

The Development of Islāmic Culture and Civilization in Kashmīr and the Contribution of Muslim *Ṣūfīs* during the Medieval Times

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Abstract

Kashmīr has a long unique structure and identity due to its geographical beauty, natural resources, and traditional spiritual ethos since antiquity. In ancient times, although most Kashmīris were followers of Buddhism and Hinduism, in addition to these traditional religions, there was also an influential group ascetic mystics called Rishis in Kashmīr. They devoted their entire lives to abstinence (Nafs Kashi) and various spiritual struggles in order to control their desires of carnal self (Mujahida's). From the beginning of medieval times which is known as the golden age of Islāmic civilization and culture, the message of Islām spread rapidly throughout the world. In this regard, the group of Ṣūfīs played vital role in the whole Islāmic world. In Kashmīr, as in the rest of the subcontinent, Ṣūfīs made significant contributions to the propagation of Islām. The present article will examine the historical events of the medieval times, which are considered a milestone in the spread of Islām and the promotion of Islāmic civilization in Kashmīr. Moreover, the works of those Ṣūfī masters will be reviewed who have sacrificed a lot and done commendable works on the history of Kashmīr.


Keywords: Kashmīr, Buddhism, Hinduism, Ṣūfīs, Islamic


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Introduction

The Kashmīr¹ valley known worldwide for its natural scenery and beauty, is also famous for its cultural and spiritual traditions from ancient times. Since medieval age the region has been the abode of religious scholars, *Ṣūfīs*, religious preachers, due to which it is known as “*pirwari*.”² In the Medieval times, a large group of *Ṣūfīs* from Irān and Turkestān spread Islām in the Kashmīr Valley. They dedicated their lives here by presenting theoretical and practical examples of Islāmic teachings, and the people of Kashmīr got impressed to see the same. The history of Kashmīr bears witnesses to the fact that the *Ṣūfīs* were the most prominent contributors to the promotion of Islāmic culture in Kashmīr, and it was through them that Islāmic civilization and culture flourished in Kashmīr. It is a historical fact that the rays of Islāmic light in Kashmīr are spread through *Ṣūfīs*. However, Islāmic influences began to flourish in Kashmīr valley as early as 711-13 AD, but Islām began to prosper in the early fourteenth century AD in this region with its beauty and elegance. Thus, the first Muslim government was started in Kashmīr valley, and due to the civilization and culture of the Muslims, the people of this region became very bright and exemplary.

The First Impressions of Islām in Kashmīr

In ancient times, Kashmīr, like the rest of the subcontinent, had an abundant number of followers of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism was at its peak in Kashmīr when the propagation of Islam in seventh century

¹ Kashmīr, claimed by both India and Pakistan, is a part of the Indian subcontinent's north western corner.

² “*Pirwari*” in Kashmīri language means the valley of holy saints.

CE began to spread outside the Arab world. The political, social, and religious control of Kashmīr was also in the hands of the proponents of Hinduism. Hindus have owned the region for almost four thousand years, and almost twenty-one families of other Hindus have ruled the state in particular, and it is only because of this supremacy and dominance of these Hindu kings in the state their people, i.e., Kashmīri Brahmins and other nations continued to live a comfortable and prosperous life in those days. Therefore, with time, the policy of the Hindus did not succeed for a long time. With the changing times, the conditions of the country also began to change. The growing power and rise of Muslim countries forced the Hindus to establish relations with the Muslim majority countries and then reconsidered the strategy adopted by the Hindus in this regard and lifted all restrictions on the entry of Muslims into their country.³

