



## Sufi-Poetic discourse: Studying the contribution of Shaikh-Noor ud-din Wali

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### Abstract

Kashmir from times immemorial has remained seat of great *Rishis* and Sufis, owing to this reason Kashmir is popularly known as *Pirvir*, the garden of spiritual guides. In fact there lived saints in this land from very beginning but the most purists, effective and systematic *Rishi* movement is attributed from the period of Nundreshi that is 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Since the great *Rishi* in his lyric has also made mention of the earlier *Rishis* and has given even the names of few reputed *Rishi* who lived before him. But the *Rishi* movement of Kashmir is attributed to him. He is regarded as the patron founder of this movement. Besides being a leader of the *Rishi* movement in Kashmir he was also a great Sufi poet. His fame as a saint and glory of his spiritual attainments travelled far and wide attracting a great number of followers. He uttered hundreds of sayings which furnish Kashmiri literature with gems having both terrestrial as well as celestial meaning and are stamped in people's memories. In the backdrop of these introductory remarks present paper would be an attempt to give reader a sense of detailed approach of Shaikh-ul-Alam towards humanism. It is in this context the present paper has been analyzed.

**Keywords:** shaikh-ul-alam, rishi, humanism, sufi, spiritual guide

### Introduction

“Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve; those who believe and constantly guard against evil; for them are glad tidings, in the life of the present and in the hereafter; no change can there be in the words of Allah. This is indeed the supreme felicity” (Qur’an, 10:62-64). Shaikh Nur-ud-din Noorani (R.A), celebrated saint of Kashmir, is known by many names; for few he is the Alamdar-i-Kashmir (Flag bearer of the people of Kashmir), for others he is “Nundreshi” the pious saint while others call him “Shaikh-ul-Alam” the spiritual preceptor of the world. Shaikh Nur-ud-din Noorani (R.A) is undoubtedly the top personage of the spirituality in Kashmir. His sayings embody his teachings.

His poetry at occasions appears interpretation and explanation of various verses of Holy Qur’an. He started his sojourns in caves and tried to reach the ultimate truth by spreading the path of spirituality. Later on he travelled throughout the Kashmir and ultimately settled at *Charar-i-Sharief* which was his final destination. It was here that he met with Mir Muhammad Hamadani and after some discussion received a letter of guidance from him. Commonly known as *Khat-i-Irshad* in which he was asked to return with the principles of Islam and Sunnah. Thus he did not remain confined to cave, but took an active part in spreading the teachings of Islam. He craved for a society which is based on ethical values of Islam and justice. He was conscious about the social ailments which the Kashmiri society was suffering at that time. He visited the greater part of the Kashmir valley, and that a number of villages still preserves the tradition of his visit or sojourn in one form or another testifies to his missionary role. It was, indeed, easier for the common man to understand the true

spirit of the *Shar’iah*-submission, dependence on God, obedience, contemplation, repentance, endeavor, dedication, altruism and a fulfillment of the duties of fellowship-through Nur-ud-din’s popular verses than through the scholarly works of the Sufi missionaries. The mission of Nur-ud-din was essentially to make Islam comprehensible to the non-literate.

His message is universal and simple. Most of the verses of the Shaikh depict the transitory nature of the world, intense love for the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the caliphs of the Islam, brotherhood irrespective of caste, color and creed. His teachings included to say good, to do good, to think good, give charity, to be honest and upright, to fight the evil, to endeavor to search and attain the real truth, to be immune from the malpractices committed on the name of religion and to live life like a Muslim. The overall message is for the welfare, upliftment, equity and equality of mankind. His (RA) sayings not only provide a deep insight of the history or make one aware of the real teachings of Islam but these sayings act as a source of soul purification and mental alleviation.

Because of his charismatic and saintly personality, persuasive teachings and strong abhorrence of worldly things, Shaikh Nur-ud-din won many conversions to Islam, the most significant being Bhum Sad, a prominent brahmana ascetic, Zia Singh, a descendant of the royal family of Kistwar and Ladi Raina, the chief of pargana. Bhum Sadh was named as Bam al-Din, Zia Singh as Zain al-Din and Ladi Raina as Latif-al-Din. It may be mentioned that Bam al-Din, Baba Zain al-Din, Baba Latif al-Din and his other immediate disciple Baba Nasir al-Din became the four prominent *Khulfa* of the Shaikh, who like their spiritual preceptor chose to live away from the hustle and bustle of life and won many followers. Thus a big brotherhood of *Rishis* created who carried on the mission of

the Shaikh generation after generation.

