

# Role of Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> in preaching the message of Islam: A Study

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## Abstract

Kashmir is known for the valley of Saints and *Rishīs*, therefore the valley is being given the title of *Pir-i Waer* (Valley of Saints). In this valley with the passage of time, various friends of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> arrive, starting from Hadrat Abdul Rahman Bulbul Shah <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>, who enlightens the valley of Kashmir with Islām. In the similar way, one of the luminous personality born in Kashmir, known by the name of Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>. He is one of the Kashmiri *Sufi* and *Da'i* of Islam commonly known as Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>, who has considerable impact on the people of Kashmir from centuries. He is to be considered as the reformer of Islām in Kashmir. At his time, Hindu religion was at its highest peak and he struggled throughout his life for the cause of Islām. He worked day and night for the propagation of Islāmic message to the masses. He propounded the message of the *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth* in a Kashmiri language in the form of Poetry commonly known as “*Shruks*”, so that the people of Kashmir may understand the message of *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth* in their mother language and follow it for guidance. He uses his poetry as a tool to spread the true knowledge of Islām. He deliberates and expounds the mortal preaching as a base for the enrichment of harmonious life. He contributed a lot for the Kashmiri people that cover all aspects of Islāmic life. The present article seeks to study his role in preaching the message of Islām and introduce his personality as the great Islamic Preacher of Kashmir.

**Keywords:** *Preacher, Islam, Kashmir, Poetry, Shaikh al-Ālam, Shruks.*

## I. Introduction

Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> was undoubtedly one of the great personality of Kashmir, who was generally known in a common dialect as Nund Rishi, Shaikh al-Ālam, Alamdaar-i Kashmir, Taaj-ul Awliya, (the crown of saints of Kashmir) whom Kashmiri Pandits call out of love as Shahzanand. He was born on 10<sup>th</sup> of *Dhul Ḥajjah* (12<sup>th</sup> month of Islamic Calender) 779 A.H. corresponding to 10<sup>th</sup> of

December, 1377 A.D. on Thursday at the time of *Chasht* at Khai village, Jogipora, Kulgam. He was born of a virtuous couple, Shaikh Salar-ud Din and Sadra, known for their piousness and Allāh-fearing. Later, he busied himself completely in meditation, prayers, remembrance of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> and ascetic practices. In his late youth, he chose a cave as his dwelling near his birthplace for all his usual practices and meditations. After twelve years of leaving from cave life, Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> along with some disciples exclusively visited the valley of Kashmir, living for longer times at many places and preaching his simple message of truth, piety, purity, fear of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> and love for the whole humanity. Shaikh Nūr al-Din <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> lived for sixty three years and few months and passed away in Rupawan village of Chrar-i Sharief on 26<sup>th</sup> *Jamad al-sani* 842 A.H. (corresponding to 1439 A.D.) during the reign of Sultan Zain al-Ābidīn Budshah. In the last rituals all well known Islāmic personalities as well as king reached Chrar-i Sharief. He was buried at Chrar-i Sharief. By the formal orders of king Budshah his shrine was constructed and his tomb stands at Charar-i Sharief in the district of Budgam in Kashmir and draws large crowds. *Shams al-Ārifīn* or 'the sun of the pious' is the chronogram while gives the date of his demise. i.e. 842 A.H.

## II. Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> as a Poet

Shaikh Nūr al-Din <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> has his own style of preaching the message of Islam. He is the role model for his society and he chose poetry as a vehicle for propagating his understanding of religion and life to the people around him. So we can say that his art is not for art's sake but for the sake of life. So he need not be a craftsman but a person who says what he believes in. In this context, Prof. Shafi Shouq holds that:

“Understanding Shiakh Nūr al-Din’s poetry means understanding the language of his poetry... The *Shruk* is grounded in the phonological, semantic and semiological structure of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir: no approach other than linguistic, can, therefore, be reliable in understanding and evaluating the *Shruk*”.

