influence, particularly within the Royal Court. The dominance of

these Hindu courtiers created barriers that prevented the common people from accessing the education and training necessary to understand the fundamentals of Islam. In this context, there was an urgent need for a religious scholar who could communicate the teachings of Islam in the local language, making it accessible to the unlettered masses.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, emerged as the instrument of change in this challenging environment. Although the reformation of the Kashmiri people had been initiated by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdāni, it was significantly advanced by Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam. He embraced the responsibility of the Ummah to uphold justice, promote righteousness, and prevent wrongdoing, as prescribed by the principle of *‘Amr-bil Ma’ruf wa Nahi ‘Anil Munkar.’* Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, carried out this mission with great sincerity, expressing his philosophy through his poetic compositions, known as Shruks. As a spiritual leader, he sought to enlighten the world with his philosophy of universal brotherhood, rooted in conviction and solidarity.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, is revered as a *Mufasssir*, or commentator of the Qur’an, in Kashmiri terminology. He translated the message of the Qur’an and Hadith into Kashmiri through his poetry, allowing the people of Kashmir to understand these sacred texts in their mother tongue. His contributions to Kashmiri society were immense, as he emphasized the importance of every aspect of Islamic life. His poetry reflects his unwavering faith in Allah (s.w.t) and his commitment to Islamic teachings, particularly in the areas of Beliefs (Īmāniyāt), which include Tawḥīd (Oneness of God), Risālah (Prophethood), and Ākhirah (Hereafter).

In his Shruks³⁰, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, conveyed these beliefs with profound clarity:

1. **On Tawḥīd:** *”He was and He shalt be, May for Him my dear-self be, Alone, He wilt remove thy fears and doubts Be perceptible to some extent O, me!”*
2. **On Risālah:** *”Let thou take Mohammad (s.a.w) and His four disciples as paragons of life. Solution to all thy affairs wilt thou get from them. Devote thy being to their defined doctrine. A vast empire wilt thou find*

in Hereafter. Able not a blind be to impel without a staff. Thus shalt not thou be righteous without Thy Prophet. One shalt pledge devotion to such a prophet. Whose era has brimmed in with divinity all the spheres?"

3. **On Ākhirah:** *"What shalt thou do on the day of resurrection. When rank & file shalt be with lurking fear. Each one shalt be looking for his ownself & The patient ones shalt lose the sense of patience."*

Non-Involvement in Active Politics

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam consciously chose to remain uninvolved in the active politics of his time, reflecting a core tenet of the Sufi tradition, which emphasizes the importance of spiritual over temporal power. Despite the reverence he commanded from rulers like Sultan Zain al-‘Ābidīn, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam remained focused on his religious mission, choosing not to participate directly in political affairs. This decision allowed him to serve primarily as a spiritual teacher and advisor on Islamic principles, earning him widespread respect as a genuine preacher of Islam³¹.

In a politically complex region like Kashmir, where the influence of Hindu courtiers often posed challenges to the Muslim community, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s abstention from political involvement was both strategic and principled. His commitment to spiritual guidance over political engagement helped him maintain his integrity and the purity of his mission. By prioritizing the moral and ethical reform of society, he demonstrated that the role of a religious leader can transcend the immediate concerns of governance, focusing instead on lasting spiritual impact.

In the broader context of Islamic history, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s stance reflects a longstanding debate about the role of religious scholars in politics. While some scholars have engaged deeply with political authority, many Sufi figures, like Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, have opted for a path of disengagement. This allowed him to inspire change from a position of spiritual authority, influencing rulers and common people alike through his teachings and example.

Peaceful Struggle

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s mission was characterized by a profound commitment to peaceful propagation of Islam. Emphasizing dawah (calling people to Islam), he relied on wisdom, compassion, and moral integrity rather than violence or coercion to spread his message. His teachings highlight the Sufi ideal of winning hearts through exemplary conduct rather than through force, establishing a model for religious dissemination that prioritized spiritual connection over political conquest³².