For Kashmīri historians, the question of propagation of Islām and its consolidation in Kashmīr has been a matter of debate since times immemorial. However, most historians agree that the first wave of Islām in Kashmīr started from the Hindu era.⁴ When Islām spread with full force in the Kashmīr region, the mighty armies of Islāmic thought, literature, science, culture, and civilization also rose from the different parts of the subcontinent and began to enter the Kashmīr valley. Dr. Farūq Bukhārī, in his book “*Kashmīr mein Islām Manẓar aur Pas-e-Manẓar*,” while describing the historical development of Islām in Kashmīr states that The presence of Islāmic influences in Kashmīr is found in ancient times, when Muḥammad bin al-Qāsim’s⁵ contemporary ruler Lalitāditya’s⁶ successor Vajraditya,⁷ according to Kalhana,⁸ introduced many [Islāmic] traditional customs/practices of the Muslim community (called *malecchas*) in his country (Kashmīr) and also sold many Kashmīri men to the Arab Muslims (*malecchas*) [of Sindh] which continued for a longer time. Even in the last decade of the eleventh century CE, Raja Harsh Dev,⁹ inspired by Islām, embarked on a vigorous religious reform campaign in Kashmīr. He did not hesitate to sacrifice his own life in this way.¹⁰

From the very beginning of Medieval times, the golden age of Islāmic civilization and culture began. In the same period, the message of Islām spread all over the world at a rapid pace, and in this regard, the contribution of the *Ṣūfīs* is considered phenomenal throughout the Muslim world during the medieval times. Thus, from the eleventh century AD onwards, when the separate *Ṣūfī* orders (*silsilahs*) began to establish in *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), the idea of mystic hospices (*khanqāhs*) came into view as a result abundant number of these hospices (*khanqāhs*) began to be built for the stay and training of *Ṣūfīs*. These monasteries (*khanqāhs*), besides providing practical spiritual training to the *Ṣūfīs*, also trained them to serve common people and impart spiritual light in them. As the number of seekers of truth increased with time, the *Ṣūfīs* left their areas and migrated to different areas for the service of people, travelled only for the knowledge of the truth and especially for the propagation of Islām. They aroused the spirit of purification among people. As a result, innumerable people in every region, influenced by the character of these *Ṣūfīs*, converted to Islām without any compulsion or violence. This way, Islām continuously spread throughout the world through the immense sacrifices of these *Ṣūfīs*, these services of them are not only acknowledged but also historically overviewed by the famous orientalist T.W. Arnold in his book “*The Preaching of Islām*.”¹¹

³ Syeed ‘Ali Raza, *Wadi Kashmīr k Thazibi wa Saqafati hamajabati pehlu*, unpublished thesis submitted to Punjab University, Lahore, 2008, page no. 9.

⁴ Khan, Professor Mohammad Ishaq, *Kashmīr’s Transition to Islam: Role of Rishis*, Gulshan publishers, Srinagar, 2005.

⁵ Muḥammad bin al-Qāsim was an Arab General of the Umayyad Caliphate who successfully invaded and conquered Sindh and Multan by defeating the last Hindu ruler, Rājā Dāhir in the conquest of Aror. He was the first Muslim to conquer Hindu lands and establish the early Islāmic India in 712 CE/92 AH

⁶ Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa (ruled c. 724 CE-760 CE) was a powerful ruler of the Karkota dynasty in the Indian subcontinent’s Kashmīr region.

⁷ Vajraditya was the youngest son of Kashmīri ruler L’‘Alitāditya, who ruled from 762 CE till 770 CE.

⁸ Kalhana was one of the great historians of Kashmīr who wrote *Rājatarangīnī* (River of Kings), an account of the Kashmīri History in Sanskrit.

⁹ Harsh Dev (ruled 1089 CE-1111CE) was a Hindu king of Kashmīr India.

¹⁰ Bukhari, Dr Syed Muhammad Farūq, *Kashmīr mein Islam: Manẓar aur Pasi Manẓar*, Maktab ilm wa Adab Srinagar, Kashmīr, n.d., p. 49. Same fact has been mentioned by A.Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmīr: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, Good Media, Sydney, 2003, p. 1.

¹¹ Arnold, T.W., *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, Constable & Company Ltd., London, 1913, pp. 220-221.

