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## Rise of Islam in Kashmir valley

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### Abstract

Kashmiri Muslims are an ethnic group native to the Kashmir Valley in Indian-administered Kashmir, predominantly adhering to Sunni Islam. They refer to themselves as "Koshur" in their native language. The widespread conversion to Islam in the valley occurred primarily in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, significantly influenced by the efforts of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, a Persian Sufi mystic from Hamedan, Iran, who visited Kashmir multiple times during the 1370s and 1380s. His arrival, along with his disciples, marked a turning point as many settled in the region, promoting Islamic teachings. Earlier Islamic influences date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, with figures like Bulbul Shah (Syed Sharaf-ud-Din Abdur Rahman Suhrawardi), the first Muslim missionary in Kashmir, playing a key role. Additionally, the first known Quran manuscript in Kashmir, calligraphed by Fateh Ullah Kashmiri in 1237 AD, underscores the intellectual engagement with Islam during this period. This document explores the historical dissemination of Islam in the Kashmir Valley and the enduring impact of notable Islamic scholars on the region's spiritual and cultural evolution.

**Keywords:** Islam, Muslim, Kashmir, contribution, History

### 1. Introduction

By 725 AH, religious practice was not deeply entrenched in Kashmir. However, under the influence of Hazrat Sharaf-ud-Din, also known as Bulbul Shah, King Rinchan Shah and many followers embraced Islam. At the guidance of Bulbul Shah, Rinchan Shah constructed a grand *Khanqah* (Sufi lodge) along the banks of the Bahat River, marking it as the first *Khanqah* in the region. This project was financed through the allocation of village revenues to support its staff. The area, later called Bulbul Lankar, reflects this historic establishment, which continued to provide aid during the Chak dynasty. Subsequently, numerous Sufi saints arrived in Kashmir, initiating an era of widespread Islamization. These saints, known for their compassion, humility, and service to people regardless of social

divisions, gained immense respect. Their efforts led to the construction of numerous mosques and *Khanqahs* across the valley. Some notable examples include Khanqah-i-Mu'alla, Masjid Rinchan Shah, Jamia Baramulla, Khanqah-i-Makhdoomi, Jamia Shopian, and Khanqah-i-Shaikh Noor-ud-Din. These structures remain significant symbols of Kashmir's Islamic and cultural history.

### 2. Research objectives

1. To Discover how Islam spread and what impact it had on Kashmir Valley society.
2. To Highlight the significant contribution of well-known Islamic preachers in introducing Islam to the Kashmir Valley.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Arrival of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani

Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani (1312–1384 CE), a distinguished Persian scholar, poet, and saint of the Kubrawiya Sufi order, played a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual and cultural landscape of Kashmir. Born in Hamadan, Iran, he traveled extensively across Central Asia, spreading Sufi teachings and Islamic ideals. Known by titles such as Shah-e-Hamadan ("King of Hamadan"), Amir-i-Kabir ("The Great Commander"), and Ali Sani ("Second Ali"), his influence extended well beyond his homeland. Arriving in Kashmir in 1384 CE, Hamadani led a meticulously organized mission of 700 disciples, each a spiritually accomplished figure. His approach to Islamization was strategic and inclusive. He encouraged his followers to settle across the valley, demonstrating Islamic values through their daily lives and interactions. This approach resonated with the local populace, as it emphasized justice, equality, and spiritual harmony. The Sufi ideals of love and service echoed the essence of the holy scriptures, fostering a society rooted in mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Through their teachings and personal conduct, Hamadani and his followers helped transform Kashmir into a spiritually vibrant and Islamized region. They provided moral guidance and inspired people to seek inner peace and a deeper connection to spirituality. The efforts of Sufis from Persia and Central Asia, spearheaded by Hamadani, laid the foundation for Kashmir's Islamic identity and cultural renaissance. Hamadani passed away the same year in Kashmir, yet his legacy endures, with his final resting place in Khatlan, Tajikistan, remaining a site of reverence.

#### 3.2 Hazrat Mir Muhammad Hamdani

Hazrat Mir Muhammad Hamdani, the son and spiritual heir of Hazrat Shah Hamadan, was born in 1372. Designated by his father to continue his spiritual mission, he was entrusted with a profound responsibility to uphold and spread Islamic teachings in Kashmir. Before his passing, Shah Hamadan left specific instructions for his son, supported by two letters given to Maulana Sirahi, directed to prominent spiritual figures Khawaja Ishaq Khatlani and Noor Uddin Jafar Badakhshi. When these saints visited Mir Muhammad Hamdani to convey their condolences, he requested the letters. While Khawaja Khatlani handed over the will, he withheld the heir apparent letter, stating that it would only be delivered if Mir Muhammad Hamdani demonstrated his readiness. This motivated a period of self-reflection and spiritual growth for the young heir. He served Khawaja Sahib for three years and later studied under Noor Uddin Jafar Badakhshi, refining his character and spiritual knowledge. Once deemed capable, he succeeded his father in leading the mission. Following Shah Hamadan's guidance, Mir Muhammad Hamdani married twice, forging strong social and spiritual connections with Kashmir. He remained in the region for eleven years, completing his father's work of spreading Islam, guiding the Kashmiri people toward Islamic values, and eradicating non-Islamic rituals and practices. His efforts solidified his father's legacy and deepened Islam's roots in the valley, leaving an enduring impact on the spiritual and cultural life of Kashmir.

#### 3.3 Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-din)

The true Islamic transformation of Kashmir is often attributed to the indigenous Reshi movement, spearheaded by the profound influence of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din (also known as Nund Reshi or Sheikh-ul-Aalam). Unlike the Central Asian Sufis, his contributions left a deeper and more lasting impact on the spiritual and cultural identity of the valley, which historically had Hindu-Buddhist roots. Sheikh Noor-ud-Din emphasized the spiritual and ethical development of the common people, shifting their worldview from materialism to spiritual consciousness. Through his teachings and lifestyle, Sheikh-ul-Aalam profoundly influenced Kashmiri culture, literature, and social life. His work embodied the universality of Islam, advocating for values such as peace, love, selflessness, justice, and equality. By embodying these principles, he inspired the populace to adopt a life of simplicity and devotion. G.N. Gowhar, in his analysis, highlights that while many figures contributed to Kashmiri culture over millennia, luminaries like Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, Lal Ded, and Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani provided it with clear direction. Sheikh Noor-ud-Din's legacy as the pioneer of Kashmir's mystic poetry reflects his vision of a just and harmonious society. The Reshi movement, with its deep spiritual connection and dedication to humanity, played a pivotal role in shaping the valley's unique Islamic culture. Additionally, other revered Sufi saints of Kashmir, such as Bulbul Shah, Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, Mir Muhammad Hamdani, and Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom, also advanced the ideals of universality and global brotherhood, reinforcing the values of compassion and unity that define the region's Sufi traditions. Their collective contributions established a cultural and spiritual ethos that continues to influence Kashmiri life.

### 4. Conclusion

In Kashmiri society, Islam prioritised brotherhood and unity over traditional family, clan, and ethnic ties. This enabled kings to expand their kingdoms and empires to encompass diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. In the early 14th century, Mir Sayed Ali Shah Hamdani, a Muslim Sufi preacher from Central Asia and Persia, introduced the faith to the region. Islam encourages justice, equality, and respect for others in society. These are Islamic core concepts. Syed Ali Hamdani and other notable figures contributed significantly to Islam in Kashmir.

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