

The History of Islam in Kashmir: A Special Focus on Sufi Saint Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s Socio-religious Impact on the Kashmir Valley

Rameez Ahmad Lone

An Independent Scholar, SRF & holding PhD in Sociology from Aligarh Muslim University, India
rameezln777@gmail.com

Yasmeena Aziz

University of Kashmir, Hazratbal, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India
yasmeenaziz7890@gmail.com

Syamsul Haq

Universitas Islam International Indonesia, Indonesia
syamsul.haq@uiii.ac.id

Muhammed Nishad Maliyakkal Poovadichalil

Universitas Islam International Indonesia, Indonesia
muhammed.poovadichalil@uiii.ac.id

Noval Maliki

Fahmina Islamic Studies Institute Cirebon, Indonesia
novalmaliki@isif.ac.id

Suggested Citation:

Lone, Rameez Ahmad; Aziz, Yasmeena; Haq, Syamsul; Poovadichalil, Muhammed Nishad Maliyakkal; Maliki, Noval. (2025). The History of Islam in Kashmir: A Special Focus on Sufi Saint Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s Socio-religious Impact on the Kashmir Valley. *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, Volume 5, Number 2: 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v5i2.44691>

Article’s History:

Received March 2025; Revised April 2025; Accepted April 2025.
2025. journal.uinsgd.ac.id ©. All rights reserved.

Abstract:

Transformation in Kashmir's spiritual landscape has been significantly influenced by Sufi saints, particularly Hazrat Bulbul Shah and Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan. This study critically examines the pivotal role of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, whose teachings and poetry addressed essential themes such as social justice, ethical reform, environmental consciousness, and monotheism. His engagement with indigenous traditions, especially the Rishi order, fostered a distinctive synthesis of Islamic spirituality and Kashmiri culture. Anchored in the Sociology of Religion, this research employs secondary data analysis and thematic analysis to explore Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s enduring influence on Kashmir’s religious and cultural identity. The study highlights his contributions as a social reformer, emphasizing his role in fostering communal harmony and ethical consciousness. By integrating local beliefs with Islamic teachings, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam not only enriched the spiritual fabric of Kashmir but also laid the groundwork for a unique cultural identity known as *Kashmiriyat*. The article contributes to the existing literature by providing a nuanced understanding of how Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam's legacy remains deeply relevant in contemporary religious and sociological discourse. It emphasizes the importance of his teachings in promoting interfaith dialogue and social equity, demonstrating that the principles he espoused continue to resonate in today’s context.

Keywords: *Islam; Kashmir valley; Sufism; sociology of religion; social reform.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of Islam in Kashmir is a narrative deeply intertwined with the region's cultural and spiritual evolution. Unlike other parts of South Asia, where Islam is believed was introduced through conquest and trade (Chandra, 1999; Eaton, 1993; Robinson, 2000; Wink, 1994), Kashmir's Islamic legacy is rooted in the spiritual teachings of Sufi saints who catalyzed the religious transformation of the valley (Para et al., 2022). The journey of Islam in Kashmir began as early as the times of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), with initial interactions leading to the formation of small Muslim communities. The transformative influence of Sufi saints has been a significant force in shaping the spiritual and cultural landscapes across various regions, particularly in South Asia (Kaw, 2022). Notably, figures such as Hazrat Bulbul Shah and Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan have played pivotal roles in this spiritual movement, fostering a unique blend of Islamic teachings with local traditions (Zutshi, 2000). This synthesis has not only enriched the religious fabric of societies but has also catalyzed social change, promoting values such as love, equality, and communal harmony.

Among these luminaries, Shaikh-ul-Āalam (Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani) stands out as a pivotal figure whose teachings shaped Kashmir's religious identity and social order. Born in the late 14th century, Shaikh-ul-Āalam's spiritual mission was deeply rooted in Sufi principles, emphasizing piety, ethical living, and devotion to monotheism. Through his poetry and moral teachings, he engaged with local Kashmiri traditions, particularly the Rishi order, creating a harmonious synthesis of Sufi Islam and indigenous spiritual thought (Kour, 2024).

In Kashmir, Shaikh-ul-Āalam emerges as a central figure in this narrative. His teachings and poetry resonate with universal themes of social justice, ethical reform, environmental consciousness, and monotheism. By engaging with indigenous traditions—especially the Rishi order—he facilitated a distinctive amalgamation of Islamic spirituality and Kashmiri culture. This integration is crucial for understanding the enduring impact of his legacy on the region's religious and cultural identity. Beyond religious guidance, Shaikh-ul-Āalam was a social reformer, critiquing social hierarchies, moral corruption, and caste-based discrimination. His teachings promoted social justice, equality, and human dignity, laying the foundation for a harmonious and inclusive Kashmiri society. His ethical and spiritual ideals continue to influence contemporary Kashmiri identity, making his contributions significant in the study of the Sociology of Religion (Lone, 2020).

