

Sufism and Philosophical Counselling: An Analysis of Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

The Kashmir landscape, globally known for its picturesque beauty, is thus rightly known as the "Paradise on Earth." The physical beauty of Kashmir is consciously maintained and highly amplified by some of its commendable qualities. Many scholars have mentioned that Sufism in Kashmir called attention to the peaceful co-existence of all faiths apart from its emphasis on increasing virtues, soul purification, and divine love. Their philosophy has strengthened the Kashmiri social setup by adding details to their hospitality, warmth, tolerance, equality, and generosity.

In this regard, the paper attempts to understand the role that the philosophy of these Sufi saints has played in the history of Kashmir. Employing secondary sources and the relevant literature, the paper highlights the fact that Sufism has been instrumental in establishing and maintaining the legacy of peaceful co-existence and infusing the qualities the land has been known for, like hospitality, equality, brotherhood, and, more importantly, it would be better to study that how these Sufis have influenced the economic life of people of Kashmir till now. However, assessing the present situation in the valley is food for the people and scholars to see how far this philosophy needs revival to pull together the scattered threads of the longed-for Kashmir ethos.

Keywords: *Sufism, co-existence, Kashmir, tolerance, hospitality*

Introduction

Through the millennia, Kashmir's social system has portrayed itself as amenable to every religious appeal. However, Islam has been dramatically successful in attracting the people of the valley in general, and the *Sufi* traditions of Islam have been instrumental in teaching unique qualities like tolerance, egalitarianism, sacrifice, brotherhood, and hospitality. The historical records are interwoven with tales highlighting this particularity of Kashmir's state subjects. The effects have spread so far that several Sufi shrines are still highly valued and sought after. Thus, Sufism has significantly tightened the bonds between the many institutions of the social structure, giving the valley's residents a unique advantage in the stunning Kashmiri scenery. The study, highlighting this narration, will also attempt to assess the present-day situation in the valley in light of the great traditions of *Sufism* in the state.

Meaning and Genesis of Sufism

Sufism has always had a significant fan following among Muslims and non-Muslims, as

seen in India, where Sufi saints laid the foundations of the Bhakti movement in Hinduism. Moreover, Sufism has always played a pivotal role in breaking down superstitions and has become all the more relevant in contemporary times of violence. The word Sufi has many derivations, but the most popular one is that the word 'Sufi' comes from the Arabic word 'Suf,' which means wool. Therefore, the Muslim saints who used to wear garments made of wool were termed "Sufis." Even though Sufism is a much later phenomenon associated with Islam, it is said to have its foundations in the 7th century A.D.

It is asserted that Islamic Sufism finds its roots in the life and personality of the Prophet of Islam, Hazrat-e-Muhammad himself (Rafiqi, 2009, p. 24), who is the role model for all those mystics, spiritualists, *Sufis*, *dervishes*, *faqirs*, *rishis* and *pirs* who had devoted their lives for gaining the knowledge of '*haqiqt* and '*tariqat* in the light of Qur'an and Sunnah to achieve the fundamental goal of Islam. Sufism is not something different or a new religion from Islam. Mystic spirituality also depends on the

five essential pillars of Islam, i.e., the Kalma (Shahadat), the Prayer (Salat), the Saum (Fasting during Ramadan), the (Zakat) the obligatory contribution towards the poor, and finally, the performance of Pilgrimage (Hajj) if the person could effort the expenses (Hamdani, 2009, p. 34).

"The Sufis would usually live in isolation, practice self-mortification, and were distinguished by a cloak of wool (*Suf*), a tradition of Muhammad, which is believed to be the origin of the word Sufi. A group of such devotees lived a life of poverty and continued prayer and fasting on a stone bench before Muhammad's mosque. These people of the bench (*Ashab-e-suffa*), 45 to over 300 in number, were given too much weeping and repentance and are believed to be the origin of Sufism. However, the name Sufi was given to such ascetics only around the second century after the death of Muhammad. The Sufis in the early period were primarily ascetics, and Sufism had yet to evolve into a fully developed system of theosophical doctrines, which became the core feature of the later Sufism. The companions of Muhammad, like Bilal, Salman Farsi, and Ammar bin Yasir, were the early mystics. Later, with the spread of Islam, Sufism flourished in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Persia, and Central Asia and gave birth to renowned Sufis like Rabia Basri, Hasan Basri, Junayd Baghdadi, Dhun Nun Misri, etc., around the 9th and 10th century (Nizamie. et al. p.216)."

