

Cultural Confluence and Religious Transformation: Emergence of Islamic Rishism in Medieval Kashmir

DR. NAKULESWAR MUKHERJEE*

Abstract

The Kashmiri people have been familiar with the word *Rishi* since ancient times, as in other parts of India. Although the word *Rishi* is widely used in Kashmiri Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions, the word *Rishi* is also popular in fourteenth-century Kashmir. This paper explores the emergence and evolution of Islamic *Rishism* in medieval Kashmir, a unique spiritual movement that blended elements of indigenous Shaiva mysticism with Sufi Islamic principles. Rooted in the socio-political and religious milieu of the 14th to 16th century Kashmir, Islamic *Rishism* developed as a localised expression of Islamic spirituality that emphasised asceticism, nonviolence, ecological harmony, and interfaith dialogue. The study critically examines the historical conditions that facilitated the syncretic ethos of *Rishism*, focusing on key figures such as Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani) and his disciples, who adapted Sufi practices to resonate with the Kashmiri cultural landscape. The present paper employs a historical-analytical approach, using primary sources as well as secondary historical data for its textual analysis. Drawing upon historical chronicles, oral traditions, and contemporary scholarship, the paper highlights how Islamic *Rishism* became a vehicle for peaceful religious transformation in the region, fostering communal harmony and shaping Kashmiri identity. The main objective is to analyse the processes of religious and cultural assimilation in Kashmir that enabled the synthesis of Sufi and Shaivite-Bhakti traditions and the formation of a distinct Kashmiri Islamic identity based on principled universality and social harmony. This paper aims to demonstrate that the rise of Islamic mysticism was not merely a religious phenomenon but rather a manifestation of a larger civilizational dialogue in Kashmir, where mysticism, cultural integration, and spiritual revival became the main social mediums. The present research paper contributes to broader discourses on vernacular Islam, religious syncretism, and the role of mysticism in mediating cultural transitions during periods of political change.

Keywords: *Rishism, Sufism, Syncretism, Interfaith Dialogue, Lal Ded & Nanda Rishi.*

* State Aided College Teacher-Grade-I, Department of History, Fakirchand College, Diamond Harbour, West Bengal. Email: nakul.mu@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The term 'Rishi' originates from Sanskrit and has been used to refer to wandering hermits, roaming ascetics, and the composers of different Vedic hymns. As stated by some scholars, the phrase usually means that the answer describes whose eyes split the walls down of their exoteric, along with the esoteric; it also moves past the material globe, communicating the keys to their real truth.¹ Efforts are made to provide the word Rishi with a Persian origin, but it has to be regarded as fanciful. The Sanskrit term 'Rishi' has been stated as 'Risha' in Persian, meaning 'root'; another opinion in this connection is 'Resh' in Persian, meaning 'wound'. Y. Sikand stated that, "Rishis, so wounded, would continuously shed tears, by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad that there is no believer who, out of fear of God, does not weep and to whom Allah has forbidden the fire of hell."² Aziz Ahmad writes, "Islam in Kashmir was as tolerant and eclectic as the Hinduism of Kashmir."³ Rafiqi provides an exceptional identity to the Rishis of Kashmir. However, he does not even mention their relevance to the contemporary period. There are several important historical analyses about the characteristics of the Rishi order in medieval Kashmir, although there are also considerable restrictions on them.⁴ The Rishi order is related to various historical events in the Islamic ideological evolution of Kashmir, or the dynamics of multiple interactions in the last six centuries in the history of Kashmir. Due to the establishment of Islam in the valley during the medieval period, the Sufi order is an essential part of Kashmiri culture.

A salient example of how religious traditions developed through a process of cultural traditionalism and spiritual adaptation in medieval Kashmir is the rise of Islamic mysticism. The Indian subcontinent's deep ties with Central Asia and Persia made Kashmir an important place for the exchange of religious, cultural and philosophical ideas from the 14th to 16th centuries.⁵ The arrival of Islam in Kashmir did not displace the traditional Shaivite and Buddhist traditions but rather adapted them through a process of spiritual dialogue, resulting in the development of a local form of Islamic mysticism known as *Rishism*.⁶ Led by figures like Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani, the Rishi movement blended the moral monotheism of Islam with the ascetic ideals and devotional piety of Kashmiri Shaivism to create a unique spiritual synthesis, reflecting the pluralistic culture of the region. The present research paper sheds light on the historical, cultural and theological aspects of Islamic mysticism that emerged in Kashmir between the 14th and 16th centuries through the synthesis of Kashmiri traditional sage traditions with Sufism in Islam, which was completely separate from the larger context of the Sufi movement in South Asia. The Kashmiri inherent Sufi Nur-ud-Din (also known as Nund Rishi or Sahajanand), accelerated the Islamization of Kashmir by integrating traditional Kashmiri sage traditions with

Islamic Sufism, which served as a process of social reform not only in the religious sphere, but also in the moral and cultural fabric of medieval Kashmiri society.

