

Shaikh-Ul Aalam (1377-1438 C.E) In Search of Ideal Society in Kashmir during His Contemporary Period

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Abstract: Shaikh- ul Aalam the Alamdar of Kashmir was born towards the last quarter of the 14th century C.E and emerged as the cultural leader of the populace at a time when Kashmir was at the cross –roads of its socio-cultural and religio-political transition. In the backdrop of political uncertainty which witnessed the end of centuries of Hindu rule and the subsequent establishment of Muslim sultanate in Kashmir, there started arriving in Kashmir a long band of Muslim Religious missionaries who received exemplary patronage from the new Muslim political establishment. Secondly the unprivileged sections of Kashmiri society who happened to be annoyed by the caste-ridden Socio-religious fabric of Hindu society duly approved by unfriendly Brahman religious elite, showed marked signs for coming into the ambit of new social order.

Shaikh- ul Aalam played a significant role by exposing the exploitative machinations of caste-conscious Brahmins. For this purpose he used common Man’s language ‘*Kashur*’ to propagate his message to the common masses. In this paper I want to highlight those Shruks (verses, poetry) of shaikh -ul Aalam which provide the message and ideas for an ideal society free of casteism, injustice and irrelevant mass exploitation.

Keywords: Shaikh-ul Aalam, Shaikh’s poetry (Shruk), Social Solidarity, Unity of Mankind, Mutual Responsibility, Charity (Zakat).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Shaikh- ul Aalam:

The universe is believed by some great astronomers to have begun with a “Big bang,” a terrific explosion some 15 billion years ago. Surprisingly religious and languages have almost always had miraculously “Big bang” to start with without any previous history, leaving the world to thinkers and scholars to wonder as to how such phenomenon could appear suddenly and instantaneously. Unable to understand as to how could nations and languages, all of a sudden throw up great souls, saints, poets and writers with such a momentum that, to whatever distance their thrust reached, smaller insignificant particles were charged to appear as brilliant stars. Ludicrous theories appeared time and again to explain the inexplicable.

Kashmir has been unique in having had two such surprises, two Big bangs, in the personalities of Lalla Arifa¹ and Shaikh-ul Aalam, one following immediately on the heels of the other.

Shaikh-ul Aalam also called Shaikh Noor-ud Din and Nund Resh is remarkable Kashmiri saint who belonged to the Rishi order. He was one of those personalities of the medieval time who had special concern with reforming society and social justice. Born in 1377C.E, corresponding to 799 Hijri in a village called Kaimoh (old name Katimusha) 7Kms to the west of Bijbehara which is 60kms south east of Srinagar of Jammu and Kashmir State. His father was Shaikh Salar-ud Din, his mother Sadra Moji or Sadra Deddi. He was one of those Epoch making personalities, who hailed at time, which could be described as a watershed in the History of Kashmir. It was a period when there was Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir and Islam began to spread rapidly, brought about a great transformation in the life of the people. The cultural contacts that were established with Persia and Turkistan and influx of large number of people from these countries also affected profound social changes. But despite the foreign impact, which was far-reaching, links with the past were not broken, for the Kashmiris refused to give up the beliefs and practices completely. That is why throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries there was a constant conflict between those who wanted to cling to their traditional manner, customs and those who were eager to introduce the perso-islamic way of life². Al Biruni says about this:

“A society based on general consensus is likely to be a society of stable equilibrium. Conflict between different groups and segments or between their views on society as it is and as it should be build up pressure and provides an impetus for change. Competition, pronounced value differences, deep cleavages of interest wide inequalities and a sense of denial and injustice between different groups give rises to conflict, action to resolve these difference leads to change.”³

It is almost a widely accepted fact that Divine guidance had been bestowed upon man from his very creation. Allah did it by His will through His Prophets and Prophet Muhammad (S.AW) in the last of this line. The guidance serves the essence of religion-(Din) for mankind, qur’anicly termed as ‘Islam’. Islam is meant for the total good of mankind. Its principles and precepts are universal and permanent, applicable and adaptive to all times. What affects the continuous realization and expansion of Islam in space and time is, however, related to the nature and degree of human response to it. To what extent man uses his faculties to seek guidance from it to that extent it will get realized and reform his life and society⁴. Shaikh-ul Aalam in the same way used his faculty to analyze the conflict and transition keenly and tried to reform his society according to norms of Islam and cultural needs of the time, and used poetry as medium for the same in local dialect.