Sufism in India

In India, the early history of Sufis is most challenging to understand. Still, we may safely assume that Muslims with solid leanings towards mysticism were at work in this country from Islam's earliest contact with it. Historians tell us that it was by way of three open doors –the sea, the land route leading through Persia into Sind, and the Khyber pass- that Islam entered India. These same doors also must have come to these Sufis and wandering Dervishes, following in the

steps of peaceful Arab traders and military commanders (Subhan, 1999, p. 119). However, the severe or natural Sufi activities in India began in the last decade of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century. Outstanding Sufi personalities began to visit India one after another in quick succession. These Sufis organised themselves into various 'orders' called Silsilas up to the 16th century A.D. Sufi Orders (Silsilas) are numerous, crossing one hundred seventy-five. However, the most important among them are as follows:-

1. The Chishtiyyah Order.
2. The Qadriyyah Order.
3. The Naqshbandiyyah Order.
4. The Suhrawardiyyah Order (Masood, 2003, pp. 26-27)

Sufism in Kashmir

The beautiful valley of Kashmir is now one of the great tourist centres of Asia. It is by the grace of its incredible mountain scenery. Kashmir is not only famous for its beauty but also for its fine artisans and hospitality. Kashmir is a so-called valley because it is covered by mountains from all sides, and that is why it is called the 'paradise on earth.'

The individuality of the culture of Kashmir survived the coming of Islam itself in new forms. The process by which Islam was introduced into the valley differed from that whereby it entered other parts of the subcontinent, for it did not come by conquest but by peaceful penetration. In his book 'Valley of Kashmir,' Walter Lawrence states that 'foreigners call the Kashmirias *Pir Parast* saint worshippers and that epithet is well deserved' (Lawrence, 1985, p. 286).

With the beginning of Muslim rule in Kashmir (720/1320), Sufism entered Kashmir. These Sufis poured from Persia and Central Asia into Kashmir. There were four Sufi orders in Kashmir – Suharwardi, Kubravi, Naqshbandi, and Qadri. Sayyid Sharaf-ud-din Bulbul Shah was the first Sufi to enter the Kashmir valley. He was a native of Turkistan and arrived in Kashmir during the reign of King Suhadeva. He belonged to the

Suharwardia order of the Sufis. His main contribution to the Islamization of Kashmir was the conversion of King Rinchin to Islam. His conversion helped Islam to go on a long way in Kashmir.

The Islamization of Kashmir was further developed at a faster rate by the influx of a host of Sayyids, well known among them are Sayyid Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Sayyid Taj-ud-din, Sayyid Mas'ud, Sayyid Ali Hamdani. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani flourished and extraordinarily influenced the spreading of Islam in Kashmir, also known as Shah-e-Hamdan in Kashmir. His other name is Amir-i-Kabir and Ali-i-Thani (second Ali) (Lawrence, 1985, p. 292). He belonged to the Kubravi order. After moving to Kashmir, he gained enormous influence over the ruler of Kashmir, Sultan Qutub-ud-din. The saint further confirmed the switchover of the masses of the valley to Islam with the help of his prominent co-workers.

From the Suharwardi order, a famous and significant Saint was Sheikh Hamza Makhdam, popularly known as 'Mahbulul Alam' in Kashmir. He was born in 900/1494 in the district Baramulla of Kashmir. He built various mosques in Kashmir in rural areas where Islamic teachings were propagated. He strongly disapproved of Sama (mystical music), prohibited in Islam and evidenced in the Qur'an & Sunnah (Yousuf, 2019). The other two orders of Sufi Saints, the Naqshbandi & Qadri saints, were fewer and did not leave lasting impressions in Kashmir.