2. Concept of Rishism in Kashmir

Even the definition of *Rishi* is ironically precisely the same as that of the Sufi. A Rishi is considered a wise and enlightened individual within Indian religious and philosophical traditions, particularly in Hinduism. Rishis are often regarded as spiritual seers who gain profound insights through intense meditation and self-discipline. They are believed to have received and transmitted sacred knowledge, especially the hymns and teachings contained in the Vedas, which are among the oldest religious texts in existence. Rishi, as explained, will be the person who participates in meditation and constantly observes celibacy, austerity and vegetarianism.⁷ Rishi is just one who engaged in piety and prayers. The Kashmiri Rishis cannot be separated from the Indian cultural flows, because in the Vedic and Upanishadic eras, the word 'Rishi' is closely related to Indian culture. In ancient India, these Rishis were newly built to find spirituality, which is difficult to find in any other country. In regions like Kashmir, the concept of the Rishi further evolved, incorporating local and Islamic spiritual traditions. This fusion led to the emergence of the Kashmiri Rishi movement, recognised for its messages of peace, unity, and compassion. The social-spiritual awakening of the Rishis in Kashmir alone reveals that this philosophy expanded in ancient times as a result of the combination of Indian culture and social heritage. According to Rajlaxmi, "Rishi Pippalad was a great Brahmanishtha Rishi who knew the answer to every spiritual quest. Pippalad is the person who eats only the fruits of Pimple *vriksha*."⁸ In the *Upanishadic* time frame, sage-spouse Maitreyi was the leading individual *Rishika* who was ambitious to assemble the Rishis as a cult and advised them to detach from the crowded urban communities and towns for examination. All of the mystics and intellectuals of ancient India lived away from the common people, especially in mountainous or forested areas, and developed a close relationship with nature. These sages used to establish various ashrams for the thought of self-realisation and liberation of the soul.⁹

In the medieval period, the Muslim Rishis of Kashmir adopted the idea of the traditional socio-religious unity of the ancient Rishis. Impressed by the attitudes of the everyday lifestyle of ancient Rishis, the medieval Kashmiri Rishis chose their forest home, discarded caves and solitary places. The similarities between the ancient and medieval Kashmiri Rishis were also noticeable in their food and fasting practices. So, there is no problem in understanding that medieval Kashmiri Rishis' thinking and development process were no different from ancient Rishis in the

Indian sub-continent.¹⁰ It may be theoretically that the word *Rishi* originated from the ancient Vedic period. The meaning is 'who seeks the truth' and who is in the highest respect and a higher position in the direction of spirituality. There are significant differences between the sages and the wise Brahmins, and they cannot be compared with each other. *Rishi* means that he should be a Brahmin; he has no meaning. In Indian culture, the *Rishis* reside on caste, religion and nation. When scholars analyse the characteristics of Kashmiri Muslim *Rishis*, it is not difficult to find a match with the eccentric behaviours of the ancient *Rishis* of the Indian subcontinent.¹¹ Based on historical information, it cannot be said that there was no fundamental difference between the *Risibad* of Medieval Kashmir and the *Rishism* of ancient Kashmir. However, there are many similarities among them. Both of them were to educate humanity without giving them human rights and human consciousness within narrow boundaries. Because "they did not claim any Sufi ancestry and did not hesitate to borrow the idea and practices of the Hindu ascetics."¹² Without a doubt, this *Rishi* tradition has assumed an important role in the development of the otherworldly history of Kashmir, even the subsequent authentic changes which happened after the thirteenth century couldn't bother it. William Polk observed that, *Rishism* influences because of, "some Hindu practices faded away – idols were melted down, widows were no longer burned alive beside their dead husbands, and the symbol of Hinduism was no longer down on the forehead, but the Islam that evolved in Kashmir was deeply influenced by Hinduism."¹³

The wonderful identity of these *Rishis* has dependably stayed prevalent for their kind and deep treatment. Their ubiquity was great to the point that in the nearby lingo, Kashmir came to be known as the *Rishi-Var*.¹⁴ According to T.N. Gangoo, "The impact of *Rishis* was so much that still Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims hold their surname *Rishi*. The extraordinary proof of this reality is as yet alive in Kashmir's language, that the *Rishi* of a higher position is known as *Rishi-Mol*. In the Vedic setting, it is *Rishi-Moules* that signifies the crown of the sages."¹⁵ Unfortunately, followers of various religious factions in Kashmir did not preserve the textual compositions of the *Rishi* tradition. While the verses were retained, the full texts or structured sections were not compiled or maintained. Had they been preserved, these writings might have spread widely across the region and been popularly known as the *vaakh* of Lal-Ded.¹⁶ T.N. Gangoo observed, "In the available verses of the Kashmiri *Rishi*-cult, we cannot state with certainty that these verses have come down to us in their original form. Certain linguistic Neo-Marpho forms indicate that linguistic corruption and interpretation have crept into these verses. This aspect will be discussed when we deal with the linguistics and verse-structure of *Rishi*-cult. The cultural linkages are first taken into account."¹⁷

