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Sufism, State, and Society in Medieval Kashmir: An analytical study of some pioneers Suharwardiyya Sufis of Kashmir.

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Abstract

A holistic understanding of the socio-cultural and political dynamics of Medieval Kashmir (14th-17th centuries) is contingent on its contextualization concerning the then prevailing Sufi tradition(s). The Sufis, local and indigenous, left an indelible mark on the religious/cultural history of Kashmir with their profound impact on the significant dimensions of the medieval Kashmiri society, i.e., religion, economics, and politics. Their vehement stress on the doctrines of love, peace, compassion, social justice, and equality created an appealing ambiance. It made them ever living in the hearts of the masses even centuries after their departure. Despite their common spiritual aspirations, the Sufis belonging to different Sufi Salāsil/orders were at variance regarding their attitude towards the State/politics, economics/wealth, methodology for traversing the spiritual path and social engagement. Studying and analyzing the role and impact of the Sufis and their variance towards the different dimensions of the medieval Kashmir society, especially politics, economy, education, and social activism, is highly significant for unveiling a substantial segment of the history of Kashmir. Among the major Sufi orders, the Suhrawardiyya order was the first Sufi order to be introduced in Kashmir by Sayyid Sharaf-ud-Din Alias Bulbul Shah (d.1321 CE), who was instrumental in winning the first-ever conversion of a ruler to Islam in Kashmir. Subsequently, the Sufis belonging to this order, apart from being carrier agents of the religious and spiritual tradition of Islam in Kashmir, considerably influenced the society and politics of Kashmir, especially between the 13th to 16th centuries. The present study, with this backdrop, intends to assess the activities/engagement of few prominent Suhrawardiyya Sufis of Kashmir (14th to 16th centuries) towards the society and politics of medieval Kashmir.

Key Words: Sufi, Silsilah, Suharwardiyya, socio-cultural, political, religious, economic.

Research Objective

Islam in Kashmir became a dominant religion through the peaceful preachings of the Sufi missionaries who not only brought religion but helped to usher a new innovative revolution in social, economic, political, cultural and literary spheres too. As not much has been written to

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research and specify these areas which were affected by the new religious creed. Though the scholarly works of Abdul Qayoum Rafiqui¹, Muhammad Ishaq Khan² and M.A.Wani³ have emphasized the role of Sufis in the history of Islam in the valley of Kashmir, their focus mainly on historical development of Sufism in Chronological order, indigenous Rishi movement and emergence of Islam and understanding the roots of how Islam spread in Kashmir. But such research scholars have not discussed at length the role of Sufis (especially the Suharwardiyyas) in the then medieval society of Kashmir. Thus there is a possible dimension that is yet to be explored.

Introduction

Kashmir owes to be one of the predominant Muslim cultures of the South Asian region that has a prestigious legacy of religio-spiritual ethos. The Hagiographies and Chronicles of the Kashmir history narrate that this legacy has been a part of a socio-religious setting from the 14th c onwards. This religio-spiritual legacy has been progressive in reconstructing the demography, society, and political scenario of the vale. The change did not occur abruptly instead through a gradual process that worked at different levels.

Almost some six centuries preceding the Muslim sultanate's foundation in Kashmir, the gradual yet peaceful diffusion of Muslim traders and adventurers had already begun in the valley. This gradual emergence of Muslims in the vale was mainly due to inter-regional trade links or the age-old cross-cultural interactions that hooked the valley with the contiguous regions that had already come under the tilt of Islamic missionaries and conquerors. Both the traditional sources 4 and the travel accounts (Travelogues) 5 furnish valuable evidence regarding the

¹ A.Q.Rafiqui, "Sufism in Kashmir", (Australia: Sydney, Revised Edition, 2003)

² Ishaq Khan, "Kashmir's transition to Islam: Role of Rishis", (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors,

³ M.Ashraf Wani, "Islam in Kashmir", (Srinagar: Oriental publishing house, 2004)