This article aims to analyze the historical development of Islam in Kashmir, with a special focus on the socio-religious contributions of Shaikh-ul-Āalam. It seeks to highlight how his teachings shaped Kashmir's spiritual landscape, integrating Sufi mysticism with social reform and ultimately contributing to the formation of a distinct Kashmiri Islamic ethos. By applying sociological theories of religion, the study provides a comprehensive perspective on the intersection of faith, culture, and society in Kashmir. By examining Shaikh-ul-Āalam's life and teachings, we gain insight into how Sufi ideals can foster inclusive social dynamics and promote peace in an increasingly fragmented world. The relevance of Shaikh-ul-Āalam's message transcends time, offering valuable perspectives for contemporary religious and sociological discourse.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing secondary data analysis and thematic analysis to examine the socio-religious impact of Shaikh-ul-Āalam in Kashmir. The research is framed within the Sociology of Religion, drawing on theoretical perspectives from Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Peter Berger to analyze how Sufi spirituality influenced Kashmiri society. The study of Shaikh-ul-Āalam's contributions is anchored in the Sociology of Religion to explore his role as a social reformer. His emphasis on ethical consciousness and communal harmony reflects a broader trend within Sufism that seeks to address contemporary societal challenges. As Sufism continues to serve as a bridge between diverse communities globally, Shaikh-ul-Āalam's legacy remains deeply relevant in discussions surrounding interfaith dialogue, social equity, and spiritual fulfillment.

The study relies on secondary data sources, including historical manuscripts, scholarly articles, and literary works related to Islam's spread in Kashmir and Shaikh-ul-Āalam's teachings. Secondary data analysis allows for the interpretation of existing sources to develop new insights (Johnston, 2014), while library research enables a comprehensive review of published literature (George, 2008). This approach

ensures a critical and contextualized understanding of Shaikh-ul-Āalam's role in shaping the religious and social fabric of Kashmir.

To analyze the data, the study applies thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying and interpreting patterns within textual sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Flick (Roen, 2007) and Mayring (Mayring, 2014), thematic analysis ensured that only relevant information was retained for a coherent narrative. This method facilitates the categorization of key themes such as socio-religious impact, social justice, ethical reform, environmental consciousness, and Islamic monotheism, enabling a deeper sociological exploration of Shaikh-ul-Āalam's contributions.

The theoretical framework is based on three key perspectives:

1. Durkheim's Functionalist Approach. Durkheim (Durkheim, 2020) argued that religion functions as a source of social cohesion and collective consciousness. This study explores how Shaikh-ul-Āalam's teachings fostered unity and moral order in Kashmiri society by integrating Islamic spirituality with indigenous traditions.
2. Max Weber's Theory of Religion and Social Change. Weber (Weber, 1993) emphasized how religious ideas shape economic and social structures. Shaikh-ul-Āalam's critique of social injustices and moral decay reflects a transformative religious movement that challenged societal norms and encouraged ethical reform. His focus on environmental consciousness—illustrated by his saying, "Food or life will sustain only as long as forests will survive"—also underpins the basis for sustainable socio-economic development, and
3. Berger's concept of the sacred canopy, which explains how religion provides a structured worldview that influences cultural identity (Berger, 2011). Shaikh-ul-Āalam's poetry and teachings offered a structured religious worldview that shaped Kashmiri's identity and cultural ethos.

By employing this structured analytical approach, the study highlights Shaikh-ul-Āalam's contributions within a sociological framework, demonstrating how Sufi teachings shaped Kashmiri society's religious and social fabric.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Genesis of Islam in Kashmir

Kashmir is one of the prominent Muslim cultures in the South Asian region, with a prestigious heritage and significant religious-spiritual contributions. This heritage has played a crucial role in restructuring the demography, society, and political life of the region. The social transformation did not happen suddenly but was a gradual process, deeply influenced by the efforts of religious authorities, including Sufi saints who arrived from Persia and Central Asia. Their introduction of Islamic traditions through mysticism and spiritual teachings in the fourteenth century connected Kashmir with the broader Muslim world (Jan & Mir, 2023).

Sufism, derived from the Arabic word *tasawwuf*, emphasizes self-purification and the pursuit of eternal spiritual happiness. Often referred to as "Islamic mysticism," a term popularized by Western academia (Ewing & Corbett, 2019), this spiritual tradition played a pivotal role in shaping Kashmir's religious landscape. The Sufi saints' emphasis on spirituality, compassion, and inclusivity resonated deeply with the local population, facilitating the peaceful spread of Islam in the region.

The earliest traces of Islam in Kashmir date back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). It is said that he dispatched two envoys to the court of a Hindu king, Venadatt, who was so impressed by their invitation (*dawah*) that he adopted a simpler lifestyle and distributed a portion of his wealth (*ushr*—the tenth part of the wealth in Islam) among the poor. Later, a Muslim general of Syrian origin, Hamim bin Sama, accompanied Jasiya, the son of a Hindu king of Sindh, to Kashmir after Jasiya's father was defeated by Muhammad bin Qasim around 711 CE. Hamim was warmly received by the Hindu king of Kashmir, where he laid the foundation of a Muslim community and built several mosques (Sikand, 2000).