Reviewing the cultural progress of Kashmir with the cultural development of other regions of India, the linkages of the long-lived *Rishibad* became clear. *Rishibad* originated from ancient Indian Vedic culture. There is no doubt that it has affected Kashmiri culture throughout the medieval period. The *Rishibad* associated with the long-lived tradition of Kashmir had repeatedly encountered problems from the Sayyid coming from Central Asia, and hence their spiritual heritage was also damaged. And the main reason for this was the question of spiritual authority. Kashmiri Rishis could not entertain the divine power of Sayyid because they were practising chaos in Indian and Kashmiri culture, and they were not interested in medieval heritage. According to M.G. Chitkara, “It was the valley that Muslim ascetics established the Rishi order, even though the concept of a Rishi is alien to Islam. On the other hand, Hindu saints did not shy away from associating with Muslim sages. The common goal of both was the realisation of Self.”¹⁸ The Rishis had argued like Shaivit's sages, the only difference being that it kept them separate; the language of Shaivit's sages was Sanskrit, and the Muslim Rishis are in Kashmiri. There can be great similarities in the Shiva-Sutra, which indicates that '*Udamo Bhairav*' is in the same character, the self-esteem of decision-making is the path of self-knowledge.

Shaivism is not like the Vedanta method, which shows that the popular unity of creation is important with regard to the subject and its symbols are unique. The introduction of Shaivism, the world *maya* and world emotions, is mentioned within the conscious experience and mentioned before the known creation. It can be assumed that the thought school does not change *Vedantik* interference, which assumes the idea of the metaphor that the theory of outside creation only is believable in it. Followers of *Rishi* worship influenced the outcome of these material results, which highlighted it to the general population of Kashmiris due to their natural communication with the whole community.¹⁹

After surveying the guarantee of otherworldly regulations of the *Rishi* cult, it turns out to be progressively essential to examine the fundamentals of *Rishism*. It is very difficult to assume that each poetic connection that is usually named *pada*, *vaakh* and *Shrukh*, climbed to a great height in the scholarly field of the Kashmiri language during the thirteenth and fourteenth-century. Sriti Kanth's *Mahanaya Prakash*, a mystical and dialectic poem (*vaakh*) at this time, made a milestone for the Kashmiri language. It will be more secure than when this book analyses the language of Kashmiri. The unwritten practice of any cultural writing is to confirm the truth that is derived from time to time. The Kashmiri people were no longer outside of it. In the present day, many scholars identify that the historical background of Kashmiri literature gained a wide range of horizons in the seventh

century. For example, we see contemporary Shiva literary scholarship in the tenth century.²⁰ The great Shaiva scholar Abhinavagupta refers to the name of '*Chhummapada*'²¹ or the '*Chumma-Cult*' in his monumental book *Tantraloka*.

The social and intellectual relationship of the sages with the culture of Kashmir was not unknown. However, their writings for the preparation of the people of Kashmir were spiritually unknown to the people for a long time. Though these poems repeatedly tried to bring people to the public, contemporary social guardians did not agree to allow ordinary people to have a relationship with this spirituality.²² On the other hand, the Muslim Rishis joined the love of symbols of divine beings and goddesses in their lessons in Kashmir. They considered icon reverie as a significant aspect of the wonder of mysterious love. A section of Muslim Rishis, like Sheikh Yaqub taught the Kashmiri people that self-confidence itself accelerates affection for symbols.

Back in the 13th and 14th centuries, Muslims and Hindus both felt monotheism, as Shaivism of necessity considers monotheism, such as Islam and "they believed in the Universal religion of belief in God and brotherhood of man".²³ Hindus considered that Shiva is merely God, and now we have to bow to him. Muslims additionally hypothesised that God can be just one 'Allah'. During the critical period, *Rishism* was restored to attract both communities as the Rishi cult awakens universal love and preference of the people to direct a happy, comfortable and meaningful lifetime, and also to bow to God, which had been merely clearly just one slightly worldwide. Jahangir observed them and wrote in his memoir, "Though they have not religious knowledge or learning of any sort, yet they possess simplicity, and are without pretence. They abuse no one, they restrain the tongue of desire, and the foot of seeking; they eat no flesh, they have no wives, and always plant fruit-bearing trees in the fields, so that men may benefit by them, themselves deriving no advantage."²⁴

Nanda Rishi has been the cultural goods or examination with goodwill. The development of the Rishi cult throughout Nand Rishi's period has been favoured by the subsequently active conducive air too. Because "Every human being would like to have harmony or peace within himself, and with the environment and social structure outside. The dualities of human nature have to be overcome so that harmony can be there; otherwise, distortions, disputes and conflicts will be recurring, which will not enable one to live in peace and harmony."²⁵ The editors of the Nur-Nama book compiled three types of Rishi poetry. Its editors highlighted the greatness of Rishi poetry in terms of different times. Improvements request an etymological periodisation based on diachronic phonetics. It is a marvel that all

three morpho forms differ in their synchronic phonetics. Most likely, such accessible phonetic examples can without much of a stretch discredit the individuals who have so far ordered the historical backdrop of Kashmiri writing. Here, it isn't intended to talk about relative verifiable phonetics. In any case, such endeavours would surely unfurl every one of the misguided judgments which are still prevalent in writing about Kashmir. An investigation of the three semantic morpho structures would uncover numerous generally concealed connections in the old legacy of Kashmir.²⁶

