

Saint Worship: An Emerging Faith in Kashmir

¹Aarif Ahmad Najar

¹Research Scholar, Department of History, School of Social Sciences, DAVV, Indore

ABSTRACT

The society of Kashmir is very much prominent in the world from various characteristics. One of the features of Kashmir society is saint worshipping which emerged in the valley after the coming of spiritual legends from different parts of the world especially from central Asia. The saints after their death became the icons for the people of valley to heal their wounds. People of Kashmir especially Muslims call these saints also with the name of Rishis, or Sufis. People of the valley used to devote their best times to the shrines for saint worshipping. Various aspects developed during the saint worshipping in Kashmir which provide a new look to the society and culture of Kashmir are *Desh-Gadin*, *Wasiila*, *Nazr-u-Niyaz*, *Pir-Muridi*, *Naful*, animal sacrifice and Relic worship.

Key words: *Desh-Gadin*, *Wasila*, *Nazr-u-Niyaz*, *Pir-Muridi*, *Naful*, *Relic Worship*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The valley of Kashmir has been the abode of various saints and Sages from time to time. The path was also opened for different emperors and the travellers. All the people who visited the valley of Kashmir became the part and parcel of this society. One of the particular thing that gave a new look to the society of Kashmir was the emergence of saint worshipping in the valley after the death of saints and sages. The society of the valley duly respected and honoured the saints and sages who came to the valley and devoted their all-time for the well-being of the society especially to strengthening the relation between the people of different religious faiths. The most important saints whose shrines became the centre for saint worshipping are Shrine of Sheikh Nuruddin Rishi^{RA}, at Tsar-I-Sharif, Dargah Hazratbal shrine at Dargah Srinagar, shrine of Dastegeer Sahab^{RA} at Khanyar Srinagar, shrine of Muqqadam Sahab^{RA} at Rainawari Srinagar, and shrine of Mir Sayid Ali Hamdani^{RA} at Srinagar.

The valley of Kashmir is not limited to these shrines but almost in all corners of Kashmir there is a shrine of a saint. The love of the people towards the saints and sages don't remain limited as long as they were alive but after the death of the saint more attraction of the people increased. The construction of the shrines was started just after the death of the saint. The practice of constructing the shrines is considered very much holy in Kashmir valley. In large numbers people donate their wealth for the construction of the shrines. Kashmir valley is emerging into new frame work of religion where it found its parallels in the old aged traditions of the Valley. The society of the valley of Kashmir is much intimated with the shrines and associated things. In the prelude of history the Emperors were

also involved in the shrines construction in Kashmir valley. Even we see that the influence of the saints on the kings was so high that the coins were minted on the name the saints in Kashmir. Famous coins of SheikhNuruddinReshi by Emperor Skinadar are the most prominent part of the history.

II.SAINT WORSHIPPING

Islam was popularised in Kashmir by the Sufi saints of different order. Kashmir was evolved into a new social milieu by the coming of the saints and gave it a new picture. The love of the people towards the saint led to the construction of shrines. It was an important aspect that the death of the saint that led to the emergence of saint worship due to the love shown by the people. These shrines are spread in all parts of Kashmir valley. In perspective of Islam here has been a radical conflict between popular customs and religious orthodoxy. Irrespective of the orthodoxy still the saint worshipping emerged and flourished in the valley of Kashmir. The people visit the shrines with different hopes like some have faith to get good harvest. Some barren ladies too visit the shrine to get a child for them. The sick people too visit the shrines to get a good health. Even during Dogra period when in Kashmir the forced labour (Beggars), was in vogue at that time the women's of Kashmir visit the shrines to invoke help for the safe arrival of the kens and kith's. The people of Kashmir don't consider saints as dead bodies but have faith that his tomb is a repository of saints *Baraka*. Sir Walter Lawrence says that it was a custom for all people to visit a particular shrine on different occasions for the fulfilment of his wishes. It is an obligatory for every groom at the time of marriage to visit first the shrine before visiting his bride's home. The women follow the groom upto the shrine while singing the famous Kashmiri folk song (Wanvun). Ernest. F. Neve says that once a marriage party missed to salute the grave of the saint and ultimately they fell into the stream.