The spread of Islām in Kashmīr was nurtured by these *Ṣūfīs*. Thus, the imprint of Islām in Kashmīr can be traced back to the Ninth century CE, but the process of spreading Islām at the grassroots level in Kashmīr began with the arrival of Central Asian *Ṣūfīs* in Kashmīr.¹² This process started from Ḥadraṭ Syed Sharaf-ud-Din Shurawardi (رحمة الله عليه)¹³ aka Bulbul Shāh (رحمة الله عليه)¹⁴ and continued for centuries, with time not only became more effective, but this process of propagation of Islām became a permanent part of Kashmīr's individual and collective identity. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, there was a group of abstinent and God-seeking people in Kashmīr from antiquity who were looked upon with great reverence by people of Kashmīr, so it would not be wrong to say that the people of Kashmīr were already inclined towards spirituality due to which they got easily impressed by the teachings *Ṣūfīs* who came from Persia and Central Asia. The fourteenth century AD is a significant century for the spread of Islām in Kashmīr in general and the foundation of Islāmic civilization in Kashmīr in particular.

On the one hand, for the first time in this century, the Muslims established an independent empire in Kashmīr, which proved to be a golden chapter in the history of Kashmīr. In addition, the spread of Islām in this century also began to spread very fast. Sultan Ṣadar-ud-Dīn, the first Muslim ruler in Kashmīr, whose real name was Rinchan Shāh, converted to Islām due to persuasion and efforts of Syed Bulbul Shāh's (رحمة الله عليه). Historians write that Rinchan Shāh was initially a follower of Buddhism but was interested in studying other religions, especially the Hindu religion and Islām. He consulted the relevant religious scholars of both religions in order to study about their philosophies. He once invited both of the Hindu and Muslim scholars from Kashmīr in his court to deliberate upon the teachings of their respective religions. Among those who had accepted his invitation was Ḥadrat Bulbul Shāh (رحمة الله عليه), whose unique style of speech, religious arguments impressed him to such an extent that he in no time took an oath of allegiance in the hands of Bulbul Shāh (رحمة الله عليه) and converted to Islām.¹⁵ After conversion of Sultān Sadur-ud-Dīn to Islām, the spread of Islām in Kashmīr was pretty smooth. However, very few mosques and hermitages were still built in Kashmīr's political and cultural life. No extraordinary revolution took place except the establishment of Islām, nor was any immediate step taken at the government level connected with the spread of Islām, not either was it patronized. The society of Kashmīr was still dominated by Hindu civilization and culture, which was adopted not only by the people but also by those in power. However, the ideas of purity, simplicity, and equality of Islāmic teachings began to impress common masses, especially the lower-class Hindus.

The transformational progress in the propagation of Islām in Kashmīr took place during the reign of Sultān Qutub-ud-Dīn Shāh Mīrī¹⁶ when an organized caravan of *Ṣūfīs* from central Asia arrived in Kashmīr. The aim of this caravan was neither the acquisition of wealth nor political victories, but this caravan of lovers, full of divine love and the spirit of societal service, came only to enlighten the people of this land of Kashmīr with the light of Islām. The leader of this caravan was a great *Ṣūfī* thinker, whose name was the Ḥadrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī

¹² Saifud Dīn Bayhaqī, Syed, *Noori Irfān*, Kirmānī Publications Rafiabaad, Kashmīr, 2011, p. 5.

¹³ Various theories have been proposed regarding Ḥadraṭ Syed Sharaf-ud-Din Suhurawardi's birth. Some schools of thought claim he was a saintly celebrity from Bukhara, while others believe he was from Samarqand. Others are of the view that he was from Turkeṣtān or Central Asia. However, the majority of people believe he came from Turkeṣtān, hence the name of the great friend of Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) has the tag "Turkeṣtānī" attached to it.

