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Contested Sacred Spaces: Sufism, Reformist
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Abstract

The Sufi traditions in Kashmir have significantly influenced the religious, cultural, and socio-political fabric of the region, intertwining with local practices and shaping communal identities. Originating from various Sufi orders, these traditions emphasize mystical communion with the Divine, fostering spiritual insight, tolerance, and pluralism. Over centuries, Sufi saints established influential *khanqahs* and *dargahs*, contributing to the spiritual and social cohesion of Kashmiri society. However, the rise of Islamic ‘reformist’ movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the Ahl-e-Hadith and the Jama‘at-e-Islami, sparked debates over the ‘authenticity’ of Sufi practices, challenging their dominance and redefining religious discourse. These movements criticized certain Sufi rituals as deviations from ‘true’ Islam, leading to conflicts over religious authority and influencing the socio-political landscape. Despite these challenges, Sufi leaders have defended their traditions, emphasizing love, tolerance, and unity. Various religious organizations and their strategic use of Islamic principles, underscore ongoing efforts to maintain doctrinal purity and social transformation within Kashmir. This paper aims to explore the rich and complex history of Sufi traditions in Kashmir in the twentieth century, examining their profound impact on the social, religious, and cultural fabric of the region. This article also offers a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between Sufism and the socio-political landscape of Kashmir. Furthermore, it highlights the complex interplay between Sufism and various reformist critiques coming mainly from the *Ahl-e-hadith* and the *Jama‘at-e-Islami*, which challenged the authenticity of Sufi practices and sought to assert more orthodox interpretations of Islam, and how Sufi organizations, like the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam, have responded to these challenges.

Key Words: *Sacred Site, Sufism, Ideological Contestation, Community Identity, Spirituality, True Islam, Orthodoxy, Shari‘ah.*

Introduction and Literature Review

The study of Kashmir's history and culture reveals a landscape deeply intertwined with religious and political movements, where Sufism has played a formative role. Over the years, scholars have examined various facets of this heritage, ranging from the impact of Sufi mysticism on local identity to the influence of reformist movements that have sought to redefine religious practices in the region. This work addresses the significant contributions and ongoing debates within the scholarship on Kashmiri Sufism and reformist ideologies, highlighting how these elements have shaped both communal identities and sociopolitical dynamics in Kashmir.

This section explores major works that analyze the interaction between religious traditions and political authority, the evolution of Kashmiriyat as a cultural identity, and the rise of reformist movements. By situating this study within existing research, it aims to highlight gaps in the discourse, particularly in how Sufi practitioners responded to reformist critiques, and how these historical interactions continue to influence modern Kashmiri society. Through this framework, it contextualizes the focus of the current study on the complex interplay of religion, culture, and politics in shaping the historical narrative of Kashmir.

While Ian Copland (1981) in *Islam and Political Mobilization in Kashmir, 1931-34*, argues that religion was integral to the political movements of the early 1930s, with Islamic symbols challenging Hindu-dominated structures. He explores sectarian divides within the Muslim community and critiques the notion of Muslim unity in Kashmir, shedding light on British colonial influences on regional politics. Although, Muhammad Ishaq Khan's (1983) *Perspectives on Kashmir: Historical Dimensions*, traces the evolution of Kashmiriyat, a shared cultural identity rooted in mystic poetry and spiritual harmony. Khan's analysis highlights how Islam in Kashmir evolved with local traditions and how modern educational movements shifted Kashmiriyat toward a regional rather than religious identity.

Ashiq Kashmiri's (1991) work *Tarikh-i-Tehrik-i-Islami Jammu wa Kashmir*, provides a history of Jama'at-i-Islami's role in education and politics in Kashmir. Despite Kashmiri's pro-Jama'at stance, which may introduce bias, the work captures the Jama'at's educational and political influence amid opposition from traditional clerics. Sufi Ahmad Muslim's (2019) *Tarikh-i-Ahl-e-Hadith Jammu wa Kashmir*, documents the Ahl-e-Hadith movement, highlighting its reformist approach in Kashmir and challenges from entrenched Sufi traditions. His affiliation with Ahl-e-Hadith potentially colours the analysis, requiring careful interpretation for balanced insights. Whereas Yoginder Sikand's (2002) *The Emergence and Development of the Jama'at-e-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir (1940s-1990)*, examines the transformation of Jama'at into a sociopolitical

force promoting Islamic values while challenging traditional Sufi practices. Sikand's work addresses the tensions between Sufi and reformist movements, though it lacks responses from Sufi advocates.

Chitralkha Zutshi (2004) in *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, studies the fluid identities of Kashmir from the precolonial era to the 20th century, emphasizing its pluralistic history. Her work discusses major figures and political developments, suggesting that Kashmiri identity is an evolving narrative influenced by religion and politics. Mridu Rai's (2004) *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, analyses the sociopolitical disenfranchisement of Muslims under Dogra rule and its lasting tensions. Rai examines how Hindu sovereignty shaped cultural narratives and fuelled sectarian divides, arguing that British policies exacerbated Kashmir's communal conflicts.