Impact on the social structure of Kashmir

These great *Sufi* traditions have greatly influenced the land and people of Kashmir. Some of the distinctive areas that the *zSufi* orders affected in the valley are discussed in the following sections.

- **Politics:** These Sayyids or Sufi saints who arrived with Syed Ali Hamadani linked themselves with the royal courts and participated in the state's political affairs. These Sufi saints not only engaged themselves in religious positions but also served as ambassadors.
- **Lifestyle:** It was Sayyid Ali Hamadan's teachings of which Sultan Qutub-ud-din was so influenced that he discarded the dressing style of Hindu attire and divorced his wives whom he had married before, against Islamic law. Sayyid Ali Hamdani and his team established hospices in the valley, which served as centres for the propagation of their religion. The doors of these hospices were open to all, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and in the large kitchens, food was served to the needy, innates, and visitors.
- **Religious Education:** Another contribution of these Sayyids was the establishment of Madrassas (Educational institutions) where the knowledge of the Qur'an, Qur'anic commentaries, Hadis (sayings of the Prophet,) and *Tafsir* (commentary) was propagated. These Madrassas imparted religious education and moral and social equality knowledge, which helped the Kashmiris lead a disciplined and righteous life.
- **Economy:** Sayyid Ali Hamdani played a vital role in improving the Kashmir valley's economy by introducing central Asia's art and craft techniques. On his insistence, Sultan Qutub-ud-din started Karkhana (Shawl factories) in Kashmir on a main Asia factory pattern.
- **Monasticism:** It did not advocate monasticism as it is forbidden in the Qur'an and has no mention in the teachings of the Prophet. Some pseudo-Sufis practised this escapism or monkish austerity, which was their innovation and thus alienated Sufism from Islam. The Islamic abstemiousness (Zuhd), which means leading a simple life and not becoming a captive of wealth and rank, is in no way related to the issue of monasticism.
- **Conversions:** More than 30,000 people accepted Islam through the influence of Shah-i-Hamdan, mostly mass conversions. However, during Sultan Sikander (1389-1413), Sufism gained impulsion in the valley. It was by the teachings of Mir Muhammad, son of Sayyid Ali Hamadani, by whom Sultan Sikander was very impressed and who continued his father's mission in the Kashmir valley. Malik

Suhabhata, prime minister and commander of the military force at that time, was impressed by Mir Muhammad's personality and simple way of life, so he embraced Islam. Then, under the influence of Mir Muhammad, he adopted the name Saif-ud-din and abandoned the evil practices widespread in Kashmiri society, like the sale of hot drinks, *sati* system gambling, and the dancing of girls. This Sufi saint, by removing such wicked practices from society, not only helped the welfare of Muslims but also the welfare of non-Muslims. These Sufi saints not only converted the lower caste Hindus but also Brahmans renounced their faith and accepted Islam. The fact is that their conversion was practically motivated, and the spiritual cravings have nothing to do with it. Jonaraja says, "Many Brahmans and people of other castes gave up their faith to obtain the favour of the king (Sikandar) (Dutt, 1898, p. 67)."

- **Women's Education:** These Sufi saints greatly emphasised Women's education. Baba Dawud Khaki, while highlighting the importance of women's education, says,

"It is obligatory on a husband to impart religious Education to his wife, and if he does not fulfil it, the woman has every right to move towards a teacher without the permission of her husband to acquire Iilm- i- Sharia" (Khaki, 1937, p. 135)

Apart from these pros and cons of the *Sufi* faith and traditions in Kashmir, the persistence of the impact can still be located in the Kashmir atmosphere. It has, without doubt, preached and propagated Islam uniquely, attracting the Kings, their courtiers, and the common masses. It recorded huge conversions and thereby successfully inculcated the great ideals of Islam by fostering unity and tolerance and pushing society toward the realms of justice.