1.2 Importance of Shaikh-ul Aalam’s Poetry:

Shaikh’s poetry is germane to the concerns of history considering the fact that his life and the indigenous mystic order of the Rishis founded by him illustrate something of the nature of the crisis through which he was passing and its impact on the social norms and meanings of Islam in the regional context. Indeed, Shaikh-ul Aalam’s verses purport to convey not only certain basic facts about his life, but also certain ideas and concepts which have remained the worldview of Kashmiris, even generations after his death. So, central is the sense of crises and self-awareness evident in his verses that poetry pervasiveness of a vital tradition.

But for understanding the basic components of Kashmiri tradition, it is important to remember that its flowering in the real sense took place in the midst of the traditions set in vogue by the legendary Rishis period mentioned by Shaikh-ul Aalam in his verses, and mystics like Lal Ded, Sayyid Hussain Simnani, Sayyid Ali Hamdani, and Sayyid Muhammad Hamdani. It was also in the midst of these traditions that the formation of the Religious thought of Shaikh-ul Aalam took place. It is also important to remember that for Shaikh-ul Aalam religion was a matter of experience; it was the ‘real’ rather than mere ‘notional’. In Kantian terms his Knowledge began with experience that arose out of experience. An understanding of Shaikh’s thought therefore requires a prior understanding of his religious career.

It may be pointed out at the outset that there is no valid point in rejecting stories about the early life of Shaikh-ul Aalam on the flimsy ground that they “ were weaved to serve as a background-setting for some of his verses.” One of the major drawbacks of historical works has been their authors’ conventional readiness to accept the antinomy between history and poetry and also between folklore and history. What is of relevance to note here is also the historian’s utter disregard of legends? True, one cannot rely on legendary evidence without critical examination will render historical narrative subjective considering the sway of legends over folk consciousness. It is evident that Shaikh’s poetry can act as bridge to verify the medieval history of Kashmir and also provide the real image of His contemporary Kashmiri Society⁵.

2. IDEAL SOCIETY

A just or ideal society is defined as the society which is based on the principles of equality, solidarity among various members of the society and which maintains and understands the dignity and rights of every individual, irrespective of religion, color, creed, caste and gender. The same is based on the freedom of conscience, equality of Mankind and mutual responsibility. So in order to search the concept of justice in the poetry and discourses of the Shaikh- ul Aalam, the above mentioned facts should be kept in mind.

2.1 Rights:

Shaikh -ul Aalam the prominent social reformer of the fifteenth century used his poetry as a tool to spread the true knowledge of Islam, that is message of love, simplicity, tolerance, harmony, fraternity between all human beings irrespective of religion, color ,race, which ultimately lead a struggle against the social injustice and discrimination

prevailing during his times. Shaikh- ul Aalam sought to present the message in an unvarnished color before the unlettered masses. Greek to scholastic niceties of Sanskrit and Persian languages, Shaikh knew that common people could better understand the fundamentals of Islam in a local dialect as against the elite Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian medium⁶. Being conscious of the role of mother tongue in the context of religio- cultural movement, Shaikh ul-Aalam with an objective to acquaint common masses fundamentals of his message used the vernacular language for this purpose⁷.

I. *Zakr awraad udawiu wazeef aisi*

Haki kus karith chai sit man

Kari khuth yudwai insaaf aisi

Tamai sith lagi imaan⁸

If you persistently repeat the prescribed zikr (prescribed recitation)

No one can compete with you in being the true believer

If you value justice higher than the piety

Then you will leave the world as true believe

II. *Kandui maih zaig lukhindis haqus*

Munafaqus ladnai buuir

Duzquin narus lagnai pakaas

Adna pakusfuakh yai chaipur⁹

Tempted to usurp rights of the people

Loads thyself with huge burden of sins

Thou you will be put to the flames of hell

Your foul smell shall spread around

The shaikh -ul Aalam wanted to convey the following message in the above verses (Shruks)

The discipline in one's life style comes alone with conscious awareness of discharging his liabilities he owes to his society. Usurpation of rights of others is hypocrisy, which burdens the hypocrite with loads of sins.