¹⁴ Kashmīrī writers have given Ḥadrat Bulbul Shāh (رحمة الله عليه) a number of names and titles. The historian, Jonaraj, is hesitant to mention the saint's name. According to the author of the "Baharistan-i-Shahi", when the king or others inquired about his identity, the holy saint introduced himself as "Bulbul Qalandar" and declared himself a Muslim. In his "Tarikh-i-Kashmīr", Muḥammad Azam refers to him as Baba Bulbul Shah (رحمة الله عليه). In his "Nawadir-ul-Akhbar," another scholar, Rafi-ud-Dīn, refers to him as Sayed Sharaf-ud-Dīn (رحمة الله عليه). In his "Asrar-ul-Akbar," Baba Dawūd Mishkāṭī refers to him as Ḥadrat Bābā Bilāl. In his book "Tarikh-i-Kashmīr," Peer Ghulām Ḥassan Khuihamī states that his real name was Ḥadrat Sayed Sharaf-ud-Dīn (رحمة الله عليه). Some other scholars like G.M.D Ṣūfī calls him as Sharf-ud-Dīn Abdur Rahman Turkeṣtānī (رحمة الله عليه).

¹⁵ Musoodī, Muḥammad, *Rinchan say Ranjeet Tak*, Book Media, Srinagar, n.d., p. 12.

¹⁶ The ruler of Kashmīr whose reign (c. 1373-89 CE) is remembered only for the arrival in Kashmīr of a Muslim traveller named Syed 'Alī Hamdani. Qutub'din died in 1380 CE, and his son Sultan Sikander, also known as Sikander Butshikand, took over as his successor.

(رحمة الله عليه) (c. 1314 CE/713 AH-1384 CE/785 AH),¹⁷ who was well versed in religious (*Shari'ah*) sciences and was considered one of the leading Sufi mentor in the Kubrawiyya order of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism).¹⁸ Although the arrival of *Ṣūfīs* in Kashmir¹⁹ continued after Ḥaḍrat Bulbul Shāh (رحمة الله عليه) but still the majority of people in Kashmir remained non-Muslims as no effective effort was made in this regard. With the arrival of Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) this vacuum of lack of *da'wah*²⁰ in an organized way was filled. Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) brought with him a large group of followers (*Sadat*) and *Ṣūfīs*²¹ and tried to spread Islām across the length and breadth of Kashmir. It is pertinent to mention here that the comrades that came along with Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) included Islāmīc scholars and experts of diverse arts and crafts.²² Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) not only brought religion of Islām with him, but he also brought with him the tools of complete culture and civilization. This endeavor of Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) increased the social and intrinsic beauty of Kashmir along with its extrinsic beauty, resulting in social peace and harmony. The atmosphere of peace, both moral and spiritual, began to uplift with his enormous efforts. After Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه), the person who rendered historical services in the field of *da'wah* in Kashmir is the patron saint of Kashmir Valley, Sheikh Noor-ud-Dīn Noorānī (رحمة الله عليه).²³ He prepared a large group of his followers and carried out the work of spreading Islām with great sincerity and devotion.²⁴

The Rise of Islamic Civilization in Medieval Kashmir and the Services/Contributions of Ṣūfīs

Culture is such a broad term in which all aspects of society or ways of life come; that is, it is the name of all the thoughts and deeds of a nation's intellectual, emotional and spiritual life. When a nation sets its own style of development, it becomes its own culture. Therefore, culture is the name of the whole collection, including religion, beliefs, sciences and arts, ethics, habits, customs, and all the tendencies and affairs that man performs after acquisition. It is as if the concept of the term culture includes mental development, morals and etiquette, civilization, and national characteristics.²⁵

As already mentioned, the fourteenth century AD is a milestone in the history of Kashmir. Apart from an organized movement for the promotion of Islām, the promotion of Islāmīc civilization also started in a very organized manner in the same century. It is pertinent to mention here that the same era has witnessed the immense religious services, sacrifices, and contributions from revered *Ṣūfī* saint Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه). Apart from being a *Ṣūfī* and a *dā'ī*,²⁶ Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) was a distinguished researcher and author. Historians are of the view that Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) authorized almost one hundred sixty works, among them most are written on the subject of the spirituality. Apart from them, many books have been written on various aspects of Islāmīc civilization and culture. Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī's (رحمة الله عليه) prominent works include *Zakīrat-ul-Muluk*, *Chahal Isrār* (*Fārsī Ghaṣṣ' Alīyāt*),