Yoginder Sikand (2008) in *Popular Kashmiri Sufism and the Challenges of Scripturalist Islam (1900-1989)*, explores how Sufism fostered Kashmir's Islamic identity, and the ideological challenges posed by Ahl-e-Hadith and Jama'at-e-Islami. Sikand underscores the resilience of Sufi traditions despite reformist critiques, though he doesn't address post-1989 dynamics affecting Sufism.

The existing literature offers valuable insights into the interplay between Kashmir's political, religious, and cultural identity. However, discussions on "reformist trends" often overlook how Sufi practitioners responded to reformist critiques. Two Urdu works, *Amir-i-Shari'at aur Unke 'Aqaid* by Sayyid Arif Ahmad Qadri (2018) and *Noor-i-Dil* by Ghulam Hasan Zargar (2023) address this gap by exploring the techniques used by Sufis to counter anti-Sufi rhetoric, providing rare insights into Qasim Shah Bukhari's efforts to unify Muslims and engage in theological debates. Their works show that Sufis did not passively accept anti-Sufi rhetoric but engaged in theological debates, used religious discourse to counter criticisms, and sought to maintain unity within the Muslim community. Both works, however, contain biases that necessitate a cautious approach for a balanced understanding. This response from Sufis, although not covered by scholars like Sikand, reveals a two-way discourse within the Muslim community of Kashmir, adding depth to our understanding of intracommunity dynamics and religious resilience.

These works underscore the complex relationship between Kashmir's political, religious, and cultural landscapes. They reveal a nuanced view of identity formation, where Kashmiri Islam has been shaped by the intermingling of Sufi traditions and reformist movements. The literature also highlights the transformative impact of colonial and Dogra influences, the role of education, and the evolving understanding of Kashmiriyat. Yet, a key gap remains in addressing

Sufi responses to reformist critiques, as Qadri and Zargar's contributions attempt to bridge. This interplay of resistance, adaptation, and ideological contention continues to shape the historical and socioreligious fabric of Kashmir.

Sufi Tradition in Kashmir

The Sufi traditions of Kashmir have a rich and complex history, deeply intertwined with the cultural, social, and religious fabric of the region. Kashmir, known for its spiritual heritage, has been a center of Sufi activity for centuries, with various Sufi orders (*silsilah*) profoundly impacting the religious and intellectual landscape of Kashmir. Sufism was introduced to Kashmir in the early fourteenth century by Sayyid Abdul Raham Sharaf-al-Din, also known as Bulbul Shah, a disciple of Shah Ni'matullah Wali Farsi of the Shuhrawardi order. He arrived during the reign of Suhadeva (Rafiqi, 2015: 74). He is credited with converting the reigning Buddhist ruler of Kashmir Rinchana (A.D.1320-1323) and named Sultan Sadar al-Din (Khoiyami, 2016: 18). The conversion of Rinchana marked a significant point in Kashmir's Islamic history. However, his reign was short, and the Hindu ruler resumed control after his death until 1339, when Shah Mir established the Sultanate of Kashmir (Wani, 2004: 56). An important watermark in Kashmiri Sufism was reached when Sayyid Ali Hamadani arrived in Kashmir with 700 followers, significantly promoting Islam in Kashmir and primarily among the courtly class. His mission was furthered by his son, Sayyid Muhammad Hamadani, who arrived in Kashmir in 1393 and helped the reigning Sultan Sikander (1389-1413) Islamize the administration (Didamari, 2003: 88). Muhammad Hamadani established a network of Islamic institutions, including madrasas and khanqahs, and worked for twelve years to spread Islam in Kashmir. The spread of Islam in the rural areas of Kashmir was continued by Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani (*Nund Rishi*).

The Sufi orders that flourished in Kashmir include the *Qadiri*, *Naqshbandi*, *Suhrawardi*, *Kubravi*, and *Rishi silsilahs* (Sikand 2008: 490). These Sufi orders brought their distinct teachings and practices, contributing to the diversity of spiritual expression in the region. Sufism became the dominant form of Islam in Kashmir. By the end of the Seventeenth century, almost all of Kashmir had accepted Islam, and the Sufis, particularly the Rishis, played pivotal roles in this conversion (Khan, 2002).

Syncretizing the Order

Sufis initiated the Islamization of Kashmir Valley from central Asia and Persia. Concurrently, an indigenous movement called the *Rishi* tradition began to develop. This syncretic Sufi tradition flourished in Kashmir, led by its founder, Sheikh Nuruddin (1379-1442) (Rafiqi, 2015: 134-168). Despite the mystical aspects of their philosophical thought, Sheikh Nuruddin was seen as a

significant figure within the peasant community.