⁴ According to *Chachnama*, Muhammad Allafi, an Arab mercenary, having entered the service of Raja Dahir (see Kufi, "Chachnama", Eng. tr. Mirza Kalichbeg Ferdunbeg, (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, Reprint, 1979, p.55) and later on his son Jaysiah, as a reliable adviser in 710 A.D, sought refuge in Kashmir for himself and for his corpus of five hundred men, after he and his patron Jaysiah failed to mate the advance of Muslim warriors led by Muhammad bin Qasim, during his expedition on Sind (See, Kufi, "Chachnama", pp.56, 110-111, 152-55, 160). Chandrapida (713-720 A.D), the then ruler of Kashmir [represented by Kalhana as an exceptionally just ruler free from any religious bigotry, see Kalhana, "Rajatarangni", Eng. tr. Stein, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, Reprint, 1979), Vol. I, p.88 and Book IV, no. 55; no. 82)] paid due respect and regard to Allafi (Kashmiri rulers had very intimate relations with the ruling family of Sind and Allafi had proved to be a trustworthy and lieutenant adviser of Dahir and

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prevalence of Muslim settlements in Kashmir before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate in 1339 C.E. These certain evidences impart sufficient grounds supporting the statement as observed by Stein that "Islam made its way into Kashmir not by forcible conquest, but by gradual conversion, for which the influx of foreign adventurers both from the south and from Central Asia had prepared the ground".6

Unlike South Asia, the Muslim sultanate in Kashmir was unique as there was neither any forcible conquest nor invasion from foreign conquerors. Furthermore, most importantly, there were hardly any forcible conversions. Large-scale conversions in Kashmir were because of Muslim preachers' untiring efforts (Sufi scholars who watched intently for suitable land to extend the frontiers of Islam) from Central Asia and Persia. During the Sultanate period, doors were thrown open to Muslim preachers, due to which the influx of Muslim immigrants (scholars cum Sufis) got enhanced. In addition to this, Muslim scholars were welcomed, extensively patronized, and endowed with extensive gifts from the ruling class, due to which they turned out to be successful in bringing out the peaceful and gradual propagation of Islam possible into every nook and corner of the valley, thus consequently exhibiting a transition from Hindu majority to a Muslim majority state over next few centuries.

Jayasiah. See Kufi, "Chachnama", pp.56, 110-11,128,152-53,160) and even ordered that from among the dependencies of Kashmir, a place called *Shakalbar*, should be assigned to Allafi.

Kalhana, in his classical chronicle, Rajatarangini, records that "Vajraditya, the son and successor of Lalitaditya (724-61 A.D) sold many men to *mlecchas* (any foreigner who slaughtered animals and ate cows meet and usually the Muslims) and introduced into the country practices which befitted the mlecchas." (See, Kalhana, "Rajatarangini", Vol. I, Book IV, No.379).

Harsha (1089-1101) is said to have recruited Turkish soldiers (Turushkas: Captains of Hundreds) and introduced in the country, under Muhammadan (Muslim) influence, more elaborate fashions in dress and ornaments. See Kalhana, "Rajatarangini", Vol. I, Book 7, No. 1149 and Book I, introduction, p.112.

besides this, during the reign of Bhiksacara (1120-21), Muslim solidiers were employed and deputed to attack Sussala in Lahora. See Kalhana, "Rajatarangini", Vol. II, Book VIII, No.'s 885-86. Henceforth, it appears that by the end of the thirteeenth century, there was a colony of Muslims in Kashmir.

⁵ Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler, records the presence of a section of Muslims in Kashmir working as butchers for Kashmiri non-Muslims, "The people of the province (Kashmir) do not kill animals, nor spill blood, so if they want to eat meat, they get the Saracens (Muslims) who dwell among them to play the butcher". See Henry Yule (ed.), "The travels of Morco Polo", (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1903), Vol.I, p. 167.