Shaikh Nūr al-Din <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is among the first one's who used the Kashmiri language for propagating the message of Islam to the common people. It was because of his wise sayings that people of Kashmir understand the spiritual literary knowledge in a simple way that comprehend the total crux of the life. His art of propagating the message in the form of poetry attracted the people in a greater way. The poetic love of Shaikh al-Ālam is very noteworthy and beneficial in its effect. The poetical articulation of his great effort has made the linguistic and cultural mystery acceptable among the people. It can be said that Shaikh al-Ālam was among the great personalities, whose influence imprints so deep on Kashmir's culture, liter-

ature and language that he becomes an integral part of the Kashmiri identity. His whole life and teachings provides a viewpoint for a discussion on social, religious, cultural, moral poetry, its categorization, evaluation, admiration and impact with all its evidences and in all its manifestations.

The personality of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is actually reflected in his poetry. He lives in his poetry. Many times he addresses his own self and discusses different issues. In one *Shruk* he says:

*Nasr Baba paan pusher jaan aafreenas*

*Tavay saet tchaley aayinas mal*

*Duh youd krawakh wadnas rivnas*

*Tavay Hazrat raty seenas tal*

O Baba Nasr, submit your will to Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>

Because of it, your heart become pure

Spend whole of day in sincere worship

So Muḥammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> will intercession you

He used first and second person pronouns (i and you) in his poetry and mostly avoids the use of third person and saves the poet from detaching from the poet. He says:

Ha nundyo hindan hinz kaami traoutou

Traoutou te prautou haq sinz wath

Hazrat Muḥammad mata mashray tou

*Asinin douzakhas timan rozi kath*

O Nund, left the activities of Hindus

Follow the way of Truth, i.e. Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>

Don't forget Prophet Muḥammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>

We would be in a hell, but He <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> ashamed because of us

Shaikh's <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> poetry is directly and studiedly moral and the addressee is nearly always present in his verse. Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> was very much concerned about various facets of technical elements in his poetry. This is the reason that he chose compact, clear, complete and simple proverbial style for his poetry. Being a Sufi saint, most of his poetry revolves around the themes of love, truth, unity, harmony and peace. The themes of his poetry may be divided into the following broad categories:

- Religious (Islāmic) Poetry
- Devotional poetry
- Ethical Poetry
- Love for the Humanity
- Communal Harmony
- Mysticism.

Shaikh al-Ālam's <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> poetry is full of warnings against the evil practices, and advises the people how to eradicate these evils. The people must take advantage from his valuable and purposeful message for developing their personalities. The poetry presented by Shaikh is completely based on Islāmic teachings. The teachings of Shaikh are based on unity, love, communal harmony, equality and honesty.

### III. Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> as a *Da'i* (Preacher) of Islam

The period of Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> witnessed the days of intense cultural assimilation because Islām had yet to overcome the resistance of the local Hindus and Brahmans who still enjoyed all the privileges of the ruling class and dominated the Royal Court. Due to these Hindu courtiers the common masses could not get the training and education which would have enabled them to understand the fundamentals of Islām. Under these circumstances, there was urgent need of a religious scholar who could express the teachings of Islām in the local language so as to enable the unlettered masses to comprehend it properly. In that setting the Shaikh Nūr al-Dīn <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> emerged as the instrument of change. Although the reformation of people of Kashmir was started by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdāni <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> but it got boost at the Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>.

The whole *Ummah* has the responsibility of instillation, justice, enjoying the right and forbidden the wrong i.e. '*Amr-bil Ma'ruf wa Nahi 'Anil Munkar*'. In this context, the sayings of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> have the great importance. He performed this difficult task with sincerity. The Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> expressed his philosophy through *Shruks*. He was one of those spiritualists who lit the lamp of ethical knowledge for the benefit of humanity. His aim was to illuminate the world with his philosophy of universal brotherhood, based on conviction and brotherhood.

Shaikh Nūr al-Din <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> played a significant role in the spread of Islāmic tenets and Islāmic values in the process of acculturation and even Islāmization of Kashmir in its strict religious sense. It is true that Kashmir had come in contact with Islām long before the Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> assumed the role of a missionary, but it was mainly through his poetry, composed in a local language, that a dynamic and creative interaction was established between the great tradition of Islām, as repre-

sented by the Sufis and ‘*Ulamā* and the local peasant society.