Historical accounts affirm that there were no instances of forced conversions or violent tactics associated with Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s mission. Instead, he utilized the power of his poetic compositions, known as Shruks, to convey the beauty and principles of Islam in the local Kashmiri language. This approach made Islamic teachings accessible to the unlettered masses and allowed them to relate to the sacred texts within their cultural context. By doing so, he transformed the landscape of spiritual engagement in Kashmir, emphasizing a compassionate and inclusive understanding of Islam.

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s peaceful struggle stands in contrast to the more politicized movements that arose in other regions of the Islamic world during his time. His dedication to a non-sectarian interpretation of Islam fostered unity among Muslims and distanced his teachings from the superstitions and divisions that plagued the local culture. His poetry often critiqued practices that blended Islamic teachings with superstitions, reinforcing his commitment to a pure form of faith.

Ultimately, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s legacy is one of peaceful reform, grounded in the principles of *Islah* (reform) and ethical conduct. By choosing a path of non-violence and prioritizing spiritual growth, he exemplified how religious leaders can effect meaningful change in society. His life and teachings serve as a powerful reminder of the potential for religious figures to inspire transformation without resorting to coercion or political entanglement, leaving a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people³³.

Non-Sectarian Approach

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam adhered to a non-sectarian approach in his teachings, focusing on the core principles of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Sayyid Sharf-ud-Din Bulbul Shah and Sayyid Ali Hamadani, he avoided engaging in sectarian disputes. His frequent use of the term ‘Muslim’ and his avoidance of divisive labels underscored his commitment to fostering a unified Islamic identity. Moreover, his criticism of practices that blended Islamic rituals with superstitions highlighted his dedication to a pure and non-sectarian interpretation of Islam. This is strikingly reflected in his Shrukh³⁴:

*Muslims who Hinduise their lives
By adherence to superstitions and customs
They believe in paganism only boast as Muslims
They are insincere and vicious people
They who paint their houses with cow dung
They who waste the delicious food items
They all shall be presented with blackfaces
On the day of resurrection before the Allāh (s.w.t).*

Emphasis on Religious Education

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam deeply valued education, especially in the realm of religious knowledge. He understood that true spiritual growth required a combination of learning and practice, and he emphasized the importance of a comprehensive education rooted in the Qur’an and Islamic teachings. For him, the pursuit of religious education was not merely an intellectual exercise but a means to deepen one’s understanding of divine commands and live a life aligned with Islamic principles.

Ahmad M. captures this sentiment by stating³⁵, “*Who has the courage and guts to lighten up a lamp against this wind storm? And will fuel the lamp with his knowledge and faith, will abandon the false message and look after the true one. All the knowledge is Alif, Laam, Meem.*”

This metaphorical lamp represents the guiding light of true knowledge, which must be protected and nurtured even in the face of adversity. The reference to *Alif, Laam, Meem*—the first verse of the second chapter of the

Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* (translated as "The Cow")—highlights the foundational nature of Qur'anic knowledge in Shaikh-ul-Ālam's teachings.

Conclusion

The examination of Islam's history in Kashmir, particularly through the lens of the Sufi Saint Shaikh-ul-Ālam, reveals a profound and multifaceted influence on the region's socio-religious fabric. This paper has traced the evolution of Islam in Kashmir from its initial introduction through various historical figures to its deep establishment and transformation under the guidance of key Sufi saints, emphasizing the unique contributions of Shaikh-ul-Ālam.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam, also known as Shaikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani, stands out as a pivotal figure whose influence transcended the boundaries of religious propagation. His ability to weave Islamic teachings into the local cultural and social fabric was instrumental in reshaping Kashmir's spiritual and ethical landscape. By employing poetry in the local Kashmiri language, he effectively bridged the gap between complex Islamic teachings and the everyday lives of the common people. This approach not only made religious knowledge accessible but also rooted it deeply in the cultural identity of the region, demonstrating the critical role of language in the dissemination of faith.

Through his poetic compositions, Shaikh-ul-Ālam confronted social inequities and moral decay, championing the cause of social reform. His critiques of wealth disparity and caste discrimination reflected a deep commitment to justice and compassion, echoing the principles outlined in the concept of 'Amr-bil Ma'ruf wa Nahi 'Anil Munkar' (commanding good and forbidding wrong). This commitment resonates with the peaceful struggle he embodied throughout his life, wherein he distanced himself from political involvement to focus on spiritual enlightenment and social cohesion. His non-sectarian approach fostered a unified Islamic identity, transcending divisions and emphasizing commonality among Muslims in Kashmir.