Presently, the glory has been lost and eroded by the modernisation of societies and the introduction of religious fundamentalism in Islam. It may still have some standing in the rural locales but has witnessed a significant downfall. The need of the hour is to rest the society on the ideals that promote unity, foster a

sense of equality, augment tolerance to other people of other faiths, and make a person live like humans.

Spirit of Communal Harmony

The traditional communal harmony that once existed in Kashmir enabled the peaceful co-existence of Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus), and other minorities. The Kashmiri society became more open to various beliefs under the influence of Islamic Sufis and Saints of the Rishi order.

"Shiva (God) abides in all that is everywhere, then do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim. If you are wise, seek the Absolute within yourself. That is true knowledge of the Lord" – Lal Ded/ Lala Arifa.

Some of the festivals in Kashmir originating in Hindu mythology attained a secular character. Pandits and Muslims celebrated them, the birthday of river *Vitasta* (Jhelum) being one such festival. The King, Zain-ul-Abidin, also known as '*Bud Shah*' (Great King), used to function as a high priest on such occasions, promoting a collective identity, often referred to as '*Kashmiriyat*,' which further evolved as a representation of religious tolerance, with saints like Lal Ded/Lala Arifa, Shiekh Noorudin/Nun Rishi helping the cause by spreading the message of oneness and sowing seeds of the concept of religious-humanism. The humanistic philosophy of Kashmiri Sufis and Rishis has played a prominent role in building the Kashmiri ethnic identity.

As times progressed, despite varied political leanings and conflicting attitudes to the history of Kashmir, Kashmiris (Pandits and Muslims) continued to have a remarkable degree of tolerance, respect, and concern for each other in day-to-day life. Pandits and Muslims celebrated the onset of spring by celebrating a festival called '*Badamwari*' (Almond festival) as flowers blossomed in almond gardens. In many areas, Muslim '*Asthans*' (shrines) and Hindu shrines stood facing each other while people made

pilgrimages to shrines and visited living Sufis. Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims attended gatherings where Kashmiri Sufi poetry was sung at the abodes of living Sufis.

Sufi Intellectual Affinity and Impact in Kashmir

Sufism, a mystical and spiritual dimension of Islam, has had a significant intellectual affinity and impact in Kashmir. Sufism emphasises spirituality, self-awareness, and inner transformation and can intersect with various aspects of Counseling and psychology. Here are some modes or pathways where Sufism and Counseling intersect:

- **Spirituality in Counseling:** It explores how incorporating spiritual elements, such as Sufi practices, into Counseling can enhance individuals' well-being and mental health. This includes discussions on meditation, mindfulness, and other Sufi techniques as therapeutic tools. These techniques are still located at many places in Kashmir where people used to live at shrines and follow meditation and mental Counseling under the leadership of a guru, which we call 'Pir' in the Kashmiri language.
- **Mindfulness and Sufism:** Examining the practice of mindfulness within Sufism and how it can be integrated into counselling techniques to help individuals manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Mindfulness is a practice rooted in Buddhist traditions but has gained widespread popularity in secular and therapeutic contexts. It involves paying focused and non-judgmental attention to the present moment. The primary aim of mindfulness is to increase self-awareness, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being.

Meanwhile, Sufism is a mystical and contemplative branch of Islam that emphasises the direct personal experience of the Divine (Allah). Sufis seek a deeper understanding of God's presence and love through various spiritual practices, including meditation, chanting, and studying poetry and sacred texts.

An inner journey, whirling dervishes, love, and devotion characterise Sufism.

