

# Sufism in Kashmir: Fostering Peace and Resisting Radicalization

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## Abstract

Kashmir, a region marred by political unrest and religious tensions, stands as a crucible of complex identities and aspirations. Yet, amid this turmoil, there exists a beacon of hope rooted in the ancient traditions of Sufism. Sufi education, steeped in the rich tapestry of spiritual teachings emphasizing peace, tolerance, and coexistence, has long thrived in the valleys and mountains of Kashmir. In the face of radical ideologies seeking to sow seeds of discord, Sufism emerges as a potent force for harmony and resilience. This paper will explore the significance of Sufism in the background of rising radical ideologies.

Keywords: Sufism, ideologies, Tasawwuf, Kashmir, radicalism

## Introduction

The word 'Sufi' comes from 'Suf' which means wool, a reference to woollen robe worn by the earliest sufis. There is no single definition or an approach to Sufi teachings. It is the method through which you can understand reality or ultimate truth. "God is the ultimate reality not this phenomenal world of multiplicity" (Fadiman & Froger, 2009, P.05). According to Sarraj's classic definition of Sufism; "the Sufi's are people who prefer God to everything and God prefers them to everything else". The sufi philosopher Al Ghazzali says, 'Real self knowledge consists in knowing the f Some believe its originis from Ahl us Suffa or the people of bench. The Sufis are united on the point that all is one, external, all knowing, and all powerful.

## Significance

The significance of Sufism in Kashmir cannot be overstated. With a history stretching back centuries, Sufi traditions have permeated the cultural and spiritual landscape of the region, offering a counter-narrative to the prevailing discord. At its core, Sufism espouses a message of love and inclusivity, transcending sectarian

divides and embracing the universal values of humanity. Despite its profound influence, the role of Sufi education in fostering peace and countering radical ideologies in Kashmir remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by delving into the intricate dynamics of Sufi educational institutions and teachings, examining their impact on social cohesion and youth radicalization. Sufism are a path of spiritual advancements, an expansion of consciousness, leading to awareness of self and the universe. The substance of Sufism is selfless experiencing and actualization of the truth. The practice of Sufism leads to the development of innate spiritual and intuitive abilities. Sufis are divided into different orders of mystical brotherhood, although they share certain core beliefs. By shedding light on the effectiveness of Sufi education as a catalyst for social harmony and resilience, this study aspires to offer actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. In a region plagued by conflict and division, harnessing the wisdom of Sufism may pave the way towards a more inclusive and peaceful future for Kashmir and beyond.

The process by which Islam was introduced into the valley was different from that whereby it entered in the other parts of the subcontinent, for it did not come by conquest, but by peaceful penetration. In his book 'Valley of Kashmir', Walter Lawrence states that, 'the Kashmiris are called by foreigners as Pir Parast that is saint worshippers and that epithet is well deserved' (Lawrence, 1985, p. 286). The valley also played a key role in representation interest of the large number of people including the Sufis, Rishis, Sayyids, and Ulama, poets, learned men and travellers. Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030 C.E.) tried to invade Kashmir on two occasions in 1015 C.E. And C.E.1021 Mahmud's efforts were threatened by Loharkote's powerful fortresses and a timely snowfall<sup>6</sup>. But by the time Ghazni's Indian invasions were over, there had been closer relations between the Kashmir Hindus and the followers of Islam. So for Islam and Muslims, it is obvious that Muslims were previously there in Kashmir before the first known Sufi saint Hazrat Sayyid Sharf-ud-Din Abdur-Rahman (Bulbul Shah) arrived in Kashmir. So the ground for Islam's circulation was already clear, but because of some unfavorable circumstances, history could not record the names and services of the saints, (Bukhari, 1998, p. 51). Nevertheless, such a number of Auliya-i-Allaha, were born on the land of Kashmir, and almost no other nation had been formed yet. Although the truth is, Tasawwuf's past in Kashmir starts with the history of Islam in Kashmir and there is no record of Tasawwuf in Kashmir before it. (Hasan, 2003, p. 1) Sufism came to Kashmir after it had entered the last and the most significant stage of its history that is the phase of the organizations of the khanqas and Silsilas and had taken form at various places in the Islamic world. Though, almost at the same time with the foundation of Muslim rule in Kashmir (720/1320), Sufism was introduced there. Still there are evidences that Islam had made its inroads long before the establishment of Muslim rule in Kashmir. But there is no doubt that the

Sufi's systematic and well organized activities only began towards the end fourteenth century. Hence forward outstanding sufis like Sayyid Ali Hamadani, Mir Muhammad, Sayyid Jamaluddin Bukhari and Sayyid Ismail Shami began to enter Kashmir in a quick succession. (Rafiabadi, 2009, pp. 3-4).

This time, when Sufis from Persia and central Asia began to pouring into the valley of Kashmir coincide with the development of an indigenous Sufi order known as the Rishi order, with Shaikh Nurud Din as its founder (Gull, 2003, p. xix). The life of peaceful coexistence of all human beings was fostered by this order. In Kashmir the Sufism has been divided in two wide trends by this order i.e. the orthodox trend which was usually followed by the Sufis who migrated from Persia and central Asia, and the other hand Rishis, mostly inhabitant of Kashmir valley adept a broadly based system of co-existence (Rafiqi, 2009, p. xxxvi).

The history of Sufism in Kashmir is spread over a long period of time starting from the Bulbul Shah to Sufi poets. Sufi saints are still inspiring the people of Kashmir by their subtle mystical insights. The Suharwardi, Naqshbandi, and Qadri Sufi orders have also played a great role in process of Islamization of Kashmir. (; Rafiabadi, 2009)

The radicalization process which lately engulfed the Kashmir society poses a serious threat to the plural cultural settings. The entries of new radical ideologies have seriously damaged the harmony and peace in the society. Sufi thought which promotes peace and harmony is the indigenous and innate to Kashmiri culture. Sufi culture is basically the Kashmiri culture and it accommodates different ethnic groups which have been living in the valley for centuries together.

## **Conclusion**

In Kashmir Sufism promotes universal values, such as love, compassion, and humanity. The positive impact of Sufism on communities cannot be overstated. Sufi orders have acted as

centers of social and spiritual cohesion. In fact Sufism is a mystic sect of Islam. Sufi Saints like Shekiul Alam, Lal ded won over the hearts of Kashmiris on account of their piety and sincerity by employing methods of persuasion, humanity and discourse. The people of Kashmir initially started to convert to Islam under the influence of peaceful Sufis and at a later stage by forceful means employed by Muslim invaders who ruled Kashmir for five centuries till Islam became the dominant religion in the State, however the popular religion could never acquire a dogmatic form in Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims were indubitably aware of their religious differences while Sufism served to promote a common way of understanding the world, thereby forming the cornerstone of the unique Kashmiri culture that transcends religious boundaries. During current times, when the people of Kashmir are going through ineffable yet palpable miseries, both inside and outside Kashmir, the magnificent metaphysical and mystical ethnicities enriched by Sufi saints do bring solace, though facing their greatest challenge due to the Wahhabi brand of Islam designed to destroy Kashmir and its old ethos. Sufis always emphasized love and devotion to one God and rejected outward religiosity by inspiring people to be compassionate towards all fellow human beings and respect the creations of God.

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