The 9th-century Arab traveler Buzurg bin Shahryar further documents the presence of Islam in Kashmir, stating that the first translation of the Holy Quran into Kashmiri was commissioned by the Hindu king Mehroke. Kalhana, the notable Kashmiri Pandit scholar, also recorded that the Hindu king Harshadeva (1089–1101) employed many Muslims in his army and court. Unlike other Muslim-majority regions in South

Asia, where Islam arrived through the South, Kashmir primarily received Islamic influences from Khurasan and Central Asia. Arnold Walter traces the introduction of Islam in Kashmir to the invasion of Tartar Khan Dalcha in the early twelfth century, around 1128 AD (Walter, 1914).

However, it was two centuries later that Syed Abdur Rahman, widely known as Hazrat Bulbul Shah of Turkestan, firmly established the roots of Islam in Kashmir. His real name was Syed Sharafuddin Abdur Rahman, and according to various accounts, he hailed from either Iran or Baghdad. His first visit to Kashmir occurred in 1295 CE, but he returned in 1324 CE with a thousand disciples, including prominent Islamic scholars. Among his first converts was the Buddhist prince Ranchan Shah, later known as Sadruddin. Opposed to caste-based discrimination, Sadruddin actively supported Hazrat Bulbul Shah in the spread of Islam, laying a strong foundation for its growth in the region (Walter, 1914). He became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir (Sūfī, 1948).

Following Hazrat Bulbul Shah, Mir Syed Muhammad Hamdaani, popularly known as Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan, arrived in Kashmir in the early 1390s with seven hundred disciples during the reign of Sultan Sikandar. His efforts contributed significantly to the establishment of Islamic law (Shariah rule) in Kashmir. He is regarded as one of the most influential figures in the spread of Islam in Kashmir, impacting not only religious practices but also the region's culture, politics, and economy (Wink, 1994).

Aziz Ahmad (1979) notes that Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan played a crucial role in the Islamization of Kashmir. He was not only a religious missionary but also a political theorist who championed Muslim elitism in a composite society. His influence primarily led to the Islamization of the ruling dynasty and the nominally Muslim elite, followed by the mass conversion of many Hindu Jatis seeking liberation from social hierarchies and stigma of pollution (A. Ahmad, 1979).

Through the spiritual charisma of these two Sufi saints, thousands of Hindus voluntarily embraced Islam. Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan, also known as Ameer-i-Kabeer (The Great Leader), is credited with converting approximately thirty-seven thousand Hindus to Islam.

Further Islamization in Kashmir was accelerated by thousands of Syeds, Islamic scholars, and other followers accompanied by them. Hazrat 'Bulbul Shah' and Hazrat Shahi Hamdaan belonged to the Suhrawardiya and Kubrawiya orders of Sufi, having a strong intellectual base and tracing their lineage to pious predecessors like Hazrat Umar (RA). Later on, during the reign of Zayn-ul-Abideen (1420-1470 AD), who was the son of King Sikandar and popularly known as 'Bud Shah,' some Indigenous Sufi traditions came-fore, among which Rishi order is prominent. Rishi order is traced to 'Nur-al-Din' (Nund Rishi), popularly known as 'Shaikh Nur-ud-Din Nurani' or Shaikh-ul-Aalam. This order was based on mutual tolerance and a mixture of Hindu-Muslim beliefs.

Shaikh-ul-Aalam is believed to have been influenced by his contemporary Hindu mystic Lal Ded and Hazrat Shah-i-Hamdaan. During this time, Sultan Zayn-ul-Abideen distanced himself from strict Shariah laws, allowed reconversions of neo-Muslims, visited Hindu temples, and participated in Hindu festivals—earning him the title of "Akbar of Kashmir." This period saw the emergence of a distinct Sufi tradition that incorporated elements of both Hindu and Islamic beliefs (Yousuf, 2019; Bhat, 2002). However, Shaikh-ul-Aalam himself did not promote religious syncretism or innovation in Islam. The blending of faiths was largely driven by individuals with vested interests, including custodians of shrines, fake Sufis, and blind followers. In reality, Shaikh-ul-Aalam was a staunch proponent of Islamic monotheism (Tawheed) and firmly opposed innovations that diluted the essence of Islam.

The combined efforts of Sufi saints, scholars, and missionaries led to a profound transformation of Kashmiri society, earning the region the title of Little Iran due to the deep cultural and spiritual influences from Iran and Central Asia (Jan & Mir, 2023). These historical interactions laid the groundwork for various reform movements in Kashmir, shaping the region's religious and cultural identity for generations to come.

Shaikh-ul-Āalam

Shaikh Nūr ul-Dīn, famously known as Shaikh-ul-Āalam (Spiritual Preceptor of the World), and by other titles such as Taj-ul Awliya (the Emperor of Saints), Nund Rishi (Pious Saint), and Alamdar-i Kashmir (Flag Bearer of Kashmir), stands as one of the most revered figures in the history of the Kashmir Valley. Born on 10th DhilHajj 779 A.H. (10th December 1377 C.E.) in Khai Jogipora, Kulgam, to Shaikh Salar-ud-Din and Sadra, a devout couple, he embarked on a profound spiritual journey from an early age. This journey, characterized by intense meditation in secluded caves, led to his ultimate spiritual enlightenment. Upon attaining this enlightenment, Shaikh-ul-Āalam emerged with a touring mission to spread the message

of Islam throughout the valley, living in various places and preaching a message centered on purity, piety, fear of Allah, and love for humanity.