### Concept of Humanism in Shaikh-ul-Alam's Poetry

The verses of Nur-ud-din give evidence of his belief that God is both immanent and transcendent. He is everywhere, not confined to one place or another. According to him, all the branches of knowledge are nothing but the commentary upon the proclamation of faith. "There is no God but Allah." If one truly seeks for God, he says, everything but Allah becomes worthless. One who recognizes himself, recognizes God: 'when I was able to recognize my own self, I was able to recognize God; but loss and gain become identical to me and the distinction between life and death disappeared.

He once told his mother: "God was and is and shall be forever; he is independent of all other creatures; he lacks nothing." Further he says: "There is no God but with a hundred names, there is not a single blade of grass, which does not worship him."

He further says: "First I became certain that there is no god but Allah, then I made myself (acquainted with) divine revelations. First I forgot myself and yearned after God, then I reached *la-makan*.

The Shaikh also impressed upon the people that the more they learnt about the deeper content of the *kalima*, the more they would become conscious of the sin of worshipping a multiplicity of deities. It was in the context that while criticizing the animistic beliefs of his compatriots, even though undergoing the process of Islamic acculturation, the Shaikh remarked:

O Pandit, the brother: O Pandits: How long will you remain wedded to the worship of stones and springs? Your thoughtless search did not bear any fruit; Submit yourselves to the Lord and his messenger; Aren't your solicitous of (spiritual and worldly) success?

Nur-ud-din strongly emphasizes the absolute dependence on God. One must trust in God, and recognize that no human endeavor can succeed without his help. The Shaikh is said to have told his mother, when she asked how he proposed to support his family, "Bread is provided by God, and trades and professions are only one of the means getting it. A slave of God should think only of worshipping him, caring nothing for food and drink. Again he says:

"No one can take anything from him to whom God has given, Time and chance are only means to an end. For one, whom God will abandon, no one can provide, Neither intelligence nor high caste shall help him."

He was, He is and He shall be, So remember Him constantly here; He will remove all (your) anxieties, So come to your senses at once."

Love and intense devotion to God form the basis of Nur-ud-din's utterances. His devotion is complete and exclusive absorption in God and indifference to all except Him. He

advocates the suppression of all other preoccupations and the abandonment of worldly cares. The lover according to Nur-ud-din is one who cares neither for spiritual nor fleshy pleasures, but only for the contemplation of the 'beloved' (God). He says:

"Love is the death of a mother's only son, Love is the venomous sting of a swarm of wasps, Can the lover have any rest? Love is a rope dripping with blood. Can the wearer (lover) even utter a sigh?

"The lover is he who burns with love, whose self shines like gold. When man's heart lights up with the flame of love, Then shall he reach *la-makan*."

Nur-ud-din regarded a man's base nature (*nafs*) as his great enemy. The first duty of worship is to control one's desires. "The belly is the stronghold of the *nafs* and to fight the *nafs*," he says, "is a meritorious holy war (*jihad*). Again he says: "if one subdues his *nafs*, one is a great soul, and his efforts are pure worship." He strongly believed that man's *nafs* is the greatest obstacle in one's way to God. Repeatedly and with great vigor lays stress on the duty of crushing and overpowering it at all costs. His whole thought, and that of his followers, is based on the control of the *Nafs*. He says:

"The *Nafs* has distributed me greatly, The *Nafs* has ruined me entirely. It is the *Nafs* which makes us destroy others, The *Nafs* is the slave of the devil."

He says further:

To serve the *nafs* is to thrust ashes into one's own eyes, How then can one expect to see? The *nafs* is just like a rebellious calf, Which should be tied up. It should be threatened with the stick of fasting."

"Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest, it cannot be made into planks, beams or cradles. He who cut and filed it, will burn it into ashes."

The Shaikh condemned anger, pride and greed, the source of which, according to him, is selfish desires: "The proud should be sent to hell where they will become soft; like iron in the fire." Again he said to have remarked: "One cannot attain the truth, if one does not give up anger, pride and greed." He says:

"Those who kill *tamagunas*, They will bear (everything) with resignation. Those whose seek after ease, ease (God), They consider everything (in this world) as ashes (worthless).

Nur-ud-din's teachings are, undoubtedly, grounded in the Qur'anic ethics of humanism and reciprocal love. The ethics of non-violence that he advocates is of an activist and positive nature; it aims at rendering positive good so human beings in the hour of their adversity. Nur-ud-din disliked tyranny and violence to fellow human beings for one's own gain. True, he regarded the gap between the rich and the poor as ordained in the existing social system. For him kindness is a form of non-violence at the personal level of which justice is

the expression at the social level. Nur-ud-din gave a humanistic and life-affirming content to the concept of non-violence. The long poem in which he extols the virtues of a true Muslim reflects his sincere desire to mediate Islam to the common folk through the agency of their own medium.