The Shaikh- ul Aalam conveys that all ills and sins emanate from social injustice. It is by this single act of derailment one gets lost in confusion. Such usurper emerges ultimately as a hypocrite, which leads him to the deterrent punishment in the world hereafter. In this world also he gets widely defamed¹⁰.

2.2 Equality of Mankind: Equality of mankind is the cardinal aspect of ideal society and Shaikh- ul Aalam clearly emphasizes it in most of his poetry. Shaikh-ul Aalam's message was not confined to one race or one class but addressed to mankind as a whole. Shaikh -ul Aalam did not approve division of society on the basis of socio-religious status; instead he advocated total surrender before Allah and is compassionate to all His creatures. There was not even a slice of space in his social thought which would approve the negative devices of exploiting agencies. Wherever Shaikh -ul Aalam went, he had ridiculed the oppressive forces and agents and associated himself with downtrodden, unheard and unprivileged people. Shaikh- ul Aalam vehemently revolted the institution of priesthood that created a division between clergy and the common people on the basis of caste and pedigree. Shaikh -ul Aalam made a clean sweep of such doctrine and threw open door to spiritual opportunity for one and all by expounding the Qur'an concept of dignity of man in a number of verses. Man's pedigree was not being esteemed since it generated pride not worthy of a true servant of Allah. Nobility of birth didn't guarantee nobility of mind; on contrary, it guarded the wretched and even fools to covet honor not by their own virtue but only because of merit of the ancestors. The contempt in which the common man was held by the Brahmans is sure to have struck the socially alert soul of Shaikh ul-Aalam. In order to tame the ferocity or their pride he challenged the concept of purity of Brahman's birth in terms of the Tawhidic humanism and universalism.¹¹ Shaikh-ul Aalam condemns caste system and highlights in his poetry that Adam is the progenitor of human race and differentiating people on caste

and color is superficial. He clearly emphasizes in his poetry that any who believes in caste system in bereft of reasons and wisdom. He vehemently criticizes selfish Mullah (superficial religious men) and other Pseudo scholars of Islam who wanted to exploit the masses and try to tarnish the fair image of Islam. Shaikh-ul Aalam deliberates and expounds the moral preaching as a base for the upliftment of man and harmonious living. He clearly defines social justice as the most balanced synthesis of human freedom, brotherhood, equality and which embodies the attributes of benevolence, providence and justice.

I. *Hadhrat baba Adam moulai*

Amui hawa taiti aiu

Ad kat dumb watul churulo

Kalus hamkul kyah haidui¹²

Adam is the progenitor of the human race

From him came wife, our mother Eve

From where have the low castes descended?

How can a high born call the low born badly?

He also relates the equality of human beings with the three forms of water (snow, ice and water) the source of which is same.

II. *Yaikh tul katurti sheen*

Tim buin buin kar padi aishan

Yamut paikh aftarbuch parui

Tamut tranvani kuni aku gui¹³

Ice, frozen water and snow seem three different entities

But God created all the three from a single source only,

The moment they get exposed to warm sunlight

They get melted into water which is the source of all.

Shaikh -ul Aalam also relate the equality of mankind with the soil which is the basic material for the whole mankind and to whom to meet with after death

III. *Adam wapdui maichai*

Maichai hund kar gandith kahth

Sarai naimch wapdain maichai

Ranan maichai hindain banan kahith

Zui chal nairith mur maichi maichai

Maichai maich gachi miylith kahth¹⁴

Man was made from the earth only

And his from case is in the earth

Out of the earth itself grow all the bounties

In earthenware do we cook our food?

Body is consigned to earth when soul leaves it

And earth gets mixed with earth for good

2.3 Social solidarity:

It is social cohesion based upon the dependence individuals have on each other in more advanced societies. Although individuals perform different tasks and often have different values and interest, the order and very solidarity of society depends on their reliance on each other to perform their specified tasks. Organic here is referring to the interdependence of component parts. Thus social solidarity is maintained in more complex societies through the interdependence of its component parts (e.g., farmers produce the food to feed the factory workers who produce the Machines that allow the farmer to produce the food. Simply social solidarity is a set of norms, values and morals that hold a certain group of people together¹⁵.