Despite the political landscape of Kashmir, ruled by the Sultans during his lifetime, Shaikh-ul-Ālam remained detached from active politics, even though rulers like Sultan Zain al-Ābidīn Budshah held him in high regard. His focus was on his mission of dawah, aiming to establish an Islamic society rooted in love, honesty, tolerance, patience, brotherhood, and moral integrity. His poetry, composed in the local language, played a crucial role in facilitating a dynamic interaction between Islamic teachings and local culture, making his teachings accessible and relevant to the people of Kashmir. Through his poetic contributions, he established a creative dialogue between the great tradition of Islam, as represented by the Sufis and 'Ulamā, and the local peasant society. This interaction was instrumental in the acculturation and Islamization of Kashmiri society, leading to the spread of Islam in the region.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's legacy is deeply interwoven with the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of Kashmir. Celebrated as a theological genius, a profound scholar, and an influential Sufi poet, his poetry, often referred to as the "Kashmiri Quran," continues to inspire spiritual seekers and mystics. His teachings transcend religious boundaries, resonating with people of all faiths, including Hindus, who revere him as 'Sahjanand.' The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on Kashmiri Sufism led to the development of a unique spiritual tradition known as Rishism—a local form of mysticism deeply rooted in Sufi ideals (Gauhar, 2009).

Shaikh-ul-Ālam traveled extensively across Kashmir, ultimately settling in Charar-i-Sharief, where he continued his spiritual and social endeavors. He lived for sixty-three years and a few months, passing away in Rupawan village of Charar-i-Sharief on 26th Jamad al-Thani 842 A.H. (corresponding to 1439 C.E.) during the reign of Sultan Zain al-Ābidīn Budshah. His funeral was attended by many well-known Islamic personalities, including the king, highlighting his significant impact on the region. By the formal order of King Budshah, a shrine was constructed over his tomb, which stands at Charar-i-Sharief in the district of Budgam in Kashmir, drawing large crowds to this day (Sūfī, 1948).

Shaikh ul-Ālam's teachings offer a roadmap to replace societal evils with love, respect, and peace, making his message as vital today as it was during his time.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's Socio-Religious Impact on Kashmir

Shaikh-ul-Ālam, also known as Sheikh Nooruddin or Nund Reshi, was a pivotal figure in the history of Kashmir, whose influence on society and religion was both profound and transformative. His contributions can be categorized into two main aspects: societal impacts and religious impacts.

1. Societal Impact of Shaikh-ul-Ālam on Kashmir

Shaikh-ul-Ālam made a profound impact on Kashmiri society through his extensive efforts in reform and social critique. His influence was felt across various facets of societal life, driven by his commitment to ethical and social reform.

a. Addressing Social Inequities:

Shaikh-ul-Ālam, was a vocal critic of the social inequalities and injustices prevalent in Kashmiri society. His poetry often highlighted the disparities between the rich and the poor, criticizing the moral and social failings of the affluent classes. He condemned the wealthy for their neglect of the poor and their indulgence in worldly pleasures, which he viewed as morally and socially irresponsible. Through his Shruks, he exposed the exploitation and suffering of the marginalized, advocating for their upliftment and stressing the importance of empathy and support. In one of his Shruks, he states (M. Ahmad, 2019):

*One gets amused with musicians- melodious
Gleeful all in drowsiness too.
The other is struck violently with whips and batons.
Learn this self, is the discretion of Lord!*

In his verses, Shaikh-ul-Ālam redefined poverty as a noble condition, a source of virtue, and a path to spiritual elevation, in stark contrast to the materialism and moral decay he associated with the rich. His teachings encouraged respect and dignity for the poor, urging the wealthy to practice generosity and charity. He emphasized that true wealth lies in righteousness and spiritual purity, rather than in material possessions. He

places a higher priority on poverty, which is a more honorable state and contributes to an ethical nature. Sheikh-ul Alam's writings consistently depict a transcendental realm that has the capacity to reinterpret the material conception of the immanent universe. This sentiment is captured in another Shruk where he asserts (M. Ahmad, 2019):

*Poverty is a shield against Hell,
Poverty is the virtue of Prophets,
Poverty is the wealth of this and the next world,
Poverty is sweet and fragrant,
One who is steadfast in the path of Poverty,
So will be honored here and the Hereafter.*

b. *Critique of Social Practices, Gender Harassment and Morality*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam used his poetry as a powerful tool to challenge the prevailing social practices he found unjust or immoral. His Shruks not only condemned the rigid caste system and entrenched social hierarchies—urging the recognition of all humans as descendants of Adam and Eve—but also addressed issues of gender harassment in a manner that resonates with contemporary challenges. His verses call for a unified society where all individuals are valued, regardless of social or economic status. This commitment to equality is evident in his Shruks:

*He does not consider the creed and color
His eye is always on the heart
Ādam is the progenitor of the human race
From him came wife, our mother Eve
From where have the low castes descended?
How can a high born taunt the low born badly?*

In addition to challenging social stratification, he also critiqued the moral and ethical decay he observed in society, warning against indulgence in immoral behavior and highlighting the destructive consequences of such actions. His verses urged individuals to uphold their character and integrity, emphasizing that moral corruption undermines the foundation of a just and harmonious society. This is reflected in his Shrukh:

*Don't stare at strange women
Because you're pious and piety will get lost
Your faith too will get stained by it
Pride does not behave a Muslim*

By cautioning against disrespectful and immodest behavior, his words remain profoundly relevant in addressing issues like eve-teasing and other forms of gender harassment, beginning with staring-unwanted and lecherous looks. His teachings serve as a timeless reminder that true piety is reflected in one's conduct and respect for others.

His criticism extended to religious leaders, and scholars, whom he accused of hypocrisy and deceit, challenging them to live according to the true principles of Islam rather than exploiting their positions for personal gain. Besides he has also highlighted the deceit of Brahmans as well. In a particularly striking Shrukh, he remarks (M. Ahmad, 2019):

*Mūllāhs have become merchants of mosques,
The Pandit steals the idols from the temple.
One among thousands of them may deserve salvation,
Others are all the disciples of Satan*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam observed that many religious leaders, though not all, engaged in exploitation and hypocrisy, thereby undermining the ethical foundations of society. Additionally, he made a distinction between the two conceivable roles of religious leaders: one is a manifestation of Satan, while the other is a manifestation of

salvation. The majority of them are Satan's agents who are using religion for their own ends. At the same time, more powerful Hindu leaders and preachers are causing devotees to stray from a morally upright lifestyle. It results in a social conditioning that can only be adapted to a specific set of people who exploit others and claim privilege that can be created by the pervasiveness of such abuses.

c. *Promoting Unity and Brotherhood*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam was a strong proponent of unity and brotherhood among people of different faiths and backgrounds. He sought to bridge the divide between Muslims and Hindus, advocating for mutual respect and a shared sense of humanity. His teachings emphasized that religious and social divisions should not hinder the establishment of a harmonious and inclusive society. Through his poetry, he called for solidarity and unity, encouraging people to transcend sectarian barriers and work together for the common good. Likewise, he has highlighted in his *Shrukh* (Gauhar, 2009):

*"We belong to the same parents, then why this difference?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together) worship God alone."
"We came to this world like partners;
We should have shared our joys and sorrows together."*

His approach to promoting communal harmony was rooted in his belief in the universal message of Islam. By focusing on the core teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, he aimed to create an environment where love, respect, and cooperation could flourish. His efforts to unite different communities under a shared vision of ethical and spiritual values contributed to the creation of a more cohesive and supportive society.

d. *Environmental Consciousness*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam was a visionary in his recognition of the intrinsic connection between humanity and the natural world. Long before environmentalism became a recognized global movement, he emphasized the importance of preserving and nurturing the environment. His poetry reflects a deep awareness of ecological balance, advocating for the protection of nature not just as a practical necessity but as a spiritual duty.

One of his most famous verses, "Ann poshi teli yeli wan poshi," which translates to "Food or life will sustain only as long as forests will survive," encapsulates his belief in the critical role of nature in sustaining human life. This simple yet profound statement underscores the interdependence between human survival and the health of the environment, highlighting the necessity of preserving forests and natural resources for the well-being of future generations.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's reverence for nature extended beyond its utilitarian value. He saw the natural world as a source of spiritual solace and inspiration, a reflection of divine beauty that nurtured the soul. As Ahmad M. (2019) observes, "It is these surroundings of thick forests, huge mountains, wider valleys which provide eternal solace, comfort, and concentration for Gnostic practices, aesthetic tastes, and devotional meditation." The natural landscape was, for Shaikh-ul-Ālam, not only a physical environment but a spiritual sanctuary that facilitated deep reflection and connection with the divine. His reverence for nature serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness between the environment and spiritual well-being.

e. *Legacy and Lasting Influence*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's impact on Kashmiri society is evident in the enduring relevance of his teachings. His poetry continues to resonate with people, offering guidance on navigating social and moral challenges. The principles he espoused—justice, equality, compassion, and integrity—remain central to his legacy and provide valuable lessons for contemporary society. His work as a reformer and poet has left a lasting imprint on the cultural and spiritual landscape of Kashmir. By addressing social injustices, advocating for the rights of the underprivileged, and promoting ethical living, Shaikh-ul-Ālam has profoundly shaped the values and ideals of Kashmiri society. His contributions to social and moral reform continue to inspire individuals to strive for a just and compassionate world.

2. *Religious Impact*

a. *Dawah Mission*

During the era of Shaikh-ul-Āalam, Kashmir was undergoing significant cultural assimilation, and Islam had not yet fully overcome the resistance from local Hindu and Brahman communities, who still held considerable power and influence, particularly within the Royal Court. The dominance of these Hindu courtiers created barriers that prevented the common people from accessing the education and training necessary to understand the fundamentals of Islam. In this context, there was an urgent need for a religious scholar who could communicate the teachings of Islam in the local language, making it accessible to the unlettered masses.