Kashmiri Rishism can be considered the unique expression of Islam in Kashmir. It represents the only Indigenous Sufi order in the region and played a significant role in the spread of Islam (Ahmad, 2011: 2). Historically, Kashmir was a center for the practice of Buddhism. However, with the advent of Vedanta philosophy in India, a new philosophical system known as Trika or *Shiva Siddhanta* emerged in Kashmir in the early 9th century (Wani 2004: 90). The establishment of the Sultanate brought Islamic science and culture to the forefront during this time. The Sufi tradition had the opportunity to engage with the existing Buddhist and Siva Siddhanta traditions. This interaction led to the Sufis, referred to as *Rishis* or *babas*, incorporating local influence into their practices.

The emergence of the indigenous *Rishi* movement in Kashmir brought a new socio-religious ethos within Kashmiri society and culture. The exemplary lives of the *Rishi* saints inspired many Kashmiris to adopt Islam. Over time, Islam integrated with community life, encompassing religious practices and belief in the holy spirit, sacred places, and saints revered by Muslims and non-Muslims. As Islam spread throughout Kashmir, various shrines were dedicated to the saints of different Sufi brotherhoods (Amin 2000:192). The success and popularity of the Sufi and their shrines in the valley can be attributed to their role as mediators in both religious (between humans and God) and worldly matters. Wani writes, “The most effective means which made his movement pervasive throughout the Valley was the language and the genre Nuruddin used to bring home to the people his message. He used the commoner’s (*Koshur*) language, the piercing mode of expression” (Wani, 2004: 67). His straightforward personality and use of the Kashmiri language likely facilitated many conversions to Islam.

Ishaq Khan emphasizes that “the majority of the commoners, especially the rural folks, were brought to the fold of Islam not by the missionaries of Persia and Central Asia but by the *Rishis*” (Khan, 2002: 178-79). The early Sufis, such as Syed Ali Hamdani, Mir Mohammad Hamadani, and their disciples predominantly used Persian for their teachings, which was inaccessible to the rural populace. Consequently, verb convergence was largely limited to the elite and those associated with the royal court. In contrast, the widespread conversion of rural illiterate people to Islam is attributed to Sheikh Nuruddin, who effectively preached in the Kashmiri language. Because of this approach, Kashmiri Muslims revered Sheikh Nuruddin’s didactic poetry as the ‘*Koshur Qur’an*’ (the Qur’an in Kashmiri) (Wani, 2004: 68). This tradition has significantly shaped not only the spiritual landscape of the region but also its socio-political structure.

The Institution of Khanqah

The term “*khanqah*” appeared in the late 9th century and came to be widely used for Sufi residences in Khurasan and Transoxiana. By the end of the 11th century, *khanqah* had become associated with tombs of venerated Sufi masters and the site of pilgrimage for ordinary believers (Lapidus, 2002: 169). Pilgrimage to the shrine is called *ziarat*, a visitation, while the shrine itself is called a *mazar*, a place of visitation; in the Sufi history of Kashmir, it is sometimes called *dargah*, a royal court (Subhan, 1938: 106). These shrines were established for enshrining relics or as tombs or hospices (Mir, 1989). The Sufi saints brought with them the *khanqahs* in Kashmir. These *khanqahs* and *dargahs* serve as centers of spiritual guidance and communitarian cohesion (Khaki, n.d.: 225-226). The shrine of a saint is a place where he has preached and breathed his last, and the tomb built after his death is revered as a sacred place (Saab, 1998: 55). It became sacred because this place is now connected to Islamic spirituality with the medium of Sufi. The presence of the Sufi in a particular space makes it holy because it connects it to divinity through the medium or chain of the Sufi master and Prophet. These shrines were established for enshrining relics or as tombs or hospices (Mir, 1989). These *khanqahs* and *dargahs* serve as centers of spiritual guidance and communitarian cohesion (Khaki, n.d.: 225-226).

Kashmir has been a focal point of spiritual and ideological debates. The interaction between sacred sites, preaching rights, and socio-political control has shaped communal identities and reflected the region’s changing socio-political dynamics (Subhan, 1938). These institutions and relationships create a sense of belonging and spiritual connection beyond mere rituals, fostering individual enlightenment and communal harmony. This syncretic nature of Kashmiri Sufism, which integrates local traditions with Islamic mysticism, highlights its inclusive and integrity ethos. This syncretism has enabled diverse communities to engage in Sufi rituals, promoting communal harmony and cultural synthesis. Additionally, the cultural manifestation of Sufism suggests music, dance, and art as powerful means of conveying spiritual messages and preserving the region’s rich cultural heritage.

The study of Sufi traditions within the context of Kashmir reveals the deep socio-spiritual interaction that has influenced their regions, culture, and religious milieu. An in-depth analysis of the historical, social, and cultural components demonstrates how integrating indigenous practices with Islamic doctrines facilitated by Sufi tradition has cultivated a distinct religious identity and promoted broader social cohesion and cultural integration. Revered Sufi saints arrived in Kashmir and established themselves, significantly shaping the spiritual environment of the region and characterizing the historical development of Sufism there. Through their exemplary lives and teachings, these saints attracted a broad following. Their shrines (*khanqahs* or *dargahs*) evolved

into centers for spiritual solace and community engagement. Over time, these shrines became focal points for religious activities, community gatherings, and cultural festivals, thus cementing their significance in the daily lives of the people.