The truth is that nobody has ever contributed to the cultural record of both three decades, i.e., 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. This can be an excellent element that Lal Ded function as part and parcel with the cult was placed differently. But available origins of this *Vaakhyas* as well as also the *Shrukayas* only indicate the women that revised and inspired this cult had been of precisely the same sect. Due to the fact the materials and procedure for this doctrine tend not to reveal anyplace that Lal Ded was maybe perhaps not of just the same flow, this looks plausible the beliefs have to have intentionally split.²⁷ The most specific crucial element that affirms this opinion is *Vaakhyas*, along with *Shrukayas*, as it is linguistically quite hard to distinguish their morph varieties. The employed linguistics will not demonstrate any disturbance from the saying. It's the amazing women who are compiling the poetry that the speech gave an ancestral lifestyle for Kashmir. Her poetry has significantly changed the linguistic tradition from old to modern Kashmiri and has made a landmark in the Kashmiri language.²⁸

It follows that Nand Rishi treats her much exceptional in spiritualism. Inside this verse, he appeals to God for a meeting with the saint Lala. The Effect of Lala on Nand Rishi was imaginary. The research of this poetry amply testifies to this particular controversy. Straight from her son's birth remained underneath her sway. It is thought that he denied suckling at the breastfeeding of his mother only after his arrival, and also that the infant Nand Rishi had been shot into Lal Ded.²⁹ Thus, we can say that Lal Ded was not only the predecessor of Nand Rishi but also a real divine mother. Nur-ud-Din's spiritualism has been related to various masters, but no particular one was seen as his direct preceptor. His name was closely connected with the Shaivite philosopher Lala, but she could not have been his direct mentor because the date of her death was approximately the late 1370s or early 1380s, when Nur-ud-Din was still a youth. It can be said that Nur-ud-Din held her in enormous respect, and her *vaakhs* were a source of motivation for him. This point of view was also reflected in his *Shrukhs* where he says: "That Lalla of *Padmanpura*—she drank nectar by mouthfuls. She was our avatar, too."³⁰

Hindu philosophy can assume different forms. However, the essence of most is the same, especially if a lifetime doesn't commence at dawn or end at passing, but is still really just a connection in an endless chain of lifestyles. Animal, human and celestial existences can be connected in this series.³¹ A people's deeds, even though very excellent, could exalt him into the skies; though wicked, could irritate his life for a monster. This can be why Indian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, all equally, offer the maximum prominence to this responsibility of kindness for creatures.³² All Indian religions have been plotted together with the notion that culture usually means an enlightened mood. This notion was chiefly accountable for promoting the idea of vegetarianism according to the profound frozen individual impulse of fresh creature eating. Pious People obtained their food from vegetables. People who cling to animal flesh are nearer to God. Contrary to this background, it can be securely maintained that the Rishi cult and vegetarianism can be too outdated as faith and doctrine are in India. According to Abul Fazal, "The most respectable people of Kashmir are the Rishis who, although they do not suffer themselves to be fettered by traditions, are doubtless true worshipers of God. They reveal not any other sect and ask nothing of anyone; they plant the roads with fruit trees to furnish the traveller with refreshments; they abstain from flesh and have no intercourse with the other sex. There are two thousand of these Rishis in Kashmir."³³

3. Pre-Islamic and Islamic Rishism

The Muslim Rishi movements share many similarities with their pre-Islamic counterparts in terms of absolute faith, methods, and performances. Much like the pre-Islamic Rishis, Muslim Rishis, and way, embraced severe austerities and frequently retired to the hills and mountains to meditate. According to Philip Mathew, "Like the Hindu Rishis and Buddhists, the Muslim Rishis also adopted stern austerities and often retired to the mountains and caves to meditate. Most of them remained."³⁴ Muslim Rishis of Kashmir practised celibacy, such as mystic Sufis like Hazrat Uwais Qarni and the female mystic Rabia³⁵ of Basra, which was also applicable to Hindu Rishis. Thus stern was their refusal to choose the lifespan of almost any sentient being that lived only on tender, crazy veggies and blossoms.

