

Socio-Cultural Analysis of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (R.A) Kashmir Mission

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Abstract

Mir Syed Ali Hamadani's movement in Kashmir was a continuation of that Islamic mission which was initiated by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), grounded on monotheism (Tawhid), prophet-hood (Risalat), belief on the Hereafter, and the Quran as a complete code of life. In 14th-century Kashmir was marked by political chaos, social injustice, economic exploitation, caste oppression, and moral decline, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (Shah Hamdan) introduced Islam as a comprehensive system addressing spiritual, social, political, cultural, and economic needs. Through observant valuation, strategic planning, and the establishment of Khanqahs, educational centers, and welfare institutions, he and other Sufi saints presented Islam in a simple, humane, and value-based manner that resonated deeply with the Kashmiri psyche shaped by Shaivism and Buddhism. Shah Hamdan emphasized human equality, social justice, ethical governance, lawful economic practices, and spiritual purification, while promoting education, crafts, self-reliance, and cultural refinement. His efforts shaped Kashmir's religious outlook, cultural identity, and socio-economic structure. Finally, his movement enlightened the people from superstition, fear, and exploitation, instilling faith, dignity, moral courage, and a lasting Islamic civilizational legacy in Kashmir.

Keywords: Islamic Movement, Tawhid, Sufism and Spiritual Reform, Social Justice and Human Equality, Khanqah System, Cultural Transformation of Kashmir, Rishi Movement, Self-Reliance and Handicrafts, Spiritual Purification

1. Introduction:

The movement of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani was an Islamic movement. This was started by the Messenger of Allah in the deserts of Arabia. The foundation of that movement was based on monotheism, prophet-hood, and the concept of Akhirah. The Holy Quran was its constitution, and the life of the Prophet was its practical example. The Prophet gave the final message of salvation to humanity. He taught them how to live on a straight path. The Prophet trained them morally and spiritually. The Prophet taught tribes to live together in harmony and peace, who had been thirsty for each other's blood and in conflict. The Prophet preached and built a welfare society. He taught the teachings of the Quran and gave lessons on recognizing God and the dignity of humanity, also focusing on the true nature of humans. Thus, his message is against all ignorance, which is based on polytheism, revolt against Allah, and Mischief on

earth. Islam is a complete code of life. After the propagation of the Prophet, implementation and responsibility lie with the Ummah.

Mir Syed Ali Hamadani spread the same movement in Kashmir, and it is a continuation of that message of salvation which was started by the Prophet in Arabia. The message of Islam had reached Kashmir before his arrival. He sent an assessment committee to Kashmir, which reviewed the social, political, and geographical conditions of Kashmir. They also started Islamic preachings here. This committee included Syed Hussain Simnani, Syed Tajuddin, and Syed Bahadur. They gave a detailed report to him. Then he started a plan to come to Kashmir. Among those who spread Islam before Hamdani, the prominent names are Hazrat Makhdoom Jahan (Jahan Gasht), Hazrat Ab Rehman (Bulbul Shah), and Syed Jalal-ud-din Bukhari. Because of their efforts, a small number of people had converted to Islam. Their efforts did not gain much public acceptance as Mir Syed Ali Hamdani. After thousands of years of the era of ignorance and the degradation of humanity, the people of Kashmir were repelled by humanity and awaited a peaceful message and individuals who could deliver them spiritual peace and liberation from all political, social, economic, and civilizational exploitation.

The Arrival of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani in Kashmir marked the Advent of a Messiah who brought spiritual teachings of Islam and laid the foundations in Kashmir for a new culture, an ethical society free from exploitation, and a purified economy. In the 14th century, Kashmir was in a state of chaos and disorder. Suhadeva and the kings before him were incompetent and weak. Various groups entered Kashmir, including attackers, soldiers, and refugees. During Suhadev's regime, Zulchu attacked Kashmir. Suhadev ran away, and his minister Ram Chand became king. After that, Zulchu killed Ram Chand, and his Army plundered Kashmir. Zulchu's invasion left Kashmir in complete ruins. The mass killings and robberies not only terrified ordinary Kashmiris but also put the rulers' lives in danger; as a result, the common public has become dependent on basic needs. On the other end, Rinchen continued to engage in secret activities to seize power. Shah Mir also tried to carry off the support of influential people so that he could capture power. It was a time of fear, panic, and political disorder. The social, political, and economic conditions at that time were extremely deplorable. The so-called religious leaders had weakened the people here. They became helpers of the powerful and rich people. Religious sanctity became a shield for oppression and tyranny, and religion continued to be used for various benefits. Caste system, economic inequality, political conflicts, religious differences, and moral corruption were the common things of that time. Its full expression is prominently present in the contemporary literature of that time.