Additionally, Shaikh-ul-Ālam's environmental consciousness, articulated in his famous verse "Ann poshi teli yeli wan poshi," underscores a holistic vision that connects social justice, spiritual growth, and ecological balance. This

perspective is especially relevant today, as contemporary societies grapple with the intersection of environmental degradation and social injustice. By promoting an awareness of ecological stewardship, he positioned Islamic teachings as inherently linked to the well-being of the community and the environment.

The legacy of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam continues to resonate in contemporary discourse, providing timeless insights into the interplay of spirituality, social justice, and cultural integration. His teachings offer valuable lessons on moral integrity and environmental stewardship, reinforcing the relevance of Sufi thought in addressing modern societal challenges. Recognizing and preserving his contributions enriches our understanding of Kashmir’s religious history and highlights the broader impact of individual reformers in shaping both history and the future. Ultimately, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s enduring influence serves as a beacon of ethical guidance and spiritual wisdom, affirming the profound role of Sufi thought in fostering a compassionate and equitable society.

Notes and References

¹ . Richard M. Eaton's, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* highlights how Islam in Bengal was introduced through a combination of conquest and trade. The Persianized Turks conquered Bengal in 1204, and trade further facilitated the spread of Islam. pp.95-113. Similarly, André Wink in his book *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, 1990 pp. 7-24, 67, 192, examines how the conquest of Sind and other regions, followed by trade with the Middle East, facilitated the spread of Islam in the broader Indo-Islamic world.

² . Yogindar Sikand, 'Hazrat Bulbul Shah: The First Known Muslim Missionary in Kashmir', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2000, Vol. (20) 2, pp. 361-367.

³ . Mohamad Ilham Shiekh, *Shaikh Nur ud-Din (RA): Religious Reformation and Impact on Kashmiri Society*. Alamdar, A journal of Kashmiri Society and Culture, Markazi Noor, Centre for Shaikh-ul Aalam Studies, University of Kashmir, 2019 Vol. XIV, pp. 14-30. See also Meraj Ahmad, *Influence of Sheikh ul Alam's Poetry on Society*. Alamdar, A journal of Kashmiri Society and Culture, Markazi Noor, Centre for Shaikh-ul Aalam Studies, University of Kashmir 2019, Vol. XIV, pp. 41-46.

⁴ . Ibid.

⁵ . Sikand, Ibid., pp. 361-367.

⁶ . Pandit more often refers to upper class or priestly class in Hindus. In Kashmir Pandit refers to Brahman. It also means Hindu scholar well versed in Sanskrit, Hindu philosophy and religion.

⁷ . Sikand, Ibid., pp. 361-367. Similar views are also held by Aziz Ahmad in his 'Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir'. *Central Asian Journal*, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979, volume 23, pp. 3-18.

⁸ . Arnold Howard, Walter 'Islam in Kashmir.' *The Muslim world*, 1914, volume 4(4), pp. 340-352.

⁹ . Sikand, Ibid, pp. 361-367. See also Walter, Ibid., pp. 340-352 and Aziz Ahmad, Ibid., pp.3-18.

¹⁰ . G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashir, being a history of Kashmir*, Vol. 1, Ali Mohammad and Sons, Srinagar, 2008, pp. 83- 99. See also Muzafar Raina, *Origins of Islam in Kashmir: Valley's saga of conflict in search of identity*, *The Telegraph online*, May, 12, 2024.

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¹¹ . *Shariah* means Islamic code of conduct or Islamic way of life, according to Quran and Prophet Mohamed's (peace be upon Him) teachings. Shariah rule thus means rule or government according to Quran and Prophet's teachings.

¹² .Haidar Malik, Chadurah, *History of Kashmir*, ed., & trans., Bano, Raja, *Tabrikh-i Kashmir*. Srinagar, JayKay Books, 2013, pp.112-184.

¹³ Andre Wink *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World*, Leiden Brill, 1990, pp. 231-232. See also Sikand, *Ibid*, pp, 361-367.