Even though some Ulama recognised the Muslim Rishis for abstaining from marital connections and to his or her stringent vegetarianism, visiting such being a deviation in your course (sunnat) of their Prophet Muhammad, the Rishis defended themselves, asserting since Baba Daud Khaki will at his own Dalil-ul'Arfin, which whilst they failed to think about such as prohibited (haram) they were also supposed to everyday men and women.³⁶ The Prophet, they contended, they had embraced

these clinics only to reveal that average human beings need to reside and relish the entire planet without constraints, however, because of their mutual selection (khwass), they ended up as an obstruction on the road to succeeding God and His Prophet. Marriage could make them eventually become entangled in the snares of their self (nafs), where authentic beliefs consist of in at the core of all but Allah. Kashmiri Sufism advanced regard for different religions and even has confidence in the resurrection. In such a manner, by and large, Islam does not improve the possibility of transformation as educated in Hinduism. Numerous Muslims in Kashmir who were affected by the Rishi-Sufis put stock in the hypothesis of Karma and related resurrection.³⁷ In terms of beef, such as its kind, select' it was not best to consume it as it was directed to the production of fires. He controls the advocating of his *nafs*, composed Baba Daud Khaki, and makes a location for himself in paradise.³⁸

Nonetheless, regardless of those similarities together using pre-Islamic *Rishism*, a few notable differences could be noticed. Preaching from the speech of those people through using mysterious poetry (*shruck*), also embracing several techniques related to the pre-Islamic Rishis. Under Muslim Sufis, *Rishism* developed as an incredible social development that showed the privileges of the discouraged, harshly scrutinising human chains of command and persecution. This accounted, in an extensive measure, for the monstrous notoriety of the Muslim Rishis. It is striking to note in such a manner that practically all the Rishi sacred places are located in peripheral towns, and there are almost none in the cities.³⁹ Hazrat Nur-ud-Din Nurani, along with his followers, offered Islam to people in phrases that they might know in a shape which has been readily understandable as well as recognisable. In pre-Islamic Kashmir, Rishis were also world-renouncing mendicants, worried about their particular salvation, even under Hazrat Nur-ud-Din Nurani. *Rishism* appeared as a potent social movement, even championing the rights of the downtrodden, bitterly critiquing social hierarchies along with oppression. That consisted of substantial measures because of the astounding reputation of these Muslim Sufi-Rishis.⁴⁰ The Kashmir *Rishism* under Sufism, as opposed to scanning for freedom from the common presence, as in the Hindu Rishi convention, demanded a disconnected contribution to the issues of the world. This relates to the Sufi idea of 'isolation even while in a get-together.

According to Farooq Fayaz, Nur-ud-Din, "...discipline himself in a rural and regional colour and seek recognition as a true representative of common folk, Shaikh, from the very cave day attempted to train himself in a rural colour and character."⁴¹As opposed to merely taking flight out of your world within a pathway for liberation in the snares of real-life presence, like from the pre-Islamic Rishi

convention, *Rishism*, underneath Hazrat Nur-ud-Din Nurani, insisted on deep involvement in the affairs of the planet. It's primary to be aware not did that the Muslim Rishis generate their everyday bread by their own labour, but in addition that a number is credited with helping poor people by giving them complimentary food from community kitchens (*langars*) operated within their *khanqahs*, in addition to planting fruit-bearing trees and building bridges, guesthouses, along with mosques for your overall people. This change is a problem with human salvation, so this may effortlessly change itself into a type of escapism, into an issue with the well-being of healthy persons is among those identifying capabilities of this Rishi arrangement underneath Hazrat Nur-ud-Din Nurani, also puts it besides *Rishism* earlier. But after it dawned on him, the real dedication to God put in service to his people, too. Thus, he afterwards advised his closing disciple, Baba Nasr-ud-Din, left-handed the entire planet and drifting from the woods was a huge sin, but he had previously believed it had been the genuine type of worship. He states, "to live in the forests and caves with the work of monkeys and mice. They alone will gain a high station who live as householders, with their wives and sons, regularly offer their five daily prayers and from that gain the treasure of the cleansing of their heart."⁴²

Traditional Hinduism shows that the individual *Rishis* would retreat into the woodlands to ruminate and perform stern starkness's for a considerable length of time, disjoining all ties with their general surroundings. Conversely, under Hazrat Nur-ud-Din Nurani, *Rishism* appeared as a common otherworldly request, with the applicant making a vow of loyalty from his profound ace. After the passing of this master, he had been succeeded by his chief disciple or even *Khalifa* (*Khulafa*), who had proceeded with the *Rishi* mission. A pragmatic approach has been maintained through the years, which allowed the Rishis to do their work in an organised manner, and also to emerge because of transmission to spread Islam from the area. In this manner, the Muslims and Hindus, while keeping their religious confidence, during the Rishi-Sufi time frame, at the same time found the mixed and syncretic nature of their otherworldly convictions.⁴³ It likewise should be noted that it is normal that the Hindu believers of Islam did not feel obliged to remove themselves absolutely from their past beliefs and practices in Islam; in any event, to the degree that these did not contradict their new Islamic convictions. They were kept in fantastic esteem and reverence from the regional Hindus as well because they exuded a universal love and brotherhood, exceeding distinctions of caste and creed.

4. Noor-ud-Din: A Sufi Rishi

Belonging to the Rishi sequence, *Rishism* has a very long tradition in Kashmir. Nur-ud-Din had been a saint who'd spent his formative years in detecting strict penances and who'd lived on vegetables and herbs, such as a Yogi of Hinduism. A pious man had created his own Sufi order, referred to as the Kuburavi Hussaini Silsila. It's also a historical actuality that the majority of those Syeds who came to Kashmir had fled from their homes to save their own lives. A number of these approached Alamdar-i-Kashmir to rescue them from psychological worries and bestow on them the advantages of spiritualism.