Unlike the Saint missionaries from Central Asia and Persia, Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> was capable of entering into a meaningful dialogue with the local people regarding matters ranging from ontology to immediate social concerns. Islām has always been capable of establishing a vital link between its teachings and society. It is only amply borne out by the creative role of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> as the matter of Kashmiri identity, but simultaneously it is reflected in the social response that his popular mystical poetry generated among the people. His message was not confined to one race or one class, but addressed to mankind as a whole. He expressed his thought in the simple language of his people, clothing his ideas with and examples familiar from their experience. He taught the common people to practice religion not merely as a creed, but to make it life.

The Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> was not against the norms of the world and its social system but rather reshaped the social order so meticulously informing his individual relations with humanity as to enter into the commitment of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. According to the philosophy of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>, Lust, anger and covetousness are three gates of hell. Jealousy, lack of interest, irritability and living upon others’ fortunes leads to misery and immoral character. Gambling, drinking, harshness of speech and misuse of wealth leads to calamity. Meditate on your own self and recite the sacred name of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> with full control on all the senses. To live on the fruits of your own labour, do your work without disturbing others. Learn to sit in a natural manner, becoming steady, calm and detached, the more you sit still, the steadier your mind will become.

Shaikh Nūr al-Din <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is to be considered as the commentator of *Qurān (Mufāssir)* in the Kashmiri terminology. As he had translated the *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth* in a Kashmiri language in the form of Poetry commonly known as ‘*Shruks*’, so that the people of Kashmir may understand the *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth* in their mother language. He contributed a lot for the Kashmiri people that cover all aspects of Islāmic life. In the system of Islāmic thought, Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> has steadfast faith in Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> and his poetry reflects the commitment towards Islāmic concepts. Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> has given the message to people as prescribed by Islām. In the field of Beliefs (Īmāniyāt) contain *Tawḥīd*, *Risālāh* and *Ākḥirah*. *Tawḥīd* is the fundamental belief in Islām which means oneness of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>, Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> knows the past, present and the future of every creature. The Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> expressed the *Tawḥīd* in one of his *Shruk* as:

Suy aus ti suy ho aasi  
Suy suy kaer zi ha zuwoo  
Suy saarie andeshi kaasi

*Hanaa zuwoo paayas peto*

He was and He shall be

May for only Him my dear-self be

Alone, He will remove thy fears and doubts

Be perceptible to some extent O, me !

*Risalāh* means having belief in Prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w). A Life of Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w) is the best and perfect model for the believers as the *Qurān* has said:

“Indeed in the Messenger of Allāh (Muḥammad (s.a.w)) you have a good example to follow for him who hopes in (the Meeting with) Allāh (s.w.t) and the Last Day and remembers Allāh (s.w.t) much”.

The Shaikh (Reh.A.) described the concept of *Risalāh* in his *Shruk as*:

Muḥammad ti Tchoor yaar barhaq ganzruk

Timan nish andnay duniyihq niyaay

Jaan ti paan youd timan path binzrakh

Suy chai tour kich baed rahkay

Anis athiwoul pay keth sezrakh

*Yamath na wizrakh peer sinz jaay*

Let thou take Muhammad (s.a.w) and His four friends as paragons of life.

Solution to all the affairs will thou get from them.

Devote the being to their defined doctrine. A vast empire will thou find in Here-after.

Able not a blind be to impel without a staff.

Thus shall not thou be righteous without Thy Prophet.

One shalt pledge devotion to such a prophet. Whose era has brimmed in with divinity all the spheres?