⁶ Kalhana, "Rajtarangini", Vol. I, Introduction, p.130.

⁷ Kashmir, unlike its neighbors, rescued its conquest by a foreign Muslim commander but could not escape elite lot among the Muslims, who conquered but not the land rather the hearts of the people. Kalhana, the classical chronicler of Kashmir, states that "country may be conquered by the force of spiritual merits but not by the force of soldiers. Hence its inhabitants are afraid only of the world beyond." See Kalhana, "Rajatarangini", Vol.I, p.9.

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Another viewpoint supporting the coming of Muslim missionaries into Kashmir for the gradual process of Islamic acculturation within the society is that no doubt for centuries together, the snowy mountain ramparts offered natural solid protection to the valley, thereby hindering its subjugation by any foreign rule, this natural impediment could hardly resist the arrival of Sufi missionaries to whom Da'Wah or preaching in Islam was a prime motive, that has lead these untiring devoted Muslim preachers to intersperse throughout the globe without bending before hindrances of any disposition.

Almost simultaneously with the foundation of Muslim rule in Kashmir, Sufism⁸ was introduced here. Some of the most prominent Sufi scholars who were responsible for large scale conversions (propagation of Islam) in Kashmir were Saiyid Sharaf-ud-din Bulbul Shah, Mir Saiyid Ali Hammadani (popularly known as Amir-i-Kabir), Mir Mohammad Hammadani and his followers, Saiyid Hussain Simnani, Syed Taju-ud-din and many others including some popular indigenous ones like Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani (sheikh-ul-Alam), Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom (Mahbub-ul-Alam), Baba Daud Khaki, Baba Nasib-ud-din Ghazi, Khawaja Khawand Mahmud, etc., etc. These Sufis belonged to different Silsilahs⁹, and with their emergence in Kashmir,

⁸ Scholars have defined Sufism (*Tasawuuf*or Islamic Mysticism) in different ways; as "Sufism" according to A. J. Arberry, "is the mystical movement within Islam, whereas a Sufi, the one who associates himself with this movement, is an individual who is devoted to an inner quest for mystical union with his Creator. It also involves a 'personal trafficking with God." see Farid al-Din Attar, "Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya (Memorial of the Saints)", trans., A. J. Arberry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 1-2.

Murray Titus holds that Sufism is "an attitude of mind and heart towards God and the problems of life." See Murray T. Titus, "Indian Islam: A Religious History of Islam in India", (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 111. Tanvir Anjum describes Sufism as "an attitude of soul that entails an individual's direct relationship with God with a profound comprehension of the Real and Absolute Truth." See Tanvir Anjum, "Sufism in History and its Relationship with Power", (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2007), p. 15.

The opinions regarding origin of Sufism are also as different as those are about its definition. Some scholars like E. H. Palmer opine that roots of Sufism lay in pre-Islamic traditions. See E. H. Palmer, "Oriental Mysticism: A Treatise on Sufistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians", (London: Luzac, 1969 report, first published 1867), as cited in Annemarie Schimmel, "Mystical Dimensions of Islam", (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975) p. 9. While others like Edward G. Brown are in favour of the theory that Sufism represents the esoteric doctrine of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). See Edward G. Brown, "A Literary History of Persia", Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Reprint, 1977, first published 1902), pp. 418-21. "There is no denying that all mystical traditions have something in common but it does not mean that Sufism largely borrowed doctrinal system, methods and practices from other religions" records Tanveer Anjum in one of his articles. See Tanveer Anjum, "Sufism in History and its Relationship with Power", p. 19.

⁹ By the twelfth (12th) century Sufism had passed through its classical to its medieval phase. It was no longer the theoretical musings of ascetical protest groups; it has become an institutional movement, with hierarchical orders (Silsilahs), Charismatic leaders (Pirs, Murshids) and delineated territories of spiritual jurisdiction (Vilayats). It also

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multiple Sufi orders were introduced in the valley. The most prominent Sufi orders that influenced Kashmir included Suhrwardiyyah, Kubraviyyah, Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Nurbakhshiyyah and Rishi order.