One who does not neglect one's daily duties, Who longs to live by the sweat of one's brow, Who controls the bestial anger of one's mind, Who shows fortitude in provocation, May truly be called a Muslim,

He will be among the people of paradise Who shares meals with the hungry, (who) is obsessed with the idea of removing hunger, Who humbly bows (in prayers) in all sincerity, Who scorns anger, greed, illusion, arrogance and self-conceit, May truly be called a Muslim.

This humanistic concept of Shaikh Nur-ud-din preached and proclaimed widely and this way human relations flourished and it was his thought which he made us to understand in its simplest form. These teaching surveys are very found base for peace and justice. The highest order Sufi is explaining Holy verses of Qur'an to entire human beings in its purest form because Qur'an is message for all human beings which *waliullah* have understood the way Prophet (S.A.W) has given instructions.

Shaikh Nur-ud-din made a clean sweep of all evils in society and threw open the door to spiritual opportunity for one and all by expounding the Qur'anic concept of the dignity of man in a number of verses. Nur-ud-din's contribution to the evolution of the concept of the dignity of man can be better appreciated in light of Qur'anic verses proclaiming that all men descended from one and the same pair created by one God. It is of no consequence of what parents a man is born since the origin of all mankind is the same. Here man is asked to be ambitious of true honor and of the real glory and perfection of his common origin:

Adam is the progenitor of the human race, The mother Eve has the same primordially, (So) from where have the 'low castes' descended? How can a 'high born' deride his own ancestry?

Nur-ud-din yearned for a society on moral values. He was conscious of the defects of the society in which he lived. There are many anecdotes associated with the life and doings of Nur-ud-din, which not reveal his disapproval of the established social customs, but also provide ample evidence about the medieval society of Kashmir. Nur-ud-din believed in complete harmony among the different sections of the society and preached peace and understanding in them. He is conscious of the hatred and tension which were created during the reign of Sultan Sikander, and was keen to restore harmony between Muslims and Non-Muslims. According to Jonaraja, Suha Bhatta (Saif-ud-din), who after his policy and persecuted the Non-Muslims, put some restrictions on Shaikh Nur-ud-din. It is most likely that the Shaikh had disapproved of the actions of Suha Bhatta and raised voice against this. He strongly

pleads for tolerance, fellow feeling, love and affection among all sections of the society. Shaikh Nur-ud-din was clear in his teachings and his thought flowed generously like a river.

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 thought proved a great source of inspirations for thousands of people. The method adopted by him is still the most viable and effective, filling the people with faith and enthusiasm. His aim was to reform the people in accordance with the tenets of Islam. His thought is relevant for all times including the present one and is a must read. Nur-ud-din's message was not confined to one race or one class, but addressed to mankind as a whole. He belonged to the universe. He expressed his thought in the simple language of his people, clothing this idea with similes and examples familiar from their experience. His verse therefore had an immediate appeal to the unlettered masses. Allusions to his sayings and verses both by the Muslims and Non-Muslims of Kashmir are quite common even today and have become almost proverbial. Above all the sayings of Nur-ud-din are the expression of the ideas of many thinkers of his time. In this way he and his sayings have great importance.

### Conclusion

While concluding it is evident from the above discussion that Shaikh-ul-Alam's thought is plentiful with *tauhidic* humanism and universalism, his verses are content of the Quran embedded with metaphors drawn from society, his imagery of flowers and foliage, of mountains and landscapes, of birds and animals, of fish and fowl, of seasons and weather, of rivers and springs making us to understand the poetic approach of dealing with natural phenomenon as essential for understanding the purpose of creation. For Shaikh-ul-Alam the entire world was suffused with meaning as referred: "Symbolic pregnancy" by Cassirer. His teachings are grounded with the Qur'anic ethics of humanism and reciprocal love. According to Shaikh it was the cosmic love of nature which constituted the key point, vital for the understanding of Qur'anic universalism. Thus Shaikh-ul-Alam not only sustained rich Islamic tradition but also united the race to follow the right path without falling prey of ritualism. The religious thought which the verses of Shaikh-ul-Alam unfold has both the precision of a discourse and coherence of a system. After spending twelve years in the cave, the Shaikh-ul-Alam (R.A) realized that physical seclusion associated with asceticism does not make up its essence; rather it lies in emulating the example of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):  
There are jackals and monkeys in the forest;  
The caves are infested with rats;  
Those who offer prayers five times a day to wash off the dirt of their heart;  
Those who lead a family life, they are privileged  
A dutiful household will be crowned;  
The Messenger of Allah (SAW) led a marital life and won the Divine grace.

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