His profound greatness and good integrity have fairly won him the assignments Sheik Noor-ud-Din, Sheikh-ul-Alam, Alamdar-i-Kashmir, 'Nand Rishi' and 'Sahjanand', both from Hindus and Muslims. Nand Rishi affected the general population of Kashmir with his addresses and humanist exercises. He transformed the social and public activity of Kashmir. He was the forerunner of the spiritualist writers of Kashmir, and they took in a great deal from him. The pith of Nand Rishi's instruction is: Live in isolation and segregation. Rely upon God and surrender absolutely to him, pursue otherworldliness and keep off realism.⁴⁴ He impacted the general population of Kashmir with his addresses and activities. He affected the social and public exercise of Kashmir. Nand Rishi set up a foundation called *Rishiyat*. A Rishi is an individual who "submerges himself into the Divine self. Preceding the approach of Islam in Kashmir, the Rishis affected the general population too, and they were held in regard. The preachers from outside were the saiyids, and closer to the rulers, and they conveyed messages in Persian. Be that as it may, the Muslim Rishis were Kashmiris. Hence *Rishiyat* was imagining. The *Rishyat* was profoundly established in the minds of the folk people of Kashmir. The *Chistia* order of Sufism realised that the adoption of *Rishiyat* could be beneficial for the spread of Islam in Kashmir. Nand Rishi additionally utilised the thoughts of Sufism, then *Rishiyat* changed the process of Islamization in Kashmir.⁴⁵

Maroof Shah, an eminent modern scholar in Kashmir, gives us a new interpretation of *Rishism* in medieval Kashmir. He shows the 'exoteric dimensions of the Rishi movement as it is apparent in the Rishi way of life, to the esoteric dimensions of Rishi thought, or its metaphysical foundations, to understand its relevance for contemporary times. According to him, "*Reshiyat* is not to be designated as a religion but as a metaphysic and esotericism that grounds different religions. This metaphysics assumes different forms in different religious traditions. This metaphysics forms the unifying element of all traditions." ⁴⁶

Throughout his reign of Zain-ul-Abidin, Nur-ud-Din began his assignment of travel to a different portion of Kashmir. It's likely that while travelling, Syed Mohammad Hamadani could have fulfilled himself and obtained more inspiration from him for almost 28 years, Sheikh-ul-Alam stayed travelling. Sheikh Nur-ud-Din Rishi could not negotiate with the fundamental ideology of Islam. He tried to calm the people down with a wise example under the main spirit of the *Quran*.⁴⁷ It used to be a simple tool for the expansion of the Kashmiri language to the Kashmiri people to make it easier and rational for common people. For this reason, in many cases, his sayings are considered as '*Kashur Quran*'.⁴⁸ He always tried to spread Islam to the rural people with their feelings towards the almighty God. M. I. Khan observed, "Kashmiri owes a great deal to Nur-ud-Din since it was through his compositions that it articulated the expanding complex of impulses and responses and orchestrated the music of consciousness. It follows that Nur-ud-Din's poetry expresses the cultural style of the Islamic civilisation in a regional setting and the quality of human spirit that flourishes within it."⁴⁹ He further stated that "It further attests to the indelible influence of language and religion upon the identity of cultural groups. So deeply rooted has been the impact of Nur-ud-Din's mystical ideas on the formation of the Kashmiri language that litterateurs of the contemporary social scene in Kashmir continue to resist attempts at obliterating their religious and cultural identity. The mundane situations and Islam thus seem to coalesce rather than conflict in the ongoing social drama in Kashmir".⁵⁰

There was always the notion that Nur-ud-Din always thinks:

"Knowledge is supreme, the Kalima its glory,

If only you follow Muhammad's (SAW) path.

Devotion is a coverlet made of pearls,

The string gives it value ... walk the straight path."⁵¹

Nand Rishi expired at Charar-i-Sharief, at this time, he pleased many saints, Rishis and sanyasis. Folks from all sects were drawn towards him by his preaching, royal honours. Zin-ul-Abidin, the king of Kashmir, himself combined with his ideology. He had a terrific eagerness for Nanda's teachings.⁵² It has been emphasised recently by a few scholars that Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin joined the funeral ceremony of Alamdar-i-Kashmir or Nur-ud-Din. The flooding of 1360 A.D. caused much distress and loss of land in Kashmir, and as the principal of this nation, Zain-ul-Abidin was constantly directed by this ideology of toleration. His benevolent action was that of granting religious liberty to his or her subjects. He patronised the