In recent political and social turmoil, the lasting influence of Sufi traditions in Kashmir provides significant insight into how religious practices can foster social tolerance, spiritual well-being, and communitarian cohesion. Sufi shrines and their rituals are crucial for comprehending Kashmir's intricate relationship between religion, culture, and society. Furthermore, the inclusive nature of Sufi practices serves as a model for tackling contemporary religious intolerance and social fragmentation issues. Consequently, studying Kashmiri Sufism enhances our understanding of regional Islamic practices and contributes to the broader discussion on how mysticism and spirituality shape human experiences and societal frameworks.

Claiming Authority over the Sacred Spaces

Till the end of the nineteenth century, Sufism remains the dominant form of Islam in Kashmir, with most Kashmiri Muslims adhering to various Sufi orders. Starting in the late nineteenth century, Sufism faced significant criticism from both the 'reformists' and the 'Islamists' across the Muslim world. The arrival of Islamic 'reformists' in Kashmir, influenced by movements from mainland India such as Delhi, Amritsar, and Punjab, further altered the religious landscape of the region. The emergence of reformist movements, such as Ahl-e-hadith and the Jama'at-e-Islami, has initiated debates over the "authenticity" of Sufi practices and their devotion to Islamic orthodoxy. While some Muslim groups or movements regard Sufism as a path to spiritual enlightenment, others consider it as a deviation from the pure teachings of Islam.

However, different groups strive to affiliate themselves with Sufi shrines and culture in Kashmir, seeking to exert control over these sacred spaces. The complex power dynamics reveal the ongoing struggle for religious authority, identity, and legitimacy. The contention between various groups, notably the Mirwaiz families of Srinagar, illustrates the interplay of religious, economic, and political interests. The disputes between the two prominent Mirwaizes of Kashmir, Mirwaiz Kashmiri, and Mirwaiz Hamadani, over preaching rights at specific shrines highlight this complexity (Zutshi, 2004: 131). This struggle extends beyond mere physical control of the shrines; it was deeply intertwined with the broader socio-political and ideological currents within Kashmiri society (Zutshi, 2004: 129). This conflict over these sacred sites demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of Sufi traditions amid reformist pressures and modernist critiques. Despite attempts by various reformist and modern movements to redefine or diminish the role of Sufism, its presence and influence in Kashmir remain robust. The ongoing disputes over sacred

spaces illustrate how deeply Sufism is embedded in the cultural and religious fabric of Kashmir, continuously shaping and being shaped by the evolving socio-political landscape of the region. Ultimately, these sacred sites serve as a testament to the enduring significance of Sufism in Kashmir, highlighting the dynamic and contested nature of religious authority and identity in the region (Zutshi, 1986: 190-195). These conflicts over sacred spaces and preaching rights at significant religious sites in Kashmir have played a crucial role in shaping community identities and changing the socio-political scenario of the region. Central to these disputes are competing claims to leadership among the Kashmiri Muslim elites, who seek to assert their influences through control of city shrines and religious patronage networks. In this conflict, the issue of ‘authenticity’ and preaching ‘true’ Islam was vital in asserting their authority (Chowdhary and Rao, 2006: 298).

The *Khanqah* came to symbolize authority over the city, its inhabitants, and its sacred past, thus becoming a focal point for political conflicts among rival groups of Kashmir Muslims and their Sufi supporters and detractors. Since the shrines asserts both religious and political legitimacy, these groups sought to control its management and, thereby, over the Muslim community itself. Consequently, disputes over the shrine were often framed as battles between ‘*sahih/asal* Islam’ (true Islam) and ‘*kufir/be-dini*’ (infidelity) (Zutshi, 2018: 56). Unsurprisingly, shrines in Kashmir became the centers of political and religious controversy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, marked by significant changes in Kashmir’s political economy. During this period, the Dogra state underwent bureaucratization, with colonial officials overseeing land settlements. Consequently, the shawl trade declined, and Kashmiri Muslims began to organize as a community. As a result, the traditional landed and merchant elites experienced a losing ground influence over economic resources and political authority.

The advent of modernity, especially the rise of print media, profoundly impacted the dissemination of knowledge and ideas within the Muslim community. The printing press became a powerful tool for religious reformers, enabling the widespread distribution of Islamic teaching and debates over interpretations (Mir, 2019: 55). This technological advancement reshaped religious life, allowing individuals and groups to assert their ideological narratives and challenge established norms.