The valley of Kashmir witnessed Suharwardi Silsilah (first to be introduced in the vale) initially, as early as the fourteenth century, by a renowned Sufi, Saiyid Sharafal-Din 'Abd al-Rahman alias Bulul Shah and in the fifteenth century by Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani, popularly known as Janbaz wali. However, the credit of the firm establishment and organization of this Silsilah goes to Shaykh Hamza Makhdoom, popularly known as Mahbub-ul-Alam (beloved of the world), who played a significant role in the dissemination of the Suharwardi order of Kashmir. The Suharwardi Sufis of Kashmir, both indigenous and foreigners, dedicated their whole lives to the cause of Islamization of the valley of Kashmir.

The arrival of Bulbul Shah and the conversion of the first-ever ruler to Islam.

Bulbul Shah 10, one of the most celebrated saints of Kashmir, was instrumental in the transformation of Rinchana (Sultan Sadr-ud-Din) to Islam. The effects of this event percolated both the political and social arena of Kashmir as Syed Sharaf-ud-Din became a spiritual guide to the Sultan. The latter, inturn, bestowed royal favors on the Sufi saint. The ruler built a langarkhana¹¹ for Bulbul Shah, the first hospice (khangah) built in Kashmir. Alongside the Khangah, the Sultan also built a mosque near¹, which is the first historically known mosque built in Kashmir. In the theoretical framework, this would mean that the relation pushed Islam from a dormant and unassuming entity to a privileged and a reference culture level in the Kashmir society. The Sultan's religion became one of the ways and attractions for ordinary peopleto be in the ruler's favorable circle. In this following change in the religious, political, and social milieu of Kashmir, the role played by Syed Sharaf-ud-Din Bulbul Shah remains central.

included property: residential buildings or hospices (Khanqahs) often related to tomb complexes (Nazars), Mosques (Masajid) and Schools (Madrasas).

¹⁰ Sayyid sharaf-ud-Din Bulbul Shah, a disciple of Shah Niamattullah Farsi and a native of Turkistan, was the first to introduce Suharwardiyya order into Kashmir. While embarking upon a long journey and travelling through Central Asia and Persia, he arrived in Kashmir during the reign of Suhadeva (1301-20) -the last ruler of the Lohara dynasty of Kashmir.

¹¹ The Langarkhana (public charity kitchen) was provided with provisions and facilities of food and residence. It was open to the common folk. For the upkeep of the langarkhana some villages of the Nagam pargana were given as revenue free grants. To this day the place bears the name of the same Khanqah. It is presently known as Bulbul Lankar.

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It is of utmost significance that Rinchana as Sultan Sadr-ud-Din (1320-23) set precedence and a model which opened the prospect of an avenue for Shah Mir's ¹² ambition, leading to his seizure of the throne and hence the foundation of the first Muslim dynasty (in the valley) in 1339.¹³

The Nature of Suharwardiyya Sufi relationship with State.

Sufism, generally viewed from spiritual and religious perspectives, has a political dimension too. The relationship between Sufis and state authorities' is complex as the diverse responses of Sufis towards the state and also policies of the state towards the Sufis. The Sufis played an essential socio-political role and sometimes acted as a counterweight against the state. But sometimes, they collaborated with the rulers and tried to redress the grievances of the ruled through various means. Many Sufis used their cordial relations with the political authorities to influence the state policies optimistically and constructively. Likewise, the ruling elite benefited from the Sufis to tackle political problems. Many historians have challenged and rejected the generalizations put forward by some scholars who considered Sufis to be otherworldly, who did not lead passive and contemplative lives. Richard Eaton, in his book, Sufis of Bijapur (1300-1700), described a variety of social roles played by the Sufis. According to him, "some of them wielded a sword, others a pen, others a royal land grant, and still others a begging bowl. Some were introverted to the point of reclusive withdrawal, other extroverted to the point of zealous Puritanism, other unorthodox to the point of heresy." Nile Green's recent work Sufism: A Global History also redefines Sufism's social location. Green opines that mostly Sufism was connected to power, and Sufis were part of the political and economic establishment of many Muslim societies."¹⁵