¹⁴ . Aziz Ahmad in his '*Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir*'. Central Asian Journal, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979, volume 23, pp. 3-18.

¹⁵ Aziz, *Ibid*, pp. 3-18., Meraj, *Ibid*., pp. 41-46. See also, Afshana Yousuf '*An Analysis of Impact of Sufism in Kashmir*', *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 2019, Vol. (6), Issue, 1, pp. 932-935; Sikand, *Ibid*, pp. 361-367. Jogesh Chandra Dutt in his book *Rajatarangini* of Jonaraja, published by Gyan Publisihing House, New Dehli p. 87 contains important information about Zayn-ul-Abideen's policies towards Hindus.

¹⁶ . Shahida Bilqies, '*Response of the Ulama to Sufi and Reshi Movements in Kashmir in 18th and 19th Centuries*' *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 2016, Volume 21, Issue 5, pp. 64-74.

¹⁷ . Dr. G. M. Shadaab, *Kashmir ke Rishi Sufia*, Young Publishing House, Delhi, 2007, p. 91., ; see also Assadullah Aafaqui, *Taleemat-i Sheikh-ul Alam*, Vol. I. Delhi: Mekaf Printers, 1998, p. 210, & Mohamad Ilham, *Ibid*., pp. 14-30.

¹⁸ . Mohmad Ilham, *Ibid*., pp. 14-30.

¹⁹ . Meraj Ahmad, *Influence of Sheikh ul Alam's Poetry on Society*. Alamdar, A journal of Kashmiri Society and Culture, Markazi Noor, Centre for Shaikh-ul Aalam Studies, University of Kashmir 2019, Vol. XIV, pp. 41-46.

²⁰ . G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashir, being a history of Kashmir*, Vol 1, Ali Mohammad and Sons, Srinagar, 2008, p. 99. See also G. N. Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2008, p. 73.

²¹ . Mohmad Ilham, *Ibid*., pp.14-30; Sufi, *Ibid*., pp. 99.;; Gauher, *Ibid*., p.73. See also Muhammad Din Fouq, *Tarikh-i Budshahi*, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, p. 423.

²² . G. N. Adfar, *Alchemy of Light*, Kitab Garh, Srinagar, 2011, p. 78.

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- ²³ . Asadullah Afaqi, Aayena-i Haq Kulliyat-i Shaikh-ul Alam, 2008 p. 228.
- ²⁴ . Ibid., pp. 189, 295.
- ²⁵ . Qari Saif-ud Din, Guldasta-i Kalam Shaikh ul-Ālam, Vol-I, Maktab-i ilm-o-adab, Srinagar, 1999, p. 175.
- ²⁶ . Asadullah Afaqi, op.cit., p. 321.
- ²⁷ . Abdul Qayoom Rafiqui, Sufism in Kashmir, Sydney: Australia Goodword Media, 2003, p. 212; G. N. Gauhar, Kashmir Mystic Thought, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2009, p. 241.
- ²⁸ . Omkar Dattatrat, Nund Rishi (RA) of Kashmir, Brighter Kashmir, October 13, 2023. Retrieved on October 13, 2024. <http://brighterkashmir.com/news/nund-rishi-ra-of-kashmir-56931.html> . See also, Prithvi Nath, *Razdan, Gems of Kashmir Literature and Kashmiriyat. Samkaleen Prakashan, New Delhi India 1999. Retrieved on October, 13, 2024 from* <http://www.ikashmir.net/kashmirigems/book.html>.
- ²⁹ . Meraj Ahmad, op. cit., pp. 35-36.
- ³⁰ . Mohmad Ilham, op. cit., pp. 14-30.
- ³¹ . Ibid.
- ³² . Ibid., See also Nur-ud-Din, Jaffar Badakshi, Khulasat-ul Manaqib, Oriental Research Department, p. 17.
- ³³ . Mohmad Ilham, op.cit., pp. 14-30; Meraj Ahmad, op. cit., pp. 31-36.
- ³⁴ . Qari Saif-ud Din, op. cit., p. 67; Asadullah Afaqi, op. cit., p. 366.
- ³⁵ . Mehraj Ahmad, op. cit., pp. 31-36.