However, Sufism plays a significant role in Kashmiri society, it has encountered opposition from prominent institutions like the Ahl-e-hadith and the Jama‘at-e-Islami, which criticize and challenge Sufi traditions. Political development, socio-economic changes, and technological advancements have spurred various reformist movements seeking to establish authority within the Muslim community, during which Sufism also came under scrutiny. The critique of Sufi traditions by Ahl-e-hadith movements in Kashmir exemplifies a multifaceted and complex

dialogue within Islamic thought shaped by historical, socio-political, and theological factors. This dynamic interplay between Sufism and reformist ideologies highlights the evolving tensions and discourses that have influenced Kashmiri society since the late nineteenth century.

Ahl-e-hadith Challenges to Sufi Tradition and the Struggle for Religious Authority

The historical connection between Kashmir and the Ahl-e-hadith movement in mainland India dates to the late nineteenth century. This period was marked by the journey of Shah Hussain Bhatku, a young Kashmiri who travelled to Amritsar and then Delhi to further his Islamic studies (Khan, 1987: 43).

Born in Delhi during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hussain Bhatku hailed from a family that had migrated from Makkah. He eventually settled in Amritsar before relocating to Kashmir and settling in Batakpora Srinagar. After receiving primary education from his father, Sayyid Mohammad Shah, Hussain Bhatku went to Amritsar and became a Maulana Ghulam Ali Amritsari student in 1872. In Amritsar, he noticed the growing influence of *Madrassa Miyan Sahib*, which Maulana Nazir Dehlavi managed or ran.

Subsequently, Hussain Bhatku migrated to Delhi, where he enrolled in *Madrassa Miyan Sahib* and studied theological and jurisprudential doctrines under Nazir Dehlavi (Dar, 2006: 56). When he entered the Kashmir Valley, Hussain Bhatku found Muslims mired in superstitious practices, ignorance, and darkness. He criticized the ‘ulama for promoting several rituals that have no authenticity in Islam and ceremonies at the khanqah level (Khan, 2007: 137). He was the first among Ahl-e-hadith to raise his voice against and criticize *piri-muridi*, superstitions, and rituals and to denounce *astan* (shrine) visitation. The local Mullahs, who had much influence on people in general and had gained respect among the Kashmiri Muslims in particular, strongly opposed Hussain Shah Bhatku, compelling the Maharaja to issue an expulsion order for him from the state (Khan, 1978: 108). When Maharaja expelled Hussain Shah Bhatku from Srinagar, he chooses to go to Shopian because he had learned that Maulana Anwar Shah Shopiani (d. 1939) was convinced of the Ahl-e-hadith School and had become active in its propagation and promotion (Muslim, 2019: 95). Although Bhatku’s movement did not make much progress, it managed to influence many well-known people of Srinagar, such as Sayyid Sabzar Shah, Abdul Aziz Chikan, Maulvi Hasan Shah, and others, who became motivated by his ideology (Bukhari, 1975). Later, Anwar Shah and Atta Muhammad Khan significantly advanced the cause of the Ahl-e-hadith movement.

The Ahl-e-hadith movement emerged as a significant force, advocating for a return to the fundamental sources of Islam and promoting a literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith. This movement, characterized by its emphasis on theological purity, gained traction in Kashmir,

sparkling debates and reshaping religious landscapes. The Ahl-e-hadith argued that Muslims had deviated from “true” Islam by introducing innovations that had no Islamic legitimacy (Muslim, 2019: 65). They criticized the custodians of shrines, accusing them of hiding the ‘true’ message of Islam, and condemned the shared religious spaces, where Hinduism and Islam interacted, as threats to the purity and integrity of the Muslim community (Sikand, 2008: 502). However, the Ahl-e-hadith did not become a mass movement due to their strong opposition to the Sufi tradition, which had played a crucial role in converting many Kashmiris to Islam. The custodians of the shrines and the devotees accused the Ahl-e-hadith of being *be-din* (irreligious) and *munkir-i-auliya* (deniers of Sufis) (Muslim, 2019: 100).

The emergence of the Ahl-e-hadith in Kashmir during a time of socio-political upheaval, marked by colonial encounters and socio-economic transformations, highlights the contextual specificity of their reformist agenda. Their critique of Sufi practices was closely linked to broader concerns about religious purity, authenticity, and practices. They sought to align Kashmiri Islam with their interpretation of orthodox teachings, emphasizing a return to the foundational principles of Islam as articulated in the Qur‘an and Hadith. This attempt at religious purification was not merely doctrinal but also a means to address the socio-political realities of the time. The decline of traditional Islamic polities under colonial rule created a vacuum that allowed new religious and intellectual movements, like the Ahl-e-Hadith, to assert their influence.

The Ahl-e-hadith framed their opposition to Sufism within a more extensive Islamic revival and reform narrative. They positioned themselves as custodians of Islamic orthodoxy, challenging the established religious authority of Sufi orders and the *‘ulama* who supported them. This critique was both a theological stance and a strategic response to the changing socio-political landscape. By advocating for a return to what they considered the ‘pure’ and ‘unadulterated’ teachings of Islam, the Ahl-e-hadith aimed to restore a sense of religious and moral order amidst the tangle of colonialism and modernization.