Ākhirah means Life after death. Anyone who worship Allāh (s.w.t) and obeys his commandments will be rewarded with Paradise (*Jannah*), a permanent place of happiness; the person who does not abide will be sent to Hell (*Jahannam*), a place of harsh punishment and suffering. Shaikh (Reh.A.) forwarded various *Shruks* for Ākhirah, one of the *Shruk* he says as:

Tati kya karakh roz mahsharay  
 yeti khaasan ti aaman aasi talwas  
 Moul palzini gobras tami gatkaaray  
*Şabr rozi ni saabiran tim ti khen tras*  
 What shalt thou do on the day of resurrection.  
 When rank & file shalt be with lurking fear.  
 Each one shalt be looking for his ownself &  
 The patient ones shalt lose the sense of patience.

A large portion of Shaikh's <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> teachings are about worship (*Ibādah*). The *Ibādah* includes *Şalāh* (Prayer), *Şawm* (Fasting), *Zakāh* (almsgiving) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage). *Ibādah* is a practical devotion and demonstration of faith, and keeps a believer in constant connection with his Creator, Allah. The virtues of *Ibādah* are long lasting and numerous which cannot be measured. It develops in a believer the qualities of steadfastness, self-discipline and obedience to the Truth, leading an individual to be honest, patient and truthful in the relationships of life. It develops a believer's moral and spiritual standard and keeps an individual away from selfishness, greed, extravagance and other vices.

The same message of *Ibādah* has described by the Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> in these *Shruks* as:

Subah phol tai raat gayi ada  
 Ati kehu roodukh rada dith  
 Bang ti salat tooruk nada  
 Tati keho aakho nada dith  
 Farz ti sunnat kar mali ada  
*Jannatas ninyoo nada dith*  
 Night has ended, dawn has cracked,  
 You sluggard, still in bed!  
 The muezzin's call is a call from there,  
 Remember your promise made at your birth?  
 Dear, perform your duties and sunnah,  
 Then will you be welcome in Paradise.  
 Islāmi kaamiyan doh din barsay  
 Ilmacha lari kalmia chi zeal trav

Roza Nimaz Hajj Zakāh sar saa

*Yus kar kongul suy kar krav*

Let thou perform the duties-divine whole heartedly.

Thy defined doctrine is the vault of thy knowledge house.

Be bound to the fundamentals of thy doctrine.

As the one who sows, shalt reap thus.

In the field of *Mūāmlāt* (transactions) and *Mūāshirat* (Social affairs), Shaikh's (Reh.A.) contribution is worth mentioning. *Mūāmlāt*, i.e. matters such as selling and buying. A Muslim should be well versed in the individual responsibilities. As *Qurān* mentions at many places as :

“Those that turn (to Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>) in repentance; that serve Him, and praise Him; that wander in devotion to the Cause of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>; that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer; that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limits set by Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>; (these do rejoice). So proclaim the glad tidings to the Believers”.

Similarly, same point has been made in a tradition(*Hadīth*) as:

“A believer ought to open the gate of good and close the door of evil”.

It signifies that every member of the society should have a strong sense of responsibility towards the society. No one should remain apathetic on considering any evil or injustice. One should feel the pain of others in own heart. That is why the social responsibility has been correlated with acts of worship in Islām. Regarding social affairs, the Shaikh (Reh.A.) said in his *Shruk*:

Musalmaan yim hinduit pakan

Shak na kyah karan , kyah karan bov

Yaqeen chuk kufruk musalmaani thekan

Seena chuk na saaf chuk bad khuy

Guh yim livan ti neemach chakan

Tim qayamach doh woothan siyah roy

Muslims who Hinduise their lives

By adherence to superstitions and customs



They believe in paganism only boast as Muslims  
 They are insincere and vicious people  
 They who paint their houses with cow dung  
 They who waste the delicious food items  
 They all shall be presented with blackfaces  
 On the day of judgement before the Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>

*Akhlāqiyāt* (Good Morals) is a subject of Islām that deals with the knowledge of virtues and the ways how to acquire them, a knowledge of the rules of human behaviour, a knowledge of standard for assessing the human acts done out of free will and passing the judgment of good and bad on those acts and deciding the award or punishment, provided the belief precedes the act and provided the individual doesn't violate the virtuous deeds which prevent him from earning the pleasure of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> says:

“Verily those who believe and do righteous deeds, they are the best of the creatures, their reward is with their Lord- Gardens of Eternity, through which streams flow; they will abide therein for ever. Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him. That is for such who fear their Lord”.