According to Lal Ded:

اگرى كهڻن تهنڊ ويد سڀنى
مهنه من گز هيكه ابنكاري

پرتھ تہ بوزتہ برہمن ژھٹن
پنچ سن نته تهاون مٹن

In the social, political, and economic conditions of the Kashmir Valley, Society was ready and suitable for a new revolution. Kashmir has been considered heaven on earth by its natural beauty and geographical location. Those who came to Kashmir included conquerors, plunderers, traders, and the people of knowledge and art. The Kashmiri people continued to fight for survival; they kept the windows of consciousness and perception open to face the circumstances. In addition to understanding

every new ideology, they adopted it to such an extent that its roots became embedded in the cultural life here.

The people were deeply influenced by the Shaivite philosophy of pantheism (Hama-oost), which had imbued their minds. Besides this, he also adopted the solitude, asceticism, and self-control of Buddhism. Buddhism had a profound impact on the Kashmiri mind for approximately nine hundred years. Many of its beliefs became fundamental archetypes in the collective unconscious of Kashmiris. Kashmiri society, influenced by various factors, had adopted the guise of beliefs like non-violence, self-control, public welfare, and brotherhood. The Kashmiri Brahmin sect and Buddhists considered asceticism (Arnishiniyar or Banit) as the foundation for attaining knowledge.

Islamic teachings are very simple and clear. The essence of these teachings is monotheism (Tawhid), prophethood (Risalat), the concept of the hereafter, and man's vicegerency on earth (Khilafat-e-Arzi). Islamic preachers were paragons of high morals, spirituality, purity, and simplicity. They taught monotheism and preached a value-driven society, an economic and political system free from casteism, division of human beings, and spiritual, economic, and social exploitation. This diversion led the common people to become devoted to the Islamic preachers. Before the arrival of Shah Hamdan, the propagation of Islam and the preaching of religion were ongoing in Kashmir through Sufi saints and Muslim rulers. It can be said without contradiction that after Rinchan Shah's acceptance of Islam around 1320, the trend of accepting Islam voluntarily or involuntarily increased among the ruling class of Kashmir. During the regimes of Sultan Shamsuddin, Sultan Shahabuddin, and Sultan Qutbuddin, the leading families of Kashmir were embracing Islamic beliefs, values, and rituals. The common people were also willing towards Islam by observing these activities. The inclination of the Kashmiri people towards Islam.

The following were the reasons:

1. Hindu religious leaders entangle people in superstitions, rituals, and traditions.
2. Buddhist leaders also kept the masses entangled in mythological superstitions.
3. Political anarchy, the moral decline of the religious and ruling class, and economic downturn had made the lives of the people miserable. The philosophy of transmigration (Aawagoon) trapped them in such a vortex from which escape was an impossible feat.

Sufi saints presented the basic beliefs, values, and symbols of Islam in a simple manner, making the Islamic worldview and value system the center of public attention and inclination. During the 14th century Kashmir, Shah Hamdan, along with other Sufi saints, carried out the interpretation, propagation, and education of Islam through the lens of human equality and high morals. They understood the psychological complexities of the local people and instilled concepts of purity of soul and accountability for all actions before Allah in the Hereafter. They taught them the lesson of a responsible, dignified, and honorable humanity where there is no place for any exploitation. This strategic approach and scholarly wisdom proved effective. People were fed up with the rituals of Hinduism and the mythological superstitions and obsolete traditions of Buddhism, and were yearning for a new intellectual or religious revolution.

The valuable role of Shah Hamdan and other Sufi saints, in addition to the mentioned political and economic factors, cannot be ignored, the importance and significance of the epistemic, psychological, and theoretical attitudes of Shah Hamdan and other Sufi saints cannot be overlooked.

Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamdani was a pulse reader, a religious scholar, and a high-level administrator. His book *Zakhirat-ul-Muluk* (Treasury of Kings) outlines his political science and sociology, detailing the 20 duties of a ruler toward their subjects. It emphasizes social justice, human equality, and the protection of the “rights of people” (*Huquq-ul-Ibad*) regardless of religion, which matches your description of his reformative governance. He was a master educationist, sociologist, economist, political scientist, philosopher, researcher, writer, poet, preacher, and reformer. His mastery is evident in his other work, *Risala-i-Dah Qa’ida*, a primary manual on psychological and spiritual training that emphasizes heart purification and the ten rules of contemplative life. He traveled to remote areas to spread Islam. He visited Rome, Palestine, Asia Minor, Ceylon, and various cities of India, as well as Kashgar, Turkestan, Khotan, Kashmir, and China. The determination, firm resolve, strategy, generosity, and foresight he demonstrated changed the history and destiny of Kashmir. He first sent a review committee to Kashmir, which reported the social, political, intellectual, and geographical conditions of Kashmir and presented a detailed report to him. This committee included Syed Hussain Samnani, Syed Tajuddin, and Syed Hussain Bahadur. He reviewed the report and prepared a plan for Islamic propagation. According to some historians, he first arrived in Kashmir in 774 AH during the reign of Sultan Shahabuddin. He established the Islamic movement on comprehensive, organized, and firm foundations. He linked the Islamic invitation to the social, political, economic, and cultural needs of the Kashmiri people. A group of local scholars and preachers was educated to continue spreading Islam's message in the regional language. Hazrat Sheikh Nooruddin Wali is a living and shining example of this. Shaikh Noor-ud-Din Wali used poetry as a means of preaching. In *Noor Nama*, Baba Nasib-ud-Din Ghazi gives a hagiography of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi). It documents the spiritual link between Hamadani and the Rishi movement, confirming that Sheikh Nooruddin was the “living example” of Hamadani’s mission, translated into the local Kashmiri language. The initial supervision and education of Shaikh Noor-ud-Din Wali was entrusted to Hazrat Syed Hussain Samnani by Shah Hamdan, but in reality, his spiritual training was done by Shah Hamdan himself. After this, he remained under the supervision of Hazrat Mir Muhammad Hamdani. Shaikh Noor-ud-Din always remembered Shah Hamdan.

جنتس نپزیم پانس سیتی

ننڈ ریشی عرض کور شاه ہمدانس

Shaikh Noor-ud-Din’s contemporary, Lal Ded, although born into a Hindu family, spent most of her life in a Muslim environment. She also had the honor of meeting Shah Hamdan and Hazrat Syed Hussain Samnani. But despite this, she did not convert to Islam. What is the reason for this? This is an important question. Although elements of monotheism are found in her poetry, she did not have faith in prophethood and the hereafter. One reason for not believing might be that she was a *majzoob* (a person absorbed in divine love) or in a state of spiritual intoxication. Therefore, she remained exempt from the conditions of entering the fold of faith. Lal Ded herself had a deep feeling of this deprivation somewhere.

دیہ بول گوم بیجہ کہیو
پہلہ روس کھیول گوم بیجہ کہیو

نابدی بارس اٹہ گنڈ ڈیول گوم
گور سُنڈ وٹن راون تیول پیوم

Shah Hamdan transformed Kashmir's cultural landscape entirely. Iran, which has always been a center of knowledge, literature, culture, and refinement, the scholars and elders who came with Shah Hamdan from there made the prominent features of Iranian culture a part of public life in Kashmir. In Iqbal's words, he turned Kashmir into "Iran-e-Saghir" (Miniature Iran). Hundreds of scholars, jurists, and Sufi. They brought preachers with them, who brought a revolution in the cultural life here. He also elevated the local language and culture, making them more prominent and enchanting.. By taking care of the cultural and psychological needs of the common people, Islamic elements were included in the cultural process (Cultural Activities). Kashmiri folk poetry and Sufi poetry are clear examples of this. They brought change in dress, thoughts, thinking, and practice. They changed the intellectual, social, political, economic, communal, and cultural history here. They changed the destiny of thousands of human beings from ancient times.

The preachers took a deep look at the conditions of Kashmir and established their movement on scientific foundations. They established the system of invitation, preaching, and teaching. They established educational centers, explained religion through knowledge and practice, and presented the concept of true religion. They made the Islamic movement popular among the common people. For the spiritual training and teaching of equality of the people here, a strong system of Khanqahs (lodges) was established. The preachers used to be educated and trained in the Khanqahs. He first laid the foundation of the Islamic center Khanqah-e-Maula or Khanqah-e-Faiz Panah in Kashmir himself. Apart from Srinagar, he moved to Tral, Duru Shahabad, Pampore, Wachi, Kulgam, Kharihu Matan, Sopore, Baramulla, Ladakh, Zanskar, and other places to convert people into Islam. Islamic centers were established in these places, and mosques were built. Free education was delivered to the masses in these established educational centers. They were taught the sciences of Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Tafsir, Philosophy, Logic, Sufism, Medicine, Observation, Arabic, and Persian. This process continued for centuries. Besides worship, Khanqahs were centers for rational and transmitted sciences and training grounds for mysticism and spiritual paths. In these Khanqahs (Sufi lodges), seclusion and forty-day retreats were also permitted for the purification of the heart. He cultivated specialists in Islamic sciences and art, underscoring practical action alongside knowledge for holistic education. Behind his educational movement was the spirit of service to humanity and the propagation of Islam as a means of attaining God's pleasure.