As a significant part of broader Islamic reformist discourse, the debates over Sufism in Kashmir reflect a continuous negotiation between tradition and modernity, mysticism and orthodoxy, and individual spirituality and communal identity. The Ahl-e-hadith emphasis on scripturalism and legalism contrasted sharply with the mystical and experiential dimensions of Sufism, creating a landscape of religious contestation that was both intellectually vibrant and socially significant. The doctrinal disagreements between these two movements were not merely abstract theological debates; they had real implications for the lived religious experiences of Kashmiri Muslims. The emphasis on strict adherence to scriptural sources by the Ahl-e-hadith challenged the established norms and practices of Sufi traditions (Sikand, 2008: 501). This led to a re-evaluation of religious

identities and practices within the community.

Ultimately, the critique of Sufi traditions by the Ahl-e-hadith in Kashmir highlights the dynamic and contested nature of Islamic reform. It underscores the importance of historical context in shaping religious movements and how theological debates are often embedded in broader socio-political struggles. The enduring legacy of these debates continues to influence contemporary Islamic thought and practice in Kashmir and beyond. The ongoing quest for religious authenticity and socio-political relevance in the modern world can be traced back to these early reformist movements, which sought to redefine the parameters of religious orthodoxy and practice.

Jama‘at-e-Islami and the Challenges to Sufi Tradition in Kashmir

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the Sufi traditions in Kashmir witnessed criticism from “political Islam” (*Siyasi Islam*) in the form of the Jama‘at-e-Islami (Sikand, 2001: 218). These critics, influenced mainly by “Islamist” and “reformist” ideologies, raised concerns about the politicization of Islam and its effects on governance, social justice, and human rights. Political Islam refers to the idea of Islam as not just a personal faith but also as a political ideology governing public and social life (Volpi, 2013: 9). In Kashmir, the concept of political Islam has manifested through movements advocating for an Islamic state or the Shariah law implementation. These movements often emerged in response to perceived injustices or as part of broader struggles for self-determination (Akbarzadeh, 2012: 2).

Some supporters of political Islam in Kashmir criticized Sufi traditions for deviating from what they considered “pure” or “true” Islam. They criticized certain Sufi practices, such as “shrine worship”, veneration of saints, and mystical rituals, as *bid‘ah* (innovations) or idolatry. These critics often sought to ‘reform’ or ‘purify’ Sufi practices based on their understanding of Islam.

The evolution of the Jama‘at-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir illustrates an intricate interplay of ideology, strategic decision-making, and socio-political dynamics. The Jama‘at exemplifies the adaptability and resilience of the Islamist movement in achieving its objectives within the contexts of governance and social change. The Jama‘at was established in 1946 in Kashmir under the guidance of Sa‘aduddin din Tarabali, Qari Saifuddin, and Maulana Ahrar. It fell prey to a schism during the partition of India in 1947, with the formation of an Indian branch, Jama‘at-e-Islami-Hind (JIH), and a Pakistan Branch, Jama‘at-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP). After the partition, Jama‘at-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, till 1952, was governed by the constitution of the Jama‘at-e-Islami-Hind. However, Jammu and Kashmir were disputed regions, and owing to complex political reasons, the Kashmiri leaders of the Jama‘at decided to separate themselves from the Jama‘at-e-Islami Hind. After separating from the Jama‘at-e-Islami Hind, they drafted their constitution to

make the organisation function smoothly. A draft committee under Maulana Ahrar and Ghulam Rasul was formed. The constitution was completed in November 1953 and was accepted and passed in the same year, on which basis the Jama'at-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir should act (Kashmiri, 1991: 27-28). The constitution of the Jama'at-e-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir is like the original constitution of the Jama'at-e-Islami Hind, except that it has been localized to Kashmir (Majid, 2018: 95).

Tracing the Jama'at's trajectory from an ideological entity to an electoral participant reveals how it navigated the challenging socio-political landscape of the region. Primarily founded to promote the ideals of political Islam, the Jama'at-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir was driven by a vision of Islamic revivalism and social justice. Its basic values were embedded in the belief that returning to "true" Islamic teachings was essential to address the socio-economic and political challenges of the Muslim community (Sikand, 2002: 727). This ideological perspective directly opposed the Jama'at to the established socio-religious patterns, particularly those linked and connected with Sufi traditions, which significantly affected the region.

The Jamaat's critique of the Sufi institution was central to its ideological campaign. It accused the Sufi ulama of promoting syncretic practices and superstitions to wave them as a deviation from authentic Islamic teachings. This critique carried significant socio-political implications, as the Jama'at sought to undermine the Sufi influence and establish itself as the legitimate representative of Islamic values in the region. This effort to delegitimize Sufi institutions can be considered part of a broader strategy to consolidate the Jama'at's authority and expand its influence.

