

Shaikh Nuruddin and the Making of Syncretic Culture in Kashmir

Dr. Sami ullah Rather

Post-Doctoral Fellow at Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) New Delhi

Centre of Central Asian Studies (CCAS), University of Kashmir

Abstract: Shaikh Nuruddin also known as Nund Rishi is one of the most distinguished personalities Kashmir produced towards the end of 14th century. He is specially venerated as Nund Rishi by Muslims and Sahazanand by Hindus of Kashmir. Linked inextricably to Kashmir's historical, cultural, social, religious and linguistic realms, his esteemed self-occupies a central place in socio- cultural history of Kashmir. Heavily influenced by contemporary Shaivite saint Lal Ded, teachings of Nuruddin cut across the barriers of caste, colour, creed, and region. He championed the cause of equality of all creatures in the kingdom of God and believed in complete harmony among different sections of the society. Not only this, he condemned violence of all kinds and stressed on helping poor, to control anger, to be kind towards all and condemnation of lust, greed and pride. He toured different parts of the valley to disseminate his message to the unlettered folk and left an indelible mark on them. Thus Nund Rishi's thoughts about universal brotherhood, communal harmony, social unity, value based social fabric, caste/ class less society laid the foundations of a culture which has become the hallmark of Kashmir identity. The present paper therefore, aims at to bring to limelight the role of Nund Rishi in the making of a syncretic culture of Kashmir.

Key words: Kashmir, Rishi, Culture, Humanism, Peace, Non Violence

Introduction:

Shaikh Nuruddin is the most beloved among the indigenous saints. Nuruddin from his early childhood, possessed a keen sense to understand the gravity of socio-religious sensitivities. Given the level of magnitude of crises geared by the forces of time and processes of history during the 14th century in Kashmir, Shaikh Nuruddin, while examining objectively the processes of change and response of Kashmiri society, evolved at a later stage a distinctive socio-cultural behavior which with the passage of time became a bedrock of Kashmiri composite cultural setting. Nund Rishi ardently focus on the variegated sufferings of rural illiterate. By this way, Nund Rishi, amid great social crisis and tensions emerged as a true

champion of popular sentiment. By upholding the cause of downtrodden, the saint won unprecedented recognition of the masses and people bestowed their love, reverence, and support to this great mystic saint by christening him with the titles like *Alamdaar-i- Kashmir*.

Amid great social tensions and political instability, Nuruddin dedicated himself to the task of reforming society and toured different parts of the Valley to disseminate his message to the unlettered folk. Although it is difficult to say whether the Shaikh fully succeeded in imparting his teachings in his lifetime, it can hardly be denied that for generations after his death his teachings remained on the tip of every Kashmiri tongue. And it is chiefly for this reason that he is remembered to this day, the greatest local teacher of Islam in Kashmir. So indelible has been the influence of the Shaikh on Kashmiri society that both Hindus and Muslims visit his shrine at Charari Sharifⁱ and turned the habitats of the Shaikh in several villages into places of veneration.ⁱⁱ

He firmly believed in the equality of all creatures in the kingdom of God. Nuruddin'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 his ideas with examples familiar from their experience. His verses therefore had an immediate appeal to the unlettered masses.ⁱⁱⁱ He calls upon the people to follow the path of peace and harmony. He strongly pleads for tolerance, fellow feeling, love and affection among all sections of the society.