Brahmins, Sufis and the Rishis. In addition, he patronised Nur-ud-Din's religious syncretism by dispersing a moral perspective on life.⁵³ According to Zutshi, "The narrative of religious syncretism and communal harmony (*Kashmiriyat*) has come under critique in recent times by postmodern scholars who see it as the product of colonial and nationalist projects of suppressing claims to difference and identity."⁵⁴ In the end, these scholars did the same things as nationalist historians did; they did not emphasise the complexity of regional and religious identity when trying to find a single and effective explanation for the chronological events in Kashmir. Try to understand the transformation of the community in the rapidly changing political, social, religious and economic perspectives and culturally dividing the Kashmiri Muslim community or analyse the interconnected differences. Jaishree K. Odin observed, "The Rishi Sufi phenomenon is exactly such a narrative that needs to be explored in its fullness to understand why it became such an integral part of the Kashmiri consciousness for centuries and why it continues to exist silently in different parts of the Valley."⁵⁵

5. Conclusion

The foundation of communal harmony in medieval Kashmir, was deeply intertwined with the lives and philosophies of two pivotal spiritual figures: Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani) and his elder contemporary, Lalleshwari (Lal Ded). Lalleshwari's mystical teachings were grounded in the non-dualistic philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism, while Nund Rishi's spiritual outlook drew upon Islamic Sufi traditions. Despite emerging from distinct religious milieus, both figures articulated a vision of universal love, compassion, nonviolence, and religious tolerance that resonated across communal boundaries. Their teachings, preserved in oral traditions and spiritual memory, reveal striking thematic convergence. Both Lalla and Nund Rishi rejected ritualism, dogma, and the blind adherence to religious orthodoxy. Nund Rishi's spiritual authority, combined with his humanistic message, endeared him to people of all faiths. His followers, drawn to his emphasis on moral purity, divine love, and detachment from worldly desires, often sought to shape their lives by his ethical teachings. Nund Rishi is remembered not only as a saint but as a symbol of illumination and moral guidance. His spiritual philosophy—centred on truth, love, dignity, humility, and interfaith harmony—continues to define Kashmir's syncretic cultural identity. Through their enduring legacies, both Lalleshwari and Nund Rishi exemplify the shared mystical heritage that underpinned Kashmir's medieval ethos of coexistence.

The emergence of Islamic *Rishism* in medieval Kashmir represents a profound example of spiritual synthesis shaped by the region's distinctive cultural and

religious context. As a movement rooted in Islamic Sufism yet deeply influenced by indigenous Shaiva and Buddhist traditions, *Rishism* carved out a unique path of devotional practice centred on asceticism, compassion, and ecological awareness. Through figures like Nund Rishi, the Rishi order not only localised Islamic spirituality but also bridged communal divides during a time of significant socio-political transformation. This study underscores that *Rishism* was not merely a religious phenomenon but a broader cultural response to the challenges of coexistence and identity in a pluralistic society. Its legacy continues to inform contemporary discourses on Kashmiri identity and offers valuable insights into the possibilities of syncretic religiosity in conflict-prone regions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

-
- ¹ Kireet Joshi, *The Veda and Indian Culture: An Introductory Essay* (New Delhi: Rastriya Veda Vidya Prathisthan, 1991), 40–43.
- ² Yoginder Sikand, *The Muslim Rishis of Kashmir: Harbinger of Love and Justice* (Bangalore: Himayat, 2000), 12.
- ³ Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 23, no. 1–2 (1979): 8.
- ⁴ A. Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1993), 36.
- ⁵ Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, 47.
- ⁶ A. Ahmed, *Kashmir: The Land of Rishis and Sufis* (Srinagar: Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy, 1999), 112.
- ⁷ M. I. Khan, “The Rishi Tradition and the Construction of Kashmiriyat,” in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation, and Conflict*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (London: Routledge, 2017), 61.
- ⁸ V. Rajlakshmi Barve, *Sociology and Education: In 13 Salient Upanishads with Special Reference to Value System* (Solapur: Laxmi Book Publication, 2016), 34.
- ⁹ Chandra Mauli Mani, trans., *The Evolution of Ideals of Womanhood in Indian Society*, by Candra Bali Tripathi (*Bharatiya Samaja Mein Nari Adarshon Ka Vikasa*) (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publication, 2005), 89.
- ¹⁰ H. N. Rafiabadi, *Saints and Saviours of Islam* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005), 240–41.
- ¹¹ Rafiabadi, *Saints and Saviours of Islam*, 240–41.
- ¹² Amitabha Pal, *Islam Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle of Nonviolence Today* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2011), 75.
- ¹³ William R. Polk, *Crusade and Jihad: The Thousand-Year War between the Muslim World and the Global North* (London: Yale University Press, 2018), 262.
- ¹⁴ T. N. Gango, “Rishi Cult in Kashmir,” in *Alamdar-i-Kashmir*, ed. Pandit M. Amin (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011), 27.
- ¹⁵ Gango, “Rishi Cult in Kashmir,” 27.
- ¹⁶ Yoginder Sikand, *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2003, p. 257.
- ¹⁷ Gango, “Rishi Cult in Kashmir,” p. 28.
- ¹⁸ M. G. Chitkara, *Kashmir Shaivism: Under Siege* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publication Corporation, 2002), 17.
- ¹⁹ K. N. Dhar, *Nund Rishi: A Rosary of Hundred Beads* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, 1983; reprint, 2004), 50.
- ²⁰ Trilokinath Raina, *A History of Kashmiri Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002), 15.
- ²¹ “The specimens of Kashmiri Poetry composed by some unknown Chumma Sampradaya saints of the 11th and 12th Century.” - Mohan Lal, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: Sasay to Zorgot* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992), 4023.
- ²² M. L. Saqi, ed., *Khulliyat-i Shaykh-al-Alam* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, first published 1985; reprint 2005), 337.
- ²³ K. L. Kalla, “Composite Culture of Kashmir,” in *Lalla Rookh: The Glorious Heritage*, ed. K. L. Kalla (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2007), 76.
- ²⁴ Jahangir, *Tujuk-i-Jahangiri*, trans. Rogers and Beveridge, vol. 2 (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1914), 149–50.
- ²⁵ S. N. Kaul, *Political Turmoil of Kashmir* (New Delhi: Rajat Publications, 2005), 58.