As the Jama'at's ideological campaign gained support, it attracted many supporters dissatisfied with the prevailing socio-religious order; it transitioned from a purely ideological movement to a socio-political force influencing public discourses and policy (Sikand, 2002: 734). Its entry into electoral politics marked a strategic shift, reflecting its pragmatic approach to achieving its objectives. The Jama'at sought to transform its ideological vision into formal political engagement by participating in elections and improving its competence to effect change within the existing governance structures.

A restructuring of its organizational framework accompanied the strategic foray of the Jama'at into electoral politics (Kashmiri, 1991: 243). It established a hierarchical structure with centralized leadership to consolidate power and maintain ideological coherence. This organizational model aimed to challenge the traditional authority of Sufi leaders and assert its dominance as a religious and political entity (Sa'aduddin, n.d: 7). The centralized leadership structure facilitated coordinated efforts to propagate the messages of the Jama'at, mobilize supporters, and implement its agenda.

This restructuring was a crucial step in the Jama‘at’s efforts to establish itself as a formidable force capable of shaping the socio-political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Jama‘at-e-Islami’s journey from an ideological movement to a political actor highlights the dynamic interplay between ideology, politics, and social change. Its critique of Sufi traditions and efforts to establish authority illustrates the complexities of pursuing religious and political goals (Veer, 1999: 547). Examining the Jama‘at-e-Islami’s evolution provides insights into ideological adaptation, strategic decision-making, and socio-political transformation within Islamist movements (Kashmiri, 1991: 244). The Jama‘at’s experience in Jammu and Kashmir serves as an essential study of how religious movements evolve and adapt to changing socio-political landscapes, demonstrating the enduring relevance and influence of political Islam (Warikoo, 2011: 71).

Focusing on Islamic revivalism and adherence to Quranic principles, the Jama‘at-e-Islami became a significant political force in Kashmir. Its critique of Sufism as perceived deviations from ‘authentic’ Islamic teachings echoed with sections of the inhabitants, initiating debates and restructuring religious debates. However, among these ideological contestations, the complex relationship of “tradition” and “modernity,” “orthodoxy,” and “innovation” continue to shape the religious landscape of Kashmir.

Resilience and Adaptability: The Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam’s Defence of Sufi Tradition in Kashmir

The rise of ‘reformist’ and ‘political Islam’ during the early and mid-twentieth century created challenges and opportunities for the advocates of Sufi traditions and practices. Those who supported Sufi traditions were aware of the criticisms and challenges presented by ‘reformists’ and ‘Islamists’ to Sufi institutions in Kashmir. In response, they began to organize and restructure their Sufi organizations. Within this context, the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of Sufis in confronting various challenges and criticisms.

The Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam, founded in 1931-32 by supporters of Sufism and the traditional ‘*ulama* of Kashmir, acknowledged the necessity of organizing to defend their beliefs and practices while safeguarding and advancing Sufism in the region (Zargar, 2023: 61). Central to the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam’s effort in this polemic was its commitment to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence and its identification with the Sufi path, as reflected in its slogan, “*Hanafi Maslak Sufi Mashrab*” (Zargar, 2023: 61).

The efforts of the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam in literature, education, and organizational

restructuring highlight a proactive approach to preserving and promoting Sufi traditions. This Anjuman defended Sufi beliefs and practices against reformist critiques and sought to make Sufism relevant in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

While political movements aimed to alter Kashmir's religious and cultural landscape, Sufi organizations such as Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam sought to preserve their spiritual and cultural significance (Suhrawardi, 2008: 29). They founded educational institutions and madrasas to educate the Kashmiri populace about contemporary trends and raise awareness of the challenges confronting Sufi traditions and practices. A key feature of the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam's approach was the integration of Sufi texts into their curriculum alongside modern secular education, ensuring the continued relevance of their ideology and faith (Bukhari 1974). Additionally, they began publishing extensive journals to spread their ideas and interpretations of Islam throughout the region. These efforts, including establishing educational institutions and publishing journals and tracts, were strategic initiatives to inform and educate the masses about the importance of Sufi practices within the broader Islamic traditions.

Through a nuanced understanding of Islamic principles and a devoted commitment to Sufi traditions, the Anjuman adeptly managed the challenges of religious interpretation and socio-political involvement, thereby influencing the spiritual and ideological contours of Kashmiri Muslims. Central to the objectives of the Anjuman was its defence of Sufi practices, including shrine rituals, saint veneration, and observances like *milad-un-nabi* and *'urs* – against critique from reformist groups. By contextualizing these practices within Islamic monotheism and spiritual guidance, the Anjuman safeguarded the historical and cultural legacy of Kashmiri Islam and adapted it to contemporary changes.