Shaikh-ul-Āalam, emerged as the instrument of change in this challenging environment. Although the reformation of the Kashmiri people had been initiated by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdāni, it was significantly advanced by Shaikh-ul-Āalam. He embraced the responsibility of the Ummah to uphold justice, promote righteousness, and prevent wrongdoing, as prescribed by the principle of 'Amr-bil Ma'ruf wa Nahi 'Anil Munkar.' Shaikh-ul-Āalam, carried out this mission with great sincerity, expressing his philosophy through his poetic compositions, known as Shruks. As a spiritual leader, he sought to enlighten the world with his philosophy of universal brotherhood, rooted in conviction and solidarity.

Shaikh-ul-Āalam, is revered as a Mufassir, or commentator of the Qur'an, in Kashmiri terminology. He translated the message of the Qur'an and Hadith into Kashmiri through his poetry, allowing the people of Kashmir to understand these sacred texts in their mother tongue. His contributions to Kashmiri society were immense, as he emphasized the importance of every aspect of Islamic life. His poetry reflects his unwavering faith in Allah (s.w.t) and his commitment to Islamic teachings, particularly in the areas of Beliefs (Īmāniyāt), which include Tawḥīd (Oneness of God), Risālah (Prophethood), and Ākhirah (Hereafter).

In his Shruks Shaikh-ul-Āalam, conveyed these beliefs with profound clarity (M. Ahmad, 2019):

- 1) On Tawḥīd: "He was and He shalt be, May for Him my dear-self be, Alone, He wilt remove thy fears and doubts Be perceptible to some extent O, me!"
- 2) On Risālah: "Let thou take Mohammad (s.a.w) and His four disciples as paragons of life. Solution to all thy affairs wilt thou get from them. Devote thy being to their defined doctrine. A vast empire wilt thou find in Hereafter. Able not a blind be to impel without a staff. Thus shalt not thou be righteous without Thy Prophet. One shalt pledge devotion to such a prophet. Whose era has brimmed in with divinity all the spheres?"
- 3) On Ākhirah: "What shalt thou do on the day of resurrection. When rank & file shalt be with lurking fear. Each one shalt be looking for his ownself & The patient ones shalt lose the sense of patience."

Shaikh-ul-Āalam's context is rooted in medieval feudal Kashmir. He envisioned a universal brotherhood with a humanity perspective, which has the potential to implicate the local boundaries and various aspects of life. In this universal perspective, belief in the oneness of God is the ultimate and main focal point. Moreover, for Shaikh-ul-Āalam, divine realization is a result of the integration of self with truth. The 'realized self' will become submissive to the one God and reform society.

According to Shaikh-ul-Āalam, the Prophet's Sunnah is crucial to society. When we live by the guidance of the Prophet, we will have the answer to all problems in society, politics, and the economy. People are dependent on one another, and the Prophet's and his four predecessors' way of life is dependent on divine morality. Shaikh-ul-Āalam adheres to the Prophet's divine guidance and the Sunnah. The path to liberation from the evils that surround our sensibilities is to embrace the Prophethood and maintain a lifestyle based on the Sunnah.

Based on Shaikh-ul-Āalam, the day of resurrection serves as a warning to the people before they take action. On the day of the resurrection, he took the people with awareness and disseminated fear with the lines. He also highlights a metaphysical or transcendental sensibility and its capacity to envision an alternative worldview that opposes the one that is now promoted by evils. It has the power to reinterpret human behaviors and traditions.

b. *Non-Involvement in Active Politics*

Shaikh-ul-Āalam consciously chose to remain uninvolved in the active politics of his time, reflecting a core tenet of the Sufi tradition, which emphasizes the importance of spiritual over temporal power. Despite the reverence he commanded from rulers like Sultan Zain al-Ābidīn, Shaikh-ul-Āalam remained focused on his religious mission, choosing not to participate directly in political affairs. This decision allowed him to

serve primarily as a spiritual teacher and advisor on Islamic principles, earning him widespread respect as a genuine preacher of Islam.

In a politically complex region like Kashmir, where the influence of Hindu courtiers often posed challenges to the Muslim community, Shaikh-ul-Ālam's abstention from political involvement was both strategic and principled. His commitment to spiritual guidance over political engagement helped him maintain his integrity and the purity of his mission. By prioritizing the moral and ethical reform of society, he demonstrated that the role of a religious leader can transcend the immediate concerns of governance, focusing instead on lasting spiritual impact.

In the broader context of Islamic history, Shaikh-ul-Ālam's stance reflects a longstanding debate about the role of religious scholars in politics. While some scholars have engaged deeply with political authority, many Sufi figures, like Shaikh-ul-Ālam, have opted for a path of disengagement. This allowed him to inspire change from a position of spiritual authority, influencing rulers and common people alike through his teachings and example.

c. *Peaceful Struggle*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's mission was characterized by a profound commitment to the peaceful propagation of Islam. Emphasizing *dawah* (calling people to Islam), he relied on wisdom, compassion, and moral integrity rather than violence or coercion to spread his message. His teachings highlight the Sufi ideal of winning hearts through exemplary conduct rather than through force, establishing a model for religious dissemination that prioritized spiritual connection over political conquest (Badakshi, 1995).