-
- ²⁶ A. H. Yatoo, *The Emergence of Islam in Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2012), 17.
- ²⁷ Raina, *A History of Kashmiri Literature*, pp.21-22.
- ²⁸ Raina, *A History of Kashmiri Literature*, p.19.
- ²⁹ Santideva Sidhu, *Development of Mysticism in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2000), 234.
- ³⁰ M. L. Saqi, *Khulliyat-i Shaykh-al-Alam* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, first published 1985; reprint 2005), 148.
- ³¹ Kaul, *Political Turmoil of Kashmir*, p.2.
- ³² M. Amin Pandit, "Rishi Attitude Towards Food," in *Alamdar-i-Kashmir*, ed. M. Amin (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011), 51–53.
- ³³ Abul Fazal, *Ain-i-Akbari*, trans. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol. 3 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1894), 354.
- ³⁴ Mathew Philip, *Examining the Concept of "Kashmiriyat" in Kashmir from the 15th to 17th Century under the Muslim Rulers of Sultan Ghayas-ud-Din Zain-ul-Abidin and Mughal Emperor Akbar*, accessed August 14, 2025, www.cismor.jp/uploads-images/sites/2/2014/01/sekai45.pdf, 74.
- ³⁵ "Rabia'h understood that asceticism was not a goal in itself but the means of attaining the goal of proximity to god. Furthermore, for Rabi'ah spiritual purification extended beyond abstinence from material things; it meant complete detachment from outwards and secondary concern."- Lois Barbara Helms, "Rabia as Mystic, Muslim and Woman," in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions: Volume III*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 18.
- ³⁶ Yoginder Sikand, *The Muslim Rishis of Kashmir: Harbinger of Love and Justice* (Bangalore: Himayat, 2000), 12.
- ³⁷ Jaishree Kak, "Lalla's Relation to the Shaivite and Sufi Traditions in Kashmir," in *The Valley of Kashmir*, ed. Aparna Rao (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 188.
- ³⁸ Sikand, *The Muslim Rishis of Kashmir: Harbinger of Love and Justice*, p.12.
- ³⁹ M. I. Khan, "Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir," in *The Valley of Kashmir*, ed. Aparna Rao (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008), 169.
- ⁴⁰ Khan, "Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir," 169.
- ⁴¹ Farooq Fayaz, *Shaikh-ul-Alam: Kashmir Revisited* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011), 9.
- ⁴² Sikand, *The Muslim Rishis of Kashmir: Harbinger of Love and Justice*, p.14.
- ⁴³ Santideva Sadhu, *Development of Mysticism in Kashmir*, p.231-233.
- ⁴⁴ Mishkati Daud Khaki, *Asrarul-Abrar*, f. 68b, quoted in A. Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1993), 241.
- ⁴⁵ Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Islam and Sufism in Kashmir (Some Lesser-Known Dimensions)* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2009), 15.
- ⁴⁶ Marhoof Shah, "A Metaphysical Approach to Rishism," *Alamdar: A Journal of Kashmiri Society and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2008): 118.
- ⁴⁷ Marhoof Shah, "A Metaphysical Approach to Rishism," 115.
- ⁴⁸ In his poetry, the content of the Qur'ān is expressed through metaphors drawn from the social environment. The saint, using a simple vernacular medium, conveyed the core message of the revealed book, making it accessible to the rural masses. Being largely illiterate, these communities could easily grasp the essence of the Qur'ānic text. For this reason, the saint's verses are often referred to as the *Koshur Qur'ān*-- Shafi Shauq, *The Best of Kashmiri Literature: NUND*, 1st ed. (Srinagar: Ali Mohammad & Sons, 2022), 171.
- ⁴⁹ M.I. Khan, "Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir", 107.
- ⁵⁰ M.I. Khan, "Islam, State and Society in Medieval Kashmir",107.
- ⁵¹ A. Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, 141.

⁵² Mohibul Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans* (New Delhi: AAKAR Books, first published 1959; reprint 2005), 252–53.

⁵³ Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, 252–53.

⁵⁴ Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity and the Making of Kashmir* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 16.

⁵⁵ Jaishree K. Kak, “Lalla’s Relation to the Shaivite and Sufi Traditions in Kashmir,” 17.