Additionally, the Anjuman actively engaged in contemporary 'reformist' or 'Islamist' discourses on key Islamic concepts such as *tauhid* (unity of Allah), *shirk* (polytheist or associating partners to Allah), *bid'at* (innovations), *isti'anat* (seeking help from anyone other than Allah), and *wasila* (mediation, intermediaries), demonstrating its efforts to integrate traditional Sufi teachings with evolving religious perspectives (Bukhari, 1975). By endorsing specific practices as valid expressions of piety and spiritual connection, the Anjuman nurtured a sense of continuity and religious identity among Kashmiri Muslims, countering the homogenizing tendencies prevalent in the broader Islamic world. Moreover, Anjuman's inclusive approach to religious education, socio-political involvement, and cultural preservation enhanced its relevance and impact within Kashmiri society. Through initiatives like establishing educational institutions and advocating for social equity, the Anjuman represented a comprehensive vision of Islam that bridged sectarian differences and fostered unity amidst diversity (Suhrawardi, 2008: 13).

The Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam not only restricted itself to education and religion but also played its part in politics. Although the Anjuman professed political neutrality, it consistently supported the ruling government, sometimes in indirect ways (Hussain, 2021: 155). The Anjuman's ability to unify various Sufi groups under a single platform underscores the organizational skill and strategic foresight of its leaders. This unified approach defended the Sufi traditions against external criticism and cultivated a sense of solidarity and purpose among its followers. The success of the Anjuman in incorporating local customs and practices into the Islamic framework of Kashmir highlights the adaptive and dynamic nature of Sufism. Sufism in Kashmir did not merely survive the onslaught of reformist movements; it adapted and evolved, reinforcing its spiritual, educational, and cultural foundations. The Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam exemplifies this resilience and adaptability, demonstrating how Sufi organizations can address contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to their core spiritual values (Anjuman, 1998: 12).

The evolution of organizations like the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam, which champions the Sufi tradition, highlights a persistent pursuit of religious authenticity and social change by advocating Sufi teachings and addressing criticisms from reformist and Islamist scholars. In Kashmir, Sufi leaders and their adherents countered the criticism of reformists and Islamists by reaffirming their spiritual heritage and underscoring the values of love and tolerance promoted by Sufism. They often depicted Sufism as a cohesive force that bridged sectarian divides and enhanced social unity within Kashmiri society. Moreover, Sufi leaders occasionally dialogue with political Islamists to find common ground and bridge ideological differences. The counter-critiques by the Anjuman were motivated by reformists' criticism of the Sufi traditions and concerns about the political threat to their authority in the Kashmir valley. The Anjuman aimed to consolidate power by uniting traditional religious scholars (*'ulama*) within a single organization to strengthen their legitimacy and maintain control over religious discourse and practices in the region.

The proponents of the Sufi traditions responded to Kashmir's reformist and Islamist movements by engaging in self-criticism and embracing modern practices, institutions, and social services. Concerned about challenges to their authority, they sought to maintain relevance amidst social and political upheaval. On the other hand, if the 'reformist' groups or movements were criticizing them, it was not that the Sufis were against the Qur'an and hadith because, in their responses to the Ahl-e-hadith and the Jama'at, they were also citing the Qur'an and hadith. This indicates that the interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith can vary significantly among individuals and movements. The reformists' critiques of Sufism were less about resorting to 'true' Islam and more about consolidating their socio-political authority. Since the colonial intervention had demolished the political structure of Muslim leaders, these reformists were trying to strengthen their authority within the Muslim community by criticizing the Sufi traditions and practices as *bid'at* and 'false Islam' and declaring them unauthentic.

Conclusion

Sufi traditions and their concomitants played an important role in developing and nurturing the spiritual development and establishment in Kashmir. Contested sacred spaces: Sufism, reformist movements and religious authority in the twentieth century Kashmir illuminates how Sufism became the dominant form of Islam in Kashmir, and the Sufis became the head of this conversion. However, the advent of reformist trends in Kashmir in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed criticism of Sufi traditions and practices. They tried to articulate their notion of reform and perspectives of 'true Islam'. Central to this criticism were competing claims to leadership among the Kashmiri Muslim elites, who sought to assert their influence over the subjects through control over city shrines and religious patronage networks. However, the Sufi, on the other side, tried to reorganize and restructure the traditional 'ulama and the proponents of the Sufi traditions to defend their beliefs and rituals. Central to this reorganization of the Sufi, 'ulama on a common platform were to make themselves relevant to the changing context of the socio-political landscape of the region. Sufi leaders and their followers in Kashmir responded to critiques from the 'reformists' and 'political Islamists' by reaffirming the importance of their spiritual heritage and emphasizing the value of love and tolerance promoted by Sufi teachings. They often portrayed Sufism as a unifying force that transcended sectarian divides and contributed to the social cohesion of Kashmiri society. One common factor among the different Anjumans in Kashmir, be it the Ahl-e-Hadith, the Jama'at-e-Islami, and the Anjuman-i-Tablighul Islam, is their strategic deployment of Islam and the Qur'an as the principal instrument of advocacy. Rooted in a collective aspiration to revive an unadulterated manifestation of Islam, they have persistently attempted to combat perceived deviancy and uphold doctrinal purity throughout their respective historical trajectories.

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