¹⁷ Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) was an eminent Sufi scholar and poet from Iran. He travelled across Central and South Asia and was instrumental in preaching Islam and practicing Sufism throughout his life. Reverentially Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) was also as known King of Hamadan ("Shāh-e-Hamadān"), The Great Commander ("Amīr-i-Kabīr") and Second 'Alī ("Alī Thānī"). For further study about his remarkable contribution towards development of Islamic culture in Kashmir see, Dr Altaf Hussain Yatoo, *Islamization of Kashmir*, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2012, Shams-Ud-Din Ahmad, *Shah-i-Hamadan: Hayat Aur Karnamay*, Haji Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad And Sons, 1995, Syeda Ashraf Zaffar, *Syed Mir Ali Hamadani*, Sheikh Usman and Sons Srinagar, 2007.

¹⁸ Al-Ḥasan, Muhib, *Kashmir Salātin ke Aḥad mein*, Urdu trns. Major 'Alī Ḥamād Abāsī, Dārul Musannefin Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, 2010, p. 75.

¹⁹ The *Ṣūfīs* came and settled in different parts of Kashmir only to enlighten people there with the teachings of Islām.

²⁰ The act of inviting or calling people towards Islām.

²¹ Most historians have written the number of these comrades as seven hundred.

²² He brought some carpet and shawl weavers with him, who taught the local community how to make pashmina textiles and carpets.

²³ Also known as Nund Rishi and Alamdar-e-Kashmīr. He was among the founders of the Rishi order, a *Ṣūfī* tradition of the Kashmir region.

²⁴ Sofi, G.M.D., *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, Capital Publishing House, Delhi, 1996, p. 40.

²⁵ Durani, Aatsh, *Islami Fikr wa Thaqafat*, Maktaba 'Aliya, Lahore, 1980, p. 112.

²⁶ *Dā'ī* is a Muslim who propagates the message of Islām and invites the people towards the same.

Minhaj-ul-Arifin, Mowadat-ul-Qurbā, Risālah Zakariyyā, Risālah Dab Qaida, Mirat ul-T'Alibeen, Risālah Wajoodia, Risālah Hamadania, Risālah Eitiqadia, Masharibul Azwāq, Sharah Fasoosul Hikam, Munqabatul Jawahir, Asrarul Nuqt, Sharah Qasida-i-Khumria Fardia, Manazil-us-Sālikeen, Raudatul Firdous, Firdausul Akhyar, Kolāṣat al-manāqeb, Risālah Istilabat-il-ilm-ul-Qiyafah Arbayeen, Awrad-i-Fathia and many others.²⁷ Referring to the selfless services and contributions of Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه). The revolutionary contribution of Sayyid Ali Hamadani and other *Sādāt* [followers of Hamadani] in the spread of Islām in Kashmīr in such a short time that no other region of the subcontinent has such an example. This is the period in the history of Kashmīr from which the construction of a new society began. The way of life, manners, language, culture, and the Kashmīr nation's overall life took a new step and started a fresh life with great zeal and zest. Thus, the central Asian influences centered with a developing civilization have significantly been attached with the fertile soil as if they were actual inhabitants of here. It is as if the services of Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (رحمة الله عليه) had an impact not only on the rulers of Shāh Mīrī but also on the people, the scholars and especially the *Ṣūfīs* of Kashmīr and Rishis.

With the spread of Islām, the Islāmic atmosphere in Kashmīr embellished its culture. As soon as *Ṣūfīs* entered here, they urged the Muslims to pursue education, which was earlier mostly confined to the Brahmins. Thus, the Hindu language of Sanskrit began to decline, and Persian and Arabic began to rise. At the same time, religious tolerance became an integral part of Kashmīr civilization and the most prominent feature of Kashmīri history. People of different religions came together in *Firdaus-e-barī*²⁸ to live in unity and breathe in the atmosphere of unity and solidarity. It seems that after the spread of Islām in the medieval times, religious tolerance, literature, economy, clothing, architecture, food and drink habits, fine arts, architecture, etc., are typical examples of tolerance and interconnectedness in every field and level.