In Kashmir valley not only the saint of foreign origin kept at high esteem but the shrines of Rishi saints who were the original inhabitants of Kashmir were also highly esteemed. The people living in Rural area of Kashmir gave much respect and regard to the Rishi shrines. There is common folk belief in Kashmir that,

"YusGachiBhumezu Tsar Muqam

TasPeth Chu DozhunNaarHaraam"

"One who visits shrines of Bumzu Tsar, Muqaam, he would be saved from the scourge fire of hell"

The people of Kashmir have common belief that saints are the bridge between their creator and them. There are various poetic works which eulogise the works of the Rishi saints of Kashmir. For the people of Kashmir shrines are the soul and breathe of the society which helps in harmonising the society of Kashmir. An important element of the shrine worship in Kashmir is *Nazr-u-Niyaz*. It is a conditioned wish was a person pledges to offer some valuable thing to the shrine if his /her wishes get fulfilled. This practice is very much vague in Kashmir valley. If the wish is not fulfilled then there is no need of giving Nazr-u-Niyaz.

Wasila (intercessor) is another important element of the saint worship in Kashmir valley. The distressed and suffered people fell in Psycho-Social crises at that time no body consoles their situation. But the presences of saints in the valley help them to come out of this situation. People flock to the tombs of the saints with the intention to get help in addressing their sorrows well in front of the God. In Kashmir valley usually the shrines of Sheikh NuruddinReshi^{RA}, DastageerSahab^{RA}, DargahHazratbal and shrine of Mir Sayid Ali Hamdani^{RA} are used

especially for *Wasila.Khatam-Khawania* common practice in Kashmir which has its uniformity with the Hindu tradition. In the practice of Khatam-Khawani the people used brought the religious heads to their houses for the recitation of Naat, Manqabat and Sufi treaties. The purpose of the recitation is on evade unseen disaster and also for the safety of the dear ones from calamities and troublesome.

Relic worship is one of the most important elements of saint worshipping in Kashmir valley. This practice was present originally in Buddhism but later it also entered into Kashmir after the death of saints. Almost in all Muslim shrines of Kashmir there is the presence of Relics of the saint or of the other saint. The relic worshipping is a new emergence of faith in Kashmir valley. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani^{RA} who came from central Asia to Kashmir brought to relics of prophet Mohammad^{SAW} himself. These relics are exhibited during the acute flood conditions to evade its spread and disaster. Normally the relics are shown on the occasion of fairs and festivals. The mass gatherings on these occasions felt very blessed while seeing the relics of their saints. The most important and highest mass gathering too place at the Dargha Hazratbal shrine at Dargah were lakhs of people assemble to see the holy hair of Prophet Mohammad^{SAW}. The women on these occasions used to sing the folk song which shows praise and honour for the saint.

Pir-Muridiis an element of the saint worshipping in Kashmir valley. After the death of saints the message of moral conduct and spiritual enrichment of the people came on the shoulders of the disciples of saints. This newly born class of people were called with different names in Kashmir valley like *Pir*, *Mujawir* and *khadims*. With the passage of time these people got high attention of the devotees because of their continuous presence at the shrines and were considered spiritually strong also. So the common mass tried to build a new relation with the disciple of the saint and was termed as *pir* and the common person who wants to build relation was called as *Murid*. Now it became a common tradition in Kashmir valley that these pirs were invited on special occasion to the houses to performance of various rites and rituals. The pirs get huge offerings from the people and accumulate the wealth. There is a common proverb in Kashmir that,

“Pir go Mir”

“The pirs should be given the first attention because of his religious capabilities”

The saint worshipping gave rise to an element in the society which is called *Naful* and animal sacrifice. In Kashmir valley there is usual floods and other natural calamities which cause huge loss to the people. But with the emergence of the shrines the people arranged the special prayers collectively on the shrines on the occasion of natural calamities which evade the natural disasters. The people also gave the sacrifice of their animals on the shrines so that more disasters should not harm their property and other belongings. This is very much common in Kashmir valley that the sacrifice of animals is given on the shrines. The shrine of famous saint of Kashmir Sheikh Nuruddin Reshi^{RA} at Tsar-i-Sharif is usually known for animal sacrifices by the people. So the shrines are the centre for multiple activities for the people of Kashmir.

III. CONCLUSION

The valley of Kashmir is very important in the world from different perspectives of society and culture. One of them is saint worshipping which emerged after the coming of saints from different parts of the world and also

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from the land of Kashmir. The saint worshipping is vague in Kashmir with complete zeal and zest. It is becoming the part and parcel of the society of valley. The saints are the icons for the people of Kashmir who dedicated their whole life for the valley. Associated elements emerged with the saint worshipping like Relic worship, Naful and Khatam-Khwani which become the important features of the society of Kashmir.

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12. RA: means a kind of gratitude given to the saints by the people.

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