

Reminiscences on the Religious Philosophy of Sheikh ul-Alam

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ABSTRACT

The poetry of Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) is an expression of sustainability and caution for the present as well as future generations. His highbrow, mystical, and spiritual inspiration continues to be sensed in the contemporary world. The present study identifies the important role of Sheikh ul-Alam's (R.A.) teachings in the upliftment of moral values in the people of Kashmir. Furthermore, it found that Quran is the ultimate guidance and he who imbibes the Quran comprehensively will surely defeat the Satan and realize inner and outer purity. The literature on Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) is indeed a great asset for not only the Kashmiri culture but also for the development of Sufism in Kashmir. For that reason, the present study embarked upon the journey of revisiting Sheikh's philosophy and poetry in order to become a better human being.

Keywords: *Sheikh ul-Alam, Sufi, Islam, Quran, Islamic principles.*

1. Introduction

Shaikh Nur al-Din Wali popularly recognized as Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) was the most revered Sufi saint of Medieval Kashmir who shunned the self-centred solitude and encompassed the valley-wide tour of Kashmir, particularly rural Kashmir. Despite the fact that he was illiterate he had tremendous significance in shaping the culture of Kashmiri society and promoting its inter-community synchronization. The main aim behind his involvement in poetry was to emphasize the significance of religion in our life and its capacity to solve societal and environmental problems in general and spiritual problems in particular. He goes to the extent of stating that all problems of the societies can be solved once we have a better understanding of our religion. He laid the foundation of Rishi order in Kashmir that helped in the development of brotherhood in our valley.

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1.1 Objectives

1. To revisit Sheikh ul-Alam's (R.A.) religious philosophy.
2. To highlight the importance of Sufism in Islam and its message of love for mankind.

2. Methodology

The Methodology applied to the present study is historical¹ and analytical². The writings of scholars and academicians found in the different volumes of *Alamdard*,³ a journal of great repute that is published by Sheikh ul-Alam chair, University of Kashmir, serve as the primary basis for the present study. Furthermore, *Gleanings from Sheikh ul-Alam* (R.A.), which is a selection of Ninety-Nine Shruks⁴, also serve the source of the study. The role of Sheikh's religious philosophy has also been highlighted through secondary data collected from standard historical books on Sheikh available at Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture & language and the Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies.

3. Religious Philosophy

Maximum facets of Sheikh ul-Alam's (R.A.) life depended upon the Islamic principles, and his environmental cum religious thinking was no exception. Every society tries to improve the moral standards and maximize the social welfare in which it is involved. Whatever be the organizing principles of a society, there are some universal canons which govern almost all societies of the world like goodness, truthfulness, reliability, and honesty. The religion will run through religious principles and activities which relates to the divine connection between man and his creator. Sheikh held simplicity and selflessness at the topmost level in his life and religious thought. According to him, religious activities are not only necessary for the attainment of the illumination of the soul, for achieving excellence and purity here and hereafter, spiritual completeness and salvation, and overall benefit to society. The righteousness, justice and integrity are a function⁵ of the spiritual education of people, and for that reason, he also regarded being simple and honest as an authorized part of the Islamic or Sharia⁶ law.

Allocation and optimization⁷ of resources are the twin goals of economic activity. And Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) established many goal lines of economic activity⁸ that

he assumed were attached to one's religious accountability coupled with beneficial to the individual here and hereafter: goal of resourcefulness for one's subsistence, sustainable development⁹ for meeting the needs of present generation without compromising the needs of future generation, plantation of trees for the conservation of environment, and endowments for the welfare of one's posterity. According to him, we should always be patient and should never feel sad and grimace from the tests and trials rather we should treat these tests and trials as sweet divine tests, and glory shall be ours here and hereafter. Sheikh says:

Don't shield yourself from his darts,

Don't wince from his rapier thrusts,

Treat as candy divine ordeals,

And glory is yours here and hereafter¹⁰

The material groundwork or underpinning of social and religious life is a broad framework within which the social and religious activities are carried out. Every religion and religious community or sect tries to maximize the returns of religious activities in which it is involved. The religion empowers one to integrate the spirituality of one's soul, provides religious and pious self-determination, and discipline in one's way of life. It is the way to create a noble, upright and virtuous man who conjectures and constructs up the edifice of his worldly life according to the canons of 'Shariah' and employs it to sustain his faith.

Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) claimed that living for mere survival, or living which only offers the basic requirements of life for you and your family should not be the goal of a man rather one should aim for the good of the whole society which would be a satisfactory religious duty. Melancholy or unhappiness is formed once we struggle for wants which are unlimited¹¹ and he was strictly against the belief that one should satisfy *only* one's own wants and desires. Nevertheless, he did confess that some pious people prefer the simple living and high thinking at their own will for their heart is full of love and zeal for the all-powerful Allah. He believes that too much material desire is very dangerous for the moral wellbeing of a man that is why he appeals and cautions people to avoid holding unnecessary material goods, signifying that excess money earned over and above one's basic necessities of life must be spent in the path of Allah.

No doubt every feature or attribute of Sheikh's teachings is a source of the greatest blessing for mankind. But the enlightenment that comes through his poetry called Shruks defeats all hunger, desires and pleasures and is a path towards highest spiritual blessings and saintliness. The spiritual messages and lessons by way of his poetry are well-kept-up for the welfare and benefit of the people of Kashmir in particular and mankind in general, and are made up of foresight and divination, which are the most significant foundations of corroborating the reality to those who do not believe in the existence of Almighty Allah. To bear up sneaky or devious Satan is very difficult nonetheless goodness is always respected and highly valued than wrongness. A fighter cannot beat the shrewd man. Knowledge gained in youth is no less than a stimulant marked against a pillar. We should never follow shortcuts and act in such a hurry. We should not create our own mystical and divine stories and disrupt the scripture, holy sayings, materials that are mysterious in nature for we will get entangled in the grid of life. We have been allotted a trivial time that we utilize judiciously. He says:

Who can withstand wily Satan?
 I did household chores and tripped into the mire.
 Who knew the Dal would just dry up?
 Can the warrior beat the crafty man?
 What was learnt in youth was elixir splashed against a rock.
 What a fool I was to act in such a hurry!
 Disrupted the scripture, holy sayings, matters esoteric,
 And got enmeshed in the web of life.
 We have been allotted a trifling time-
 What will Hope long for and what shall we get?
 The cream I have eaten-why churn the whey now?
 The ass has worked havoc in the saffron field.¹²

Those who refute the divine system of Islam are themselves totally empty of the spirituality and mysticism. Islam teaches that every society had their Prophet and every one of them had been given the divine wisdom and knowledge in their own language. Sheikh's poetry also points out the same. Accordingly, the messages of

Sheikh is not limited to Kashmiris only. If one's faith and conviction are very strong then definitely it will come to the lucky divine souls in their own language.

Egalitarianism¹³ highlights equality for all people. Sheikh thought that egalitarianism or equality of wealth and income in society should not be vehemently thrust upon people, but rather they should be motivated by the spirit of Islamic brotherhood so that on their own accord they should share their income and wealth. According to him wealth should be earned and spent in good ways and benefit the Islamic community. According to him, for achieving excellence and purity here and hereafter there must be the sound understanding of the Holy Quran which for all intentions and purposes creates a good interface between the man and his Creator and maintains the spirit of Islam. He believes that we should lay our life for Prophet Muhammad's (S.A.A. ^W.S) magnificence and glory for he will surely set free his Ummah. The most difficult task is to defeat the Satan and he who triumphs in this attempt here, will succeed emotionally, mentally, and spiritually here and hereafter. He who imbibed the Qur'an comprehensively will surely defeat the Satan and realize inner and outer purity. Sheikh explains:

My life I lay for Muhammad's glory,
Who will surely rescue his ummah?
He who shackles Satan here,
Is the one who has imbibed the Quran.¹⁰