The interaction of Suharwardiyya Sufis and rulers (politics) began at the right earnest with the foundation of the sultanate in Kashmir. Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani, popularly known

¹² Shah Mir (1339-42) who started his career as a military faction leader and a palace politician adopted the title Sultan Shams al Din on his assumption of sovereignty or little later. See Aziz Ahmad, "Conversion to Islam in the valley of Kashmir", Central Asiatic Journal, 1979, Vol. 23, No.1/2, p.10.

¹³ After the death of Rinchana, Hindu rule was resumed again until the final usurption of power by Sultan Shamsud-Din Shah Mir.

¹⁴ Richard Maxwell Eaton, "Sufis of Bijapur (1300-1700): Social Role of Sufis in Medieval India" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 283.

¹⁵ Nile Green, Sufism: A Global History (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 8.

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Janbaz Wali¹⁶ (including Bulbul Shah and Saivid Ahmad Kirmani¹⁷), enjoyed the royal tutelage while receiving endowments (for the maintenance of their Khangahs) from the reigning Sultans, henceforth preserving the Suharwardi outlook regarding the political leadership. Dastur-us-Salikin, on one hand, relates that Shaikh Hamza Makhdum never showed any inclination towards the political leaders of the period so much so that he did not even stand to greet them when they approached him, 18 while on the other hand, there are some indirect references in the same treatise which indicates that the Shaikh was in contact with the political group of the period. For instance, references are lying there, showing that the people used to come to the Shaikh Makhdum for pleading their cases before the then reigning Sultans. 19 Shaikh sometimes even allowed his disciples to attend the Amirs' feasts, provided they arranged it out of love and affection. 20 Thus the above-stated references indicate that Suharwardiyya Sufis of Kashmir were not reluctant to accept the gifts from the rulers of the time.

¹⁶ Accompanied by a band of scholars and Sufis, JanbazWali was warmly welcomed by the Sultan [Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70)] and gifted him an endowment for his maintenance. The Langarkhana (Public charity Kitchen) of Sayid JanbazWali always remained in service of the people and everyday people in large numbers used to have food from this place, which is even testified by the presence of a large Cauldron (still persisting near the tomb of Janbaz Wali). The receiving of food from the kitchen of SayidJanbaz not only by Muslims but also by the Hindus amply brings into limelight his (JanbazWali) religio-spiritual activities of guiding the common masses towards the truthful way in an unparalleled peaceful manner. The fact remains that the people would come to listen Sayid Janbaz who after finishing his religious sermons used to arrange food for the masses. See Sayid Ali, "Tarikh-i-Kashmir", RPD No.739; f.29a; Mullah Ahmad Sabur, "Khawarigus Salikin", f.13a; Abdul Wahab Nuri, "Futuhat-i-Kubrawiyya", f.74b; Baba Daud Mishkwati, "Asrar-ul-Abrar", f.103a; Khawaja Muhammad Azam Diddamari, "Waqiat-i-Kashmir", pp.88-89; Pir Gulam Hassan, "Tarikh-i-Hasan" (Asrar-ul-Akhyar), Vol. III, Urdu tr. as "Tazkiray-i-Awliyay Kashmir" by M. Ibrahim, (Srinagar, 1960), p.40; Qadri Ahmad Shah, "Dhikr-i-Janbaz", (Srinagar: Shaykh Muhammad Usman and Sons, 2002), pp.12-51; Abdul Qayoum Rafiqui, "Sufism in Kashmir", p.21; Muhammad Ishaq Khan, "Biographical Dictionary of Sufis in South Asia", p.325; Khan, "Sufis of Kashmir", pp.297-98.