Social solidarity is the integration of various members of a society within a society. Social solidarity makes a society easy, to work within a given framework of a social norm. It is of the basic foundation on which an ideal society can be framed without any slice of social injustice.

Below are the verses of Shaikh ul-Aalam which depicts the concept of social solidarity.

I. *panchan shaiyn ti kahan*

Sui paan kahain dihth nabr drauw

Yudwai sari aik wati maukham asahan

Ad mah raihai kah gau¹⁶

Let not split thy deca configuration into numerical digits

Let thou prove thy worth to the standards of a touchstone.

Thou shall be firm thy defined route and track

Thus shall not thou redo the faults of aspirants in watch of kine?

II. *Dunaihus aiyi baiji baiji*

Samith karhui baiji waith

Brukuin aichan gui moul ti muoji

Wachith gachi wanigi nil waidt¹⁷

Companions unto each other did we remain in this world

Desiring to live as fellow travellers

Secluded am I by death from dear parents before me.

See not thou how flint- hearted are I!

2.4 Mutual responsibility: Islam legislate the concept of mutual responsibility in society in all shapes and forms, these forms take their rise from the basic principle that there is an all embracing identity of purpose between the individual and society, and that life in its fullness is interrelated.

The concept of mutual responsibility was clearly interpreted by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) on the occasion of Farwell Hajj, he said, “your lives and properties are forbidden to one another till you meet your lord on the Day of resurrection. Allah had laid down in the Qur’an, anyone who kills a believer deliberately, as his reward to live in the hell for ever. Allah will be angry with him and prepare a dreadful torment for him”¹⁸.

Shaikh- ul Aalam was the preacher of the Islamic faith and man of great vision who clearly understands the fact and taught the concept of mutual responsibility in the simple language which are as:

I. *Doud trawith yuis ab mandai*

Sui samsarus kandai zau

Pertain ti panus yus huivi wandai

Suiyabai saaunday traith draw¹⁹

One who churns water instead of milk?

He is born fool in this entire world

One who always helps his friends and foes?

He is the luckiest man in the universe

II. *Panus maul karnai haray*

Siati baiyis karni maan maan

Darug zain trawith suzan garai

Ratus duhus waraiy paan

Per ti paan saidrus tarai

Sui dapzi mussalman²⁰

One who does not pride on thy Self

One who does not compete on the pity things?

One who struggling for realizing his self

One who helps everyone to live a peaceful life?

Who is the real Musalman

Shaikh-ul Aalam explained that basic social obligations are not be neglected even after a complete surrender to divine obligations. He also mentions quality social order and personal relations in such a manner which leads to proper contentment with God²¹.

2.5 Charity (Zakat):

The most exceptionally remarkable institution and major pillar of Islam is zakat. To Qur'anic word zakat and the meaning it conveys, there is no equivalent in any other language. It is not just a form of charity or alms-giving or tax or tithe. Nor it is simply an expression of kindness; It is all of these combines and much more. It is not merely a deduction of a certain percentage from one's property, but an abundant enrichment and spiritual investment. It is not simply a voluntary contribution to someone or some cause, nor a government tax that a shrewd clever person can get away with. Rather, it is a duty enjoined by Allah and undertaken by Muslims in the interest of society as a whole.

Zakat mitigates to a minimum the sufferings of the needy and poor-members of society. It is a most comforting consolation to the less fortunate people, yet it is a loud appeal to everybody to roll up his sleeves and improve his lot. To the needy, it means that it is by nature an emergency measure and that he should not depend on it completely, but must do something for himself as well as for others. To the contributor, it is a warm invitation to earn more. To all parties concerned, it is, directly as well as indirectly an open treasure for spiritual investment that compensates abundantly.

Zakat is a healthy form of internal security against selfish, greed and social dissension, against the intrusion and penetration of subversive ideologies. It is an effective instrument in cultivating the spirit of social responsibility on the part of the contributor, and the feeling of security and belonging on the part of the recipient.