For both inner and outer growth and development of mankind, Sheikh's teachings are a must for it will not only help in a good interface between the man and his creator but, it will conserve the environment. His teachings, therefore, is the most trustworthy and enlightening words of wisdom that brings closeness to Almighty Allah. It is a clear and most reliable fact that without divine teachings one could never be guided to the right path. The cruel, merciless and heartless oppressors and dictators shall be put to Hell and the educated, cultured, and enlightened will be put up in grand heavenly abodes. As the Sheikh says:

Hearken to the sayings and the surahs,
One day the hourie will attend on you.
The heartless tyrants to Hell will be sent
And the learned put up in palatial abodes.¹⁴

4. Sufism

Sufism or tasawwuf¹⁵ is itself another name of spiritual worldview and Islamic mysticism¹⁵ cultivated in Kashmir from centuries. The word Sufi is a derivative of the Arabic word al-tasawwuf, which means “divine wisdom.” Some take the term Sufi a derivative of the Greek word for knowledge. Sufis take themselves on a spiritual path towards God and believe that they can experience nearness to God while they are still alive¹⁶. The term Sufism was popularized by British orientalist. Sufis integrated all the varied tides of notions that were present at the time of arrival of Islam and gave it an Islamic positioning. A Sufi doesn't have to be essentially an adept or expert. Any person devoted to pass through the spiritual routes and trails may also be termed as a Sufi¹⁷. They focus on their spiritual progress and self-purification. Sufism is a manifestation of the interior characteristic of Islam, as distinguished from its outer or exoteric characteristic.

It is the unifying mystical-philosophical-metaphysical filament of Islam that has shaped the Kashmiri religious heritage and culture. Verses of Sufi saints of Kashmir fit the spiritual wisdom of all the traditions that Kashmir has introduced historically. Metaphysics of Sufism surpasses boundaries of self-centrism, bio-centrism, and egoism. It shows the way to capabilities, choices and human freedom discourses without casting a shadow on, denigrating and actualizing the non-human world. It is grounded in outright undistinguishable spirit. The supreme principle is the Reality, Absolute, and Godhead which is Countless and All-Possibility. In Sufism, the *Zat* designates the first code or belief. There are very important twin economic facts that wants are unlimited but means are limited having alternative uses (Robins, 1945¹¹). And it is the man as a sense of self with unlimited wants and avaricious or materialistic desires who is the basic guilty party in the macroeconomic problems, social problems, global problems, and destruction of mankind. The fall of the graph of moral values of a man is because of the rise of the graph of a distinct mindfulness and cognizance that emphasizes on living outside the domain of religion. Sufis argue that the earth belongs to Almighty Allah and not to a man as a desirous character. For that reason, it can't be plundered and exploited extensively.

5. Conclusion

There is a need for a paradigm shift from the pure scientific-based approach to a spiritual-based approach which has its roots in religion and philosophies of great

Muslim philosophers and saints including Sufi saints. We need to revisit the philosophy and religious thought of Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.). There is a need to realize the fact that inner and outer purity encompasses the transformation of the self, and that this transformation necessitates the realization that the individual is primarily a spiritual being. Imam-i- Al-Ghazali says that he who knows himself is actually happy and jocund¹⁸. We need to brush up our religious fervor and strengthen our faith so as to bring symmetry in all state of affairs. Luxury must be avoided and the principle of the simplicity and high thinking be followed by every heart. We need to emphasize on the moral values and Islamic Ethics which stimulate a man to take all essential measures to be honest, polite, upright and virtuous. The interface between man and his Creator need to be understood and the concept of man and his activities in Islam need to be understood in order to comprehend the philosophy of Islam in general and Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) in particular.

End Notes and References

¹ The historical method encompasses the methods and strategies by which historians make use of the primary sources of data coupled with other evidence including the archaeological sources.

² Analytical research is a detailed, explicit, and definite type of research that implicates or take account of critical thinking abilities and the appraisal of evidence and information in relation to the study being conducted.

³ *Alamdar* is a research journal intended and designed at endorsing, upholding, and supporting an unprejudiced and independent sympathetic and appreciative opinion of Kashmiri society and its art and culture with a distinctive and special orientation towards Sufism and Rishi crusade.