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.^{iv}

Nuruddin's teachings are deeply rooted in humanism and reciprocal love. The ethics of non-violence advocated by Nuruddin aims at rendering positive good to human beings in the hour of their adversity.^v Taking into consideration his emphasis on help to the poor and the needy, mercy and kindness towards all and condemnation of lust (*lobh*), pride (*ahankar*) and anger (*Krodh*), it can be safely said that the value system of non-violence as contained in Nuruddin's thought illustrates his richness and positive commitment to the traditions of non-violence.^{vi}

Nuruddin was severe in his condemnation of the *Ulama* of contemporary society for their deviations from practising the true spirit of the Shari'a in daily life. It was, in fact, the '*Ulamas*' failure to bring exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) aspects of religious life into a harmonious, balanced relationship that determined Nuruddin's attitude towards them. Their malicious mind, arrogance, hypocrisy and pursuit of material gains at the cost of spiritual benefits were so horrifying to him that he even urged his followers to seek the refuge of Allah at the mere sight of an '*alim*'.^{vii}

He criticised the caste system in very severe terms as is reflected from the following verses:

*“[By] displaying the caste in the world,
What will thou gain?
Into dust will turn the bones,
When the earth envelopes the body:
To utter disgrace will he come
Who, forgetting himself, jeers at others.”*^{viii}

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 honour 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 primordiality,
(So) from where have the 'low-castes' descended?
How can a 'high born' deride his own ancestry?*^{ix}

The contempt in which the common man was held by the Brahmins must have touched the sensitive soul of Nuruddin. In order to tame the ferocity of their pride he challenged the concept of purity of the Brahmin's birth in terms of the *tauhidic* humanism and universalism. It was a Muslim's commitment to an ethic of action which was valued by Nuruddin vis-a-vis the unethical egocentrism of the Brahmin:

*One who harps proudly upon one's caste,
Is bereft of reason and wisdom,
Here the good alone **can** claim noble descent;*

In the Hereafter 'caste' will be extinct.^x

Apart from the caste system, he lashed out at rich people who owned big houses, jewels, horses, and elephants. They enjoyed musical concerts in their homes. However, Nuruddin is pained to note that these rich people neglected their social responsibilities.

*One amuses oneself by organising a musical concert,
Although aware, yet pretends innocence (about human sufferings),
(While) the other is being scourged,
(Has) God Himself willed it so?"^{xi}*

Conclusion:

Shaikh Nuruddin has greatly succeeded in portraying a positive message of life with a strong practical approach for progress and development of mankind. There is hardly a verse of Nuruddin which has not a social, cultural and topographical context. He criticised not only any kind of inequality on the basis of caste, colour, creed or place of birth, but also lashed out at religious elite of the society for their arrogance, falsehood, and materialism. He championed the cause of peace and harmony at a time when society was torn apart by socio-religious and political feuds and undoubtedly emerged as chief apostle of religious tolerance, brotherhood, peace, harmony and non-violence. His sayings (*Shruks*) left such an indelible mark that not only the contemporary common masses, Rishis, the theologians and *imam*s transmitted the Shaikh's verses, but even today his sayings are on the tip of tongue of every Kashmiri. It is therefore, not surprising that his poetical compositions have made him immortal among the Kashmiri masses of all creeds.

References and End Notes

-
- ⁱR.K. Parmu, *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir*, Gulshan Books,1967 rep.2009,p.110
- ⁱⁱ M.I.Khan, *Kashmir' Transition to Islam*, Manohar,New Delhi,1994,pp.104-105.
- ⁱⁱⁱ A.Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, Goodword Media, Sydney, 1976,p.188.
- ^{iv}*Nur Nama: A Collection of the sayings of Shaikh Nuru 'd- Din*. Edited by M.Amin Kamil, Sringar,1966,p.42.
- ^v M.I. Khan, *Kashmir' Transition to Islam*,p.122.
- ^{vi} M.I. Khan, *Kashmir' Transition to Islam*,p.123.
- ^{vii}M.I. Khan, *Kashmir' Transition to Islam*,pp.111-112.
- ^{viii} B.N. Parimoo, *Nund Rishi: Unity in Diversity*, 1984, p.226.
- ^{ix}*Kulliyat -i-Shaikh al-Alam*, Compiled by Moti Lal Saqi, p.206.
- ^x*Kulliyat -i-Shaikh al-Alam*, p.86.
- ^{xi}*Kulliyat -i-Shaikh al-Alam*, p.181.