¹⁶ Baba Daud Khaki, *Dastur-us-Salikin*, Ms. RPD No. 741, f.163b.

¹⁷ Saivid Ahmad Kirmani entered the valley from Kirman during either of the two periods of Sultan Nazuk Shah's reign (1529-30; or 1540-52). The reigning sultan got so much influenced by the personality of Sayyid Ahmad that he became his devotee, built a khanqah/hospice for him at Narwar in Srinagar and also assigned an annual grant for the maintenance of his Khanqah out of the revenues of the state. This Khanqah, the nerve centre of his activities obviously played an important role in diseminating Suharwardi Silsilah in Kashmir. See Diddamari, "Waqiat-i-Kashmir", urdu tr. pp. 54-55; Pir Hasan, "Tarikh-i-Hasan", Vol. III, p.270f; Miskin, "Tarikh-i-Kabir, p.112; Khan, Sufis of Kashmir, p.270f; khan, "Biographical dictionary of Sufis in South Asia", p.310; Rafiqui, "Sufism in Kashmir", p.22.

¹⁸ Baba Daud Khaki, "Dastur-us-Salikin", Ms. RPD No. 741, f.163b.

¹⁹ Khaki, "Dastur-us-Salikin", ff.201b, 208a.

²⁰ It is said that once an Amir invited the disciples of Shaikh Hamza to a feast. The disciple felt reluctant to go, for he had no permission to go to amirs, when Shaikh Hamza came to know about it, he allowed his Murid to share the feast on the ground that feast was arranged out of love and affection. Khaki, "Dastur-us-Salikin", ff.190ab.

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Baba Daud himself had such close contact with the ruler of Kashmir that he dedicated his Qasida-i-Ghusliyah Yusuf Shahi to Sultan Yusuf Shah, in whose reign the Qasida was completed.²¹ Baba Hardi Rishi, another disciple of Shaikh Hamza, though a Rishi did not cut himself off from the politics, as we are told that the then (two) reigning Sultans (Ali Shah and Yousuf Shah) had great faith in him, who often used to come to the Shaikh and the Shaikh in return prayed for their success.²² The above-stated references indicate that Suharwardiyya Sufis of Kashmir were not reluctant to accept the gifts from the rulers of the time. There are ample evidences to show that the attitude of Suharwardiya Sufis of Kashmir towards various political groups of the period was not that of indifference and hatred, but it was sympathetic and friendly.

Conclusion:

The Suharwardiya Sufis of Kashmir exercised great influence on various social and cultural aspects of the then medieval society of Kashmir. Besides living a life of simplicity, they did not renounce the world or isolate themselves from the people and their problems. Most of such pious Sufi saints led a happy conjugal life and took an active interest in the affairs of the state (politics). Thus, Kashmir still gives us a good example of; it greatly signifies that Sufism that has usually been targeted with undue otherworldly concerns, apolitical stance, inertness and inactiveness: the role of Sufi missionaries in general and that of Suharwardiyya Sufis in particular shows how much active they were in the Kashmiri society. They were engaged in each and every aspect of the society of Kashmir.

²¹ In his Risala-i-Gusl-i-Yusuf Shahi, khaki showers praise on the Shia ruler of Kashmir for his equitable justice, nobility of culture, promotion of learning and policy of non-interference in the religious life of his subjects. See Khaki "Qasida-i-Gusla-i-Yusuf Shahi", RPD Ms. No. 1914, ff.4b-5ab. Not only Yusuf Shah but also his father, Sultan Ali Shah, is praised by Khaki for their respect for the pious (Salihan). See Khaki, "Rishinama", RPD Ms. No. 1822, f.121a.

²² Baba Daud Khaki, "Rishinama", f.121a.

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