During the Hindu period, the element of casteism was dominant in Kashmir, and class division was considered a divine division. Shah Hamadan introduced a new system in Kashmir against this inhuman, cruel, and unnatural method, which was based on the Islamic concept of justice, human equality, brotherhood, mutual respect, and sympathy. The Islamic society is bound by the principles and rules of divine commands in the formation of its economic system. Islam integrates economics under a comprehensive and disciplined system based on justice and free from interest. This principle provides humanity with a just, exploitation-free, and complete guiding system. It offers a balanced approach blending action and theory. It determines principles and social rules. Every action of a believer is for Allah. Religion teaches that every good and legitimate act of a person is an act of worship. Therefore, a

person should obey the command of Allah in matters of Hukuk-ul-Allah (rights of Allah) and Hukuk-ul-Ibad (rights of people), i.e., political, social, and economic matters.

Shah Hamadan addressed the economic needs of the people. He encouraged lawful earning and taught new ways of earning a living. He promoted handicrafts and craftsmanship. He himself adopted cap-making as his livelihood. He brought educated and skilled people with him from Iran and Central Asia, who trained masses in diverse crafts such as painting, calligraphy, bookbinding, weaving, carpet weaving, embroidery, window work, floral work, and architecture. Shah Hamadan worked on the principle of self-reliance and self-help. He cultivated crops on the land of the Jagirs (estates) granted. They continued to do so.

Attention was focused on cities and towns. The message was conveyed to the well-off sections of society and politicians. A political leader's role was also played. Help was provided to people in power, and help was taken from them, but power itself was not joined, because this would have led to a deviation from the missionary work. Reforms in government institutions were definitely continued. The Sultan of Kashmir, Shahabuddin, was at war with Firoz Shah Tughlaq, the King of Delhi. He conquered some parts of the Delhi Sultanate, and the Kashmir Sultanate spread up to Sirhind. Shah Hamdan mediated peace between the two kings, and bloodshed was stopped through reconciliation. Sultan Qutbuddin was made to adhere to Sharia law. Maulana Muhammad Balkhi was appointed to advise the Sultan on Sharia ruling. The blessed cap (Kulah) was bestowed upon Sultan Qutbuddin. The successors of Sultan Qutbuddin continued to wear this cap under their crown for generations until the death of Sultan Fateh Shah. According to the will of Sultan Fateh Shah, this cap was buried with Fateh Shah. According to Mulla Ani, "The truth is that from that very day, the Shahmiri government began to decline." It is understood that after this incident, the long dark night of slavery began for Kashmir, because the people of Kashmir started giving priority to their personal and temporary interests instead of working for the upliftment of the legacy of their ancestors, which is the religion of Islam. This historical event is enough to shake the conscience.

Shah Hamdan was not only aware of the secrets of Qalandari but also of the secrets of the monarchy. He wrote "Zakheerat al-Muluk" for the political guidance of sultans, in which the principles of Islamic politics and methods of implementation are explained. His entire political philosophy is based on two principles: power and poverty. He urged them to liberate people from human bondage, uphold justice, and institute a divine order over a man-made one. He taught to conquer the universe with the light of intellect and control the self with the power of love, and for this, to seek the company of men of truth. He created mutual unity and political awareness among the people.

2. Conclusion:

Shah Hamdan was a comprehensive personality. He was a speaker, thinker, author, reformer, reviver, commentator, and hadith scholar. He became the guide and spiritual leader of Kashmiri Muslims. He was called Amir-e-Kabir. "Aurad-e-Fatihiya" is his famous work. It contains elements of faith, gnosis, knowledge of monotheism, supplications, and seeking forgiveness. Through "Aurad-e-Fatihiya", he instilled monotheism into the souls of Kashmiri Muslims. He made the Holy Quran the focus of people's thoughts. He brought Kashmir out of ignorance and darkness into knowledge and light, away from

polytheism and innovation to obedience to Allah, and prepared them for the will of Allah, freeing them from the slavery of the self. He instilled bravery, courage, and confidence in a nation that had lived in the shadow of superstitions and fear for thousands of years. He taught the lesson of creating uniformity in appearance and inner self. In that nation, Faith, courage, and fearlessness came. He became victorious. He removed humiliation and poverty and created a spirit of honor, prosperity, and selfhood. He freed people from negative thoughts and exploitative elements. He made people realize that “we do not want to take anything from you, but want to guide you on the path of knowledge and wisdom, self-respect, truth, and righteousness”. He gave people a social status by respecting their self-esteem. People came closer to each other. The importance of cleanliness was clarified. Knowledge, paired action, strategy, patience, tolerance, humility, sincerity, high ability, cooperation, mutual respect, attachment to the purpose, precise objective, confidence, sympathy, peacefulness, spirit of goodness, and the principles of divine pleasure are the reasons and distinctions of her movement’s success.

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