⁴ The poems of Sheikh ul-Alam (R.A.) are also known as Shruks in Kashmiri vocabulary or lexicon which are more moralistic, educational, and instructive than just literary.

⁵ A function defines the relationship between two or more than two variables thereby expressing the dependence of one variable on one or more other variables.

⁶ Sharia or Islamic ruling is a sacred law constituent of the Islamic belief which is derived from the religious teachings and tenets of Islam, predominantly the Quran and the Hadith.

⁷ Optimization of Resource is the series or sequence of developments, progressions, and methods to counterpart or bring equilibrium between the existing or available set of resources like physical resources, human resources, financial resources etc., with the wants and requirements of the organization or party in order to accomplish time-honored goals and targets.

⁸ Economic activities are the activities or arrangements that consist of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services at the micro (small/individual) as well as macro (large/economy) levels within a society. It is prompted by production which uses resources or factors of production: land, labour, and capital. Due to technological advancements and innovations, the level and nature of the economic activities change. Economy is an arrangement or scheme spread over a specific area that reveals or divulges the nature and smoothness of miscellaneous economic activities in that area. The crux or quintessence of the subject matter of economics is a scarcity of resources juxtaposed with the human wants which are unlimited in nature. Scarcity, choice, and decision-making correlated with the allocation of resources having alternative usages are the fundamental considerations or parameters of all economic activities (grounded on the practice of scarce resources or scarcity for the satisfaction of human want) around us. Every economy no matter what runs through the economic activities of production, consumption, investment, and exchange which relates to product pricing and factor pricing or simply distribution.

⁹ The concern and subject of sustainable development are very important for the growth and development of an economy at both the micro and macro level. *“Earth has an adequate amount of resources to meet the needs and demands of every Tom, Dick, and, Harry but not plentiful to satisfy the insatiability and hunger of even one person.”* The most popular view of sustainable development and ecological balance comes from Brundtland Report of 1987 according to which development which meets the needs of present generation without compromising the needs of future generation is said to be sustainable. Sustainability is the capability and talent to use the resources optimally, levelheadedly, rationally, pragmatically, judiciously in order to preserve mankind in the best possible manner and maintain ecological balance. In order to understand sustainable development, it is very important to put emphasis on Islamic Ecological Ethics which boosts or inspires a man to take all compulsory trials and actions to safeguard or look after the environment. Perception of man in Islam needs to be understood in order to comprehend the interface between man and ecosystem or man-environment relationship on the one hand and sustainable development on another hand.

¹⁰ M. Amin, *Gleanings from Shaikh-ul Alam* (A Selection of Ninety-Nine Shruks). Markaz-i-Nur, Shaikh-ul Alam Chair, University of Kashmir, 2008.

¹¹ L. Robins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. Macmillan and Co., Limited ST. 1945. Martin's Street, London. Retrieved from <https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2013/HEN444/um/Robbins-1932.pdf>.

¹² M. Amin, op. cit. Egalitarianism or equalitarianism comprehends a school of thought that highlights or place in order egalitarianism for all. The canons of equality maintain that every Tom, Dick, and Harry is equal in ultimate substance or social prominence.

¹³ M. Amin, op. cit. Tasawwuf is theology or spirituality in Islam which point towards the interior journey of our religion characterized by precise moral standards.

¹⁴ T. Anjum, 'Sufism in History and its Relationship with Power'. *Islamic Studies*, 2006, 45(2), 221-268. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839016>.

¹⁵ Burckhardt, Titus, *An Introduction to Sufism: The Mystical Dimension of Islam*. 1990, Crucible.

¹⁶ Smith, James L. Jr. *Sufism: Islamic Mysticism*, *Verbum*: 3(1), Article 10, 2005, Retrieved from <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol3/iss1/10>

¹⁷William Stoddart. *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam*. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999 rpt., first published 1981), 1999, 20-21.

¹⁸ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Trans. And ed. Claud Field & Elton I. Daniel. London: M.E. Sharpe, 1991.