Historical accounts affirm that there were no instances of forced conversions or violent tactics associated with Shaikh-ul-Ālam's mission. Instead, he utilized the power of his poetic compositions, known as Shruks, to convey the beauty and principles of Islam in the local Kashmiri language. This approach made Islamic teachings accessible to the unlettered masses and allowed them to relate to the sacred texts within their cultural context. By doing so, he transformed the landscape of spiritual engagement in Kashmir, emphasizing a compassionate and inclusive understanding of Islam.

Shaikh-ul-Ālam's peaceful struggle stands in contrast to the more politicized movements that arose in other regions of the Islamic world during his time. His dedication to a non-sectarian interpretation of Islam fostered unity among Muslims and distanced his teachings from the superstitions and divisions that plagued the local culture. His poetry often critiqued practices that blended Islamic teachings with superstitions, reinforcing his commitment to a pure form of faith.

Ultimately, Shaikh-ul-Ālam's legacy is one of peaceful reform, grounded in the principles of *Islah* (reform) and ethical conduct. By choosing a path of non-violence and prioritizing spiritual growth, he exemplified how religious leaders can effect meaningful change in society. His life and teachings serve as a powerful reminder of the potential for religious figures to inspire transformation without resorting to coercion or political entanglement, leaving a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people (M. Ahmad, 2019).

d. *Non-Sectarian Approach*

Shaikh-ul-Ālam adhered to a non-sectarian approach in his teachings, focusing on the core principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Sayyid Sharf-ud-Din Bulbul Shah and Sayyid Ali Hamadani, he avoided engaging in sectarian disputes. His frequent use of the term 'Muslim' and his avoidance of divisive labels underscored his commitment to fostering a unified Islamic identity. Moreover, his criticism of practices that blended Islamic rituals with superstitions highlighted his dedication to a pure and non-sectarian interpretation of Islam. This is strikingly reflected in his Shrukh:

*Muslims who Hinduise their lives
By adherence to superstitions and customs
They believe in paganism only boast as Muslims
They are insincere and vicious people
They who paint their houses with cow dung
They who waste the delicious food items
They all shall be presented with blackfaces
On the day of resurrection before the Allāh (SWT).*

In fact, Kashmir might serve as a setting for assimilating Hindu traditions. Prior to the Islamic reforms in Kashmir, Hindu practices were regarded as part of the general public domain. Hinduized norms and practices are hence more influenced by historical shifts and social conditioning. Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam attacks Kashmiri Muslims’ societal indoctrination in this verse. It is feasible to compare the Islamic ideology and manner of life with the Hindu impact in Kashmiri Muslims’ daily lives. What society perceives to be the truth defines the social dynamics. Furthermore, only relative certainties—which correspond to certainty derived from sight or empirical observation, respectively, and certainty derived from reason—can be used to understand the truth. Furthermore, social practices and ethos align with social realities and truth. Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam emphasized redefining the socio-cultural realities that Muslims associate with Hindu mythology in this verse. He demonstrates the Hindu theology by vehemently opposing Muslim customs. And he reminded the Muslims of a lifestyle founded on the Sunnah and the Quran.

e. *Emphasis on Religious Education*

Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam deeply valued education, especially in the realm of religious knowledge. He understood that true spiritual growth required a combination of learning and practice, and he emphasized the importance of a comprehensive education rooted in the Qur’an and Islamic teachings. For him, the pursuit of religious education was not merely an intellectual exercise but a means to deepen one’s understanding of divine commands and live a life aligned with Islamic principles.

Ahmad M. (M. Ahmad, 2019) captures this sentiment by stating, "Who has the courage and guts to lighten up a lamp against this wind storm? And will fuel the lamp with his knowledge and faith, will abandon the false message and look after the true one. All the knowledge is Alif, Laam, Meem."

This metaphorical lamp represents the guiding light of true knowledge, which must be protected and nurtured even in the face of adversity. The reference to Alif, Laam, Meem—the first verse of the second chapter of the Qur’an, Al-Baqarah (translated as "The Cow")—highlights the foundational nature of Qur’anic knowledge in Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam’s teachings.

CONCLUSION

The examination of Islam’s history in Kashmir, particularly through the lens of the Sufi Saint Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, reveals a profound and multifaceted influence on the region’s socio-religious fabric. This paper has traced the evolution of Islam in Kashmir—from its initial introduction by various historical figures to its deep establishment and transformation under the guidance of key Sufi saints—emphasizing the unique contributions of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam. Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam, also known as Shaikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani, emerges as a pivotal figure whose influence transcended mere religious propagation. His ability to weave Islamic teachings into the local cultural and social tapestry was instrumental in reshaping Kashmir’s spiritual and ethical landscape. By employing poetry in the local Kashmiri language, he bridged the gap between complex Islamic doctrine and the everyday experiences of common people, making religious knowledge both accessible and deeply rooted in the region’s cultural identity— in particular, demonstrating the critical role of language in the dissemination of faith.

