Chapter 2

Amir Kabir Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Kashmir: Studying the Role and Impact

The teachings and blessings of the lives of great sufis and saints like Bahauddin Zakaria, Sayyid Ali Hujveri, Khwaja Moeenuddin Chishti, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Sayyid Ali Hamadani and other great Sufis enabled the people of India and Pakistan to benefit from the teachings of Islam\(^1\).

Out of these Sayyid Ali Hamdani gave special importance to the valley of Kashmir. It is said that due to the history of Kashmiri rulers which included Mauryas, Kushans, Sultans, Mughals, Afghans and so on the religious conditions of the valley were highly disturbed. These empires not only ruled the place but produced a great number of philosophers, saints and sages as well. To point to a few amdhimati (a contemporary of Christ) and Naga Rjuna, one of the founders of the Mahayara Buddhism may be mentioned\(^2\).

Before the advent of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani in Kashmir, the valley was engulfed in Brahmanical idolatory and other non-Islamic practices.

---

\(^1\) Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Javid Nama, Iteqad Publishing House, Delhi, (Kuliyat), Lahore, 1973.

Although Islam had reached the valley quite earlier but it was not practically followed anywhere.

According to the legends, Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani was a world traveler and historians like Muhiud Din Sufi\(^1\) and Muhibul Hassan\(^2\) agree with them, both relying on Miskin\(^3\) agree on the fact that Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani visited Kashmir three times, in 774/1372-73, 781/1379-80 and 785/1383-84. However, there is no mention of any activity of Hamadani during his first two visits.

It is said that Shah-i-Hamadan visited Kashmir along with 700 Saadat and normally geographers, historians, academicians all mention two important reasons for his visit to Kashmir.

The first reason, which is widely acknowledged, elaborates that Shah-i-Hamadan was highly influenced by the Naqshbandi order from the beginning. But the keen interest and participation of Naqshbandis in the then politics made the Saiyyids of Hamadan to reject the rulership of Timur\(^4\). Consequently, Timur with his rising power crushed all coming into his way.

\(^3\) *Tarikh-i-Kabir*, p. 12, 14, 92; Jonaraja, *Rajatarangani*, p. 47.

\(^4\) By 1370, Timur has established as the undisputed ruler of Samarkand and Bukhara, and was extending his power in the neighbouring countries with a terrible speed. He conquered Balkh (1369), Khurasan (1369-80) and Heart (1380). Meanwhile, he was also making preparations to occupy Persia.
and somehow Shah-i-Hamadan alongwith his 700 Saadat fled for safety and entered Kashmir in 1379 as refugees

It is also said that Shah-i-Hamadan had earlier sent one of his Saadats Taj al-Din to make grounds for the visit of Shah-i-Hamadan himself so that they could enlighten the people of the valley with the message of Islam.

R.K.Parmu records the second important reason as an escape of many including Saiyyids from Persia out of the fear of a disease. The Muslim ruler Sultan Qutb ud-Din received the group warmly and made all comfortable arrangements for them out of his Sultanate.

---

1 P.N.K. Bamzai says that it was the first visit. R.K.Parmu, History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir, Janta Publications, New Delhi, 1969, p. 103, mentions that it was the second one; whereas Mohibul Hasan, Kashmir under the Sultans (Urdu), Delhi, 1974, p. 56, refers to it as the third one.

2 A. U. Mir, op. cit., p.49.

3 R.K.Parmu, op. cit., p. 112.

4 The