Although *Ṣūfīs* services to the spread of Islām and the evolution of Islāmic civilization in Kashmīr are unparalleled, historians have always praised the services of Muslim Sultans (Kings), as the Sultans of Kashmīr have always been fond of the *Ṣūfīs*, Dr. Aijaz Farooq said in an article reviewing the services of both *Ṣūfīs* and Sultans, he writes it is challenging to determine whose efforts in both classes are more effective in this regard. At the same time, the efforts and role of *Ṣūfīs*, Shaykhs, and Ulama [religious scholars] are not only more significant but also crucial, at the same time the efforts and intense struggle of the Sultans of Islām and the patronage of the efforts of preaching Islam and their cooperation is also no less important. It would be fair to say that the two classes, with the cooperation and guidance of each other, did a great job of introducing Islām in Kashmīr and revolutionizing the political, social, cultural, and religious life of the people of Kashmīr that by the end of the fifteenth century CE, ninety-five percent of the people of Kashmīr had converted to Islām and enlightened their lives with the light of Islām.²⁹

Conclusion

From time immemorial, at different times in the history of Kashmīr, the civilizations and cultures of different nations have gone through stages of rising and fall. For the first time in the history of Kashmīr, *Rishis*³⁰ and *Sannyasis*³¹ camped and laid the foundation of their civilization in their own way in the BC era. Then, with the arrival of the Aryans, a new civilization overcame the already existing civilization and culture in mutual mixing, a

²⁷ Ashraf Zaffar, Sayed, *Sayyid Mir 'Ali Hamadani*, Sheikh Muhammad Uthmān and Sons, Srinagar, n.d.

²⁸ Used as similitude for Kashmīr, meaning the highest heaven.

²⁹ Akram, Dr Aijaz Farooq, *Kashmīr: Isbāt wa Farīḡi Islām mein Ṣūfīyya wa Salateen Ki Masāī*, n.d., p. 240.

³⁰ The word "Rishi" is specifically derived from Sanskrit and Indian traditions, although some medieval scholars of Islām have stated that it is derived from the Persian word "Raisb" or "Rishb," which refers to a bird's feathers or wings. One such example is a Baba Dawūd Mishkānī, who gives a complicated and twisted explanation. A bird without feathers has little command over its own movements and is completely reliant on the wind. And similar is the circumstance with a *Rishī*; he is cut off from the rest of the world and lives alone, beaten by fate. This and similar interpretations, on the other hand, have failed to convince the average Kashmīri Muslim, who, for the most part, supports the Sanskrit derivation and uses it interchangeably with his Hindu counterparts as a synonym for a sage. Actually, many Kashmīris do not connect the word with any particular order of *Ṣūfīs*, instead using it to refer to any *Ṣūfī* saint.

³¹ Sannyasis are the Brahmins who have 'renounced' all materials aspects of life only to gain truth.

new civilization came into being. In the same way, with time, different nations settled here and paved the way for their religions and their own culture, which included Hindu and Buddhist nations. Fourteenth-century AD, the spread of Islām in Kashmīr began to spread rapidly in Kashmīr when *Ṣūfīs* from central Asia and Irān came to Kashmīr. After visiting Kashmīr, the *Ṣūfīs* along with preaching Islām, came here to acquaint the people with social principles and social laws and to build a united society based on Islāmic society. *Ṣūfīs* and preachers came to Kashmīr and introduced to the Kashmīri people the Islāmic social system, which later took the form of an organized civilization and further matured its culture in other civilizations of the world in the name of a universal civilization. This civilization also had the trait of universal Islāmic civilization, but it also had its own character of Kashmīriyat.