Zakat is a vivid manifestation of the spiritual and humanitarian spirit of responsive interactions between the individual and society. It is a sound illustration of the fact that though Islam does not hinder private enterprise or condemn private possessions, yet it does not tolerate selfish and greedy capitalism. It is an expression of the general philosophy of Islam which adopts a moderate and middle, but positive and effective course, between the individual and the society, between the citizen and the State, between Capitalism and Socialism, between materialism and spirituality. Zakat, according to the Qur'an, has been a pillar of true religion preached by all the prophets of Allah (2:83, 21:73) and so is it a pillar of Islam, the religion of the last Prophet of Allah. It is as essential for one who joins the fold of Islam as bearing witness to the truth

of faith (iman) or prayer (Nimaz). It has been mentioned constantly with prayer (Salat) some thirty-seven times in the Qur'an and both of them have been described with full emphasis as essentials of Islam, without which there can be salvation. Zakat is not only for the good of society; it is also necessary for the moral development and edification of the giver himself as well as for his own purification and salvation. It is not only a tax, but also an act of worship just like prayer and, above all, it is an essential part of that programme which the Qur'an prescribes for amelioration of man's soul (3:92).

Shaikh-ul Aalam teaches this to the unlettered masses in the following verses:

I. *Kandaui kaurath mainui manui*

Kahchai ditiu tahzai watay

Chaui nau kasihind kahnaui chanui

Wah zaiu payas pataui²²

*You always claimed your rights over things,
Without giving in charity or in the name of God
You belong to none, and no one belongs to you,
It is due to your own deeds, retrieve yourself my soul.*

II. *Yaim paras waip karan karnto*

Barn buhchihus warditim chui shah

Pardain muhim yaim panus hainto

Chaintui rathi kahch chaintuh wah²³

*Those who help down-trodden and strangers too,
And feed all hungry are virtually the crown of creation.
Those who share the difficulties and hardships of others,
They are truly great and elevated among people.*

III. *fahl hai waiwakh dah fahl baunay*

Dawalat bartal waubri nah zaih

Kha daih dutui kharchus kataui

Naiki karkh rawi nah zaih²⁴

*If you sow a seed it will yield the crop ten times,
If you spend wealth it will never get exhausted.
God gave you wealth so that you spend it (for needy),
If you do good deeds, your efforts will not go in vain.*

IV. *saiikh yan muil kus kari rupaisinz wairun*

Thuinakh bahshat kain hurain manz

Mujahidun tarkati salah puran

Nainakh madinn kain bhudiran manz²⁵

*Generous will be rewarded not in terms of money,
They will be placed in the gardens of paradise*

Martyrs will be dressed in arms (of virtues and piety)

They will be coupled with the Martyrs of Madina.

3. CONCLUSION

Shaikh- ul Aalam devoted his life to the missionary activities and made the Islam comprehensible to the unlettered and uneducated agriculturalists, that ever since preserved the tradition of his visits in one form or the other. His verses became the best vehicle for inculcating in the common masses the true spirit of Islam: submission, dependence on Allah, obedience, contemplation, dedication and a fulfillment of the duties of fellowship. He set forth in simple and straight forward language the essential doctrines of Islam and without making them sound too doctrinal and philosophical made these doctrines accessible to the commoners in their own medium. In his verses we hear the voice of a teacher addressing his disciples and expounding for their benefit the truth that he had learnt through deep study and introspection. Shaikh-ul Aalam revolutionized the spirit and soul of Kashmir. This revolution itself carved out a culture of forbearance, tolerance, adherence to the truth, belief in monotheism, equal love for men of Allah, keen interest in development of hospitality, and sympathy with one another²⁶.

Thus main desire of Shaikh- ul Aalam was to transmit the real message of social reformation and its social dynamics which stood for classless and casteless society free of exploitation and religious discord.²⁷ Shaikh- ul Aalam played a central role within the framework of a cognitive, moral and social order. He defined and recorded the life-world of the followers of the Rishi order, requiring of them not only devotion to Allah but patterns of social behavior. In fact, love of life, love of Allah, and love of His creatures are deep rooted in most of his verses characterized by all-embracing perspective²⁸.

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