Through his evocative poetic compositions, Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam confronted social inequities and moral decay, championing causes that ranged from wealth disparity and caste discrimination to issues of gender harassment. His verses caution against the objectification of women, and the disrespect that leads to gender-based mistreatment resonates strongly in contemporary society. By highlighting the destructive impact of such behavior on personal integrity and community harmony, his work provides a timeless call for dignity, respect, and mutual care—a call that remains as urgent today as it was in his time.

Moreover, his non-sectarian approach, emphasizing ‘Amr-bil Ma’ruf wa Nahi ‘Anil Munkar’ (commanding good and forbidding wrong), fostered a unified Islamic identity that transcended divisive labels and political entanglements. His commitment to social reform was further enriched by his environmental consciousness, as encapsulated in the famous verse, “Ann poshi teli yeli wan poshi.” This holistic vision connected social justice, spiritual growth, and ecological balance, offering insights that are particularly relevant as modern societies grapple with the intertwined challenges of environmental degradation and social injustice.

The enduring legacy of Shaikh-ul-‘Ālam continues to illuminate contemporary discourse, offering timeless lessons in moral integrity, social justice, and environmental stewardship. By integrating historical analysis with sociological theories from Durkheim, Weber, and Berger, this study highlights how Shaikh-ul-

‘Ālam’s Sufi teachings not only reshaped Kashmir’s religious and ethical landscape but also contributed to a broader discourse on social reform and cultural transformation. His enduring legacy serves as a beacon for both historical scholarship and modern societal challenges, emphasizing the transformative potential of Sufi thought in building a compassionate, equitable, and sustainable future.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A. (1979). Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir. *Central Asiatic Journal*, 23(1/2), 3–18.
- Ahmad, M. (2019). Influence of Sheikh ul Alam’s Poetry on Society. *Alamdar: A Journal of Kashmiri Society and Culture*, XIV, 31–36.
- Badakshi, Z. (1995). *Khulasat-ul-Manaqib*. Institute of Persian Studies Islamabad.
- Berger, P. L. (2011). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Open Road Media.
- Bhat, S. (2002). Lal Ded: Her spiritualism and present scientific world order. *Lal Ded: The Great Kashmiri Saint-Poetess*, 25–37.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Chandra, S. (1999). *From Sultanat to the Mughals (Delhi Sultanat 1206-1526)*. Har Anand Publications.
- Durkheim, E. (2020). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Ukemi Audiobooks from WF Howes Limited.
- Eaton, R. M. (1993). *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760* (Vol. 17). Univ of California Press.
- Ewing, K. P., & Corbett, R. R. (2019). *Modern Sufis and the state: The politics of Islam in South Asia and beyond*. Columbia University Press.
- Gauhar, G. N. (2009). *Kashmir mystic thought*. Gulshan Books.
- George, M. W. (2008). *The elements of library research: What every student needs to know*.
- Jan, Z., & Mir, I. A. (2023). Echoes of Faith: Tracing Islam and Sufism in Kashmir an Overview. *Echoes*.
- Johnston, M. P. (2014). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, 3(3), 619–626.
- Kaw, M. A. (2022). Sufism: Cementing Bonds between Central Asia and Kashmir. In *Sufism in India and Central Asia* (pp. 25–37). Routledge.
- Kour, A. (2024). Reshian-e-Silsila and the Sufi Stages in Shruks of Nund Rishi. *Literature & Aesthetics*, 34(3), 43–55.
- Lone, M. A. (2020). Role of Sufi Philosophy in the Formation of the Composite Culture of Kashmir: An Analysis. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 8(3).
- Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*.
- Para, A. H., Rashid, H., & Shah, S. (2022). Locating Kashmiriyat in Ancient History: Tracing the Genealogy of Kashmir’s Syncretic Culture. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 2455328X221126861.
- Robinson, F. (2000). *Islam and muslim history in South Asia*. Oxford University Press New Delhi.
- Roen, K. (2007). *U. Flick (2006). An Introduction to Qualitative Research: London: Sage Publications*. Taylor & Francis.
- Sikand, Y. (2000). Hazrat Bulbul Shah: The First Known Muslim Missionary in Kashmir. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 20(2), 361–367.
- Sūfī, G. M. D. (1948). Kashīr, being a history of Kashmir from the earliest times to our own. (*No Title*).
- Walter, H. A. (1914). Islam in Kashmir. *The Muslim World*, 4(4), 340–352.
- Weber, M. (1993). *The sociology of religion*. Beacon Press.
- Wink, A. (1994). Al-Hind: the making of the Indo-Islamic world. *Papier Présenté Au Symposium International Sur Les Études Indiennes*, Kovalam, 28.
- Yousuf, A. (2019). An Analysis of the Impact of Sufism In Kashmir. *International Journal of Research*.

Zutshi, C. (2000). *Community, state, and the nation: Regional patriotism and religious identities in the Kashmir Valley, c. 1880–1953*. Tufts University.



© 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).