- **Self-Exploration and Sufi Mysticism:** They not only teach the people of Kashmir how to connect with Allah but also teach concepts like self-discovery, self-realisation, and self-purification, which can be applied in Counseling to help clients better understand themselves and their life paths.
- **Sufi Poetry and Healing:** Sufi poetry is used as a therapeutic benefit, which often conveys deep emotions and spiritual insights, and it can be used in counselling sessions as a form of expressive therapy.
- **Sufi Practices for Emotional Regulation:** Investigating how Sufi practices, such as music and dance (Sama), can be used as tools for emotional regulation and expression within a counselling context.
- **Sufi Ethics and Moral Development:** Discuss the ethical principles and moral development emphasised in Sufism and how they can be integrated into counselling to promote personal growth and ethical decision-making.
- **Interfaith Counseling and Sufism:** The main aim of Sufis is to love and respect humanity, which ultimately leads to love towards God. They teach how Sufi principles of tolerance and interfaith dialogue can inform counselling approaches when working with clients from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, which are still used and located in the valley of Kashmir.
- **Sufism and Resilience:** The Sufis in Kashmir also Investigate how Sufi teachings on resilience, surrender, and acceptance can be applied to help individuals build psychological strength and cope with life's challenges.
- **Sufism and Existential Counseling:** The Sufis also develop how Sufi thought can align with existential counselling theories, particularly in addressing questions of purpose, freedom, and authenticity.

These points highlight the potential for integrating Sufi philosophy and practices into Counseling and psychology to provide a holistic

approach to mental health and well-being that considers individuals' spiritual and psychological aspects.

Sufism and Psychiatry

Sufism and psychiatry may seem unrelated, but exciting connections and intersections exist, particularly in mental health and well-being. The term psychiatry, which implies "healing of the psyche or soul," comes from the Greek words *psukhe*, which means "psyche" or "soul," and *atresia*, which means "healing." Ironically, the relationship between psychiatry and spirituality/religion is turbulent. The connection has substantially improved. Freud was affected by psychoanalysis, thinking religion was abnormal and open to naturalistic interpretation explanations (Littlewood. 1996. pp. 178-179). The hostile relationship that evolved from similar ideas remained till the end of the 20th century and has given way to the indifference of the 21st century that psychiatry seems ill afford. According to Fullford, the struggle between science and religion/spirituality is more fundamental than the conflict between psychiatry and spirituality. Psychiatry became associated with the empirical sciences, which rely on observation as the primary source of information, as a result of applying the medical paradigm to the field (Fulford. 1996. pp.5-22). Religion, on the other hand, as we know, is based on the "revealed" knowledge. Sufi experiences have similarities to prophetic revelation experiences and may make it possible to research religion "scientifically." Thus, Sufism might offer the crucial link between psychiatry and religion.

Clinically speaking, psychiatry deals with aspects of human existence influenced by scientific knowledge and religious principles (Fulford. 1996. pp.5-22). By taking into account both aspects of human life, psychiatry can develop into a discipline with a more holistic understanding of human behaviour that can have implications for understanding and treating mental disorders. Therefore, psychiatry needs to

shun indifference and actively engage with the study of religion from a philosophical and clinical perspective.

Conclusion

The propagation of Islam in Kashmir has received a substantial boost with the presentation of the ways and characters of the great *Sufi* saints -*Sufism*. It has influenced many arenas of the Kashmiri social structure, like economy, religion, and lifestyle. It has also extensively advocated women's education and authorised the position of Muslims in the political spheres of Kashmir. It has also been instrumental in denouncing the evil practices of gambling, dancing of girls, hot drinks, and the sati system, apart from hindering monasticism. The *Sufi* traditions of *sama* have been criticised widely and held responsible for presenting an undesirable direction towards God. Moreover, the *Sufi* shrines became the places of worship for most Kashmiri Muslims, a reprehensible innovation and forbidden practice in Islam. Nonetheless, the impact is unparalleled to any other religious orders in Kashmir that have infused great humanistic values in general and Islamic values in particular.

Sufism has had a profound intellectual affinity and impact in Kashmir, shaping its culture, spirituality, and social fabric. Despite the region's challenges, the Sufi tradition continues to endure and offer a message of peace and tolerance in Kashmir and beyond.

The philosophy of Kashmiri Sufis and Rishis built this Kashmiri ethnic identity. Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims share common customs and beliefs, and Sufi and Hindu shrines attract crowds from both communities. The thin lines between religious boundaries and the pluralistic cultural order of Kashmir are the cornerstone of the unique concept of the Kashmiriyat.

[\[1\]](#) Hindu widow who immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre

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