A *Hadīth* of Prophet Muḥammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> illustrated the concept of *Akhlāq* as:

“Dearest and nearest to me on the day of judgment is one who possess good moral character, most hated to me and farthest from me on the day of judgment is one who possess bad moral character”.

In the similar way, Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> used to express this message in his *Shruk* as:

Dil chuy gaad ti houkh mo thaawun  
 Zikr hund poon dis lasiyo tavay  
 Nimaz chay zameenas phal zan wawun  
*Adabach nend karus khasiyu tavay*  
 Your heart is like a fish, deny it not water  
 It needs the water of *Iman* to live.  
 Prayer is a seed sown into the earth,  
 Tend it with reverence to make it grow.  
 Pooz dapaan pan zan natakh

Apuz wanaan lagi ras  
Muḥammad trawith iblees ratakh  
*Khuday wuchuy khatakh kas*  
As a leaf you'll shake while speaking the truth.  
Telling a fiction is an exciting thing.  
If Muḥammad you renounce and to Satan you turn,  
He will see it all - how will you escape His eye?

These are the universal messages of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> to whole of the humanity in general and to the people of Kashmir in particular for attainment of peace of mind and soul in this world as well as hereafter.

In the above discussion, the Shaikh al-Ālam's <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> life is discussed precisely. He was actually a valuable asset for the people of Kashmir. He struggled mostly throughout his life for the cause of Islām. He used his poetry in forwarding the message of truth i.e. Islām. His poetry is of worth mentioning. His message universally applied for whole of the humanity to achieve salvation in this world as well as hereafter, hence proved the great Islamic Preacher of Kashmir.

## Conclusion

Islām is the complete way of life. To follow the religion of Islām is to follow the *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth*. Whoever follows it whole heartedly would be dignified in the sight of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> was one of the followers of Islām. He lays stress on the unity of Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> is the ultimate cause and the sole-existent of all being, the only self-subsisting reality. He acquires the fullness of being, all the attributes of Allah mentioned in the *Qurān* inhere in Him with full essence. He is the perfect being of goodness and beauty: the Supreme of love. The poetry of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is great exhibition of Allāh's <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> greatness, where the topics of his theme says, Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> is the Creator of all in this world and commands with full authority.

Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is a religious scholar of high repute and there is no doubt that he is a perfect believer (*Mu'min*) and his approach to Allāh <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> is totally according to Islāmic Shariah based on the teachings of *Qurān* and *Ḥadīth*. He stressed on the five pillars of Islām in his *Kalām* in a detailed way. i.e. *Imān*, *Ṣalāh*, *Ṣawm*, *Zakāh* and *Ḥajj*. They play an important role in building the character. They purify the inner self of an individual and get sufficient courage to control his lower self. In most of the *Shruks* of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>, stress has been laid on the control of one's self i.e. desires, the main source of man's destruction. Shaikh

al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is regarded as a reformer of his society. He fought throughout his entire life against all the vices of his society. As a poet, he is regarded as the poet of the humanity. His life is full of guidance and teachings for the whole humanity in a right direction. These teachings include all the aspects of human life and are based on the principle of *‘Amr bil Marūf Wa Nahī Anil Munkar*, to enjoin Good and forbid wrong. Comprehensively, he worked for the establishment of a just socio-moral order in the world.

After studying the poetry of Shaikh al-Ālam <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup>, it can be summed up that Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> is one of the greatest Sufi poet & religious scholar of the sub-continent. His message is clear, indepth and pure, free of duality based on the teachings of *Qurān & Ḥadīth* and his message are universal. He wanted to guide *Kashmiris* and through *Kashmiris* the whole of humanity to the right path i.e. Islam. But unfortunately the message of this great personality is restricted to Kashmir only and is not introduced to the whole world. The teaching of Shaikh <sup>(Reh.A.)</sup> demonstrates an individual in particular and the society in general how to live in this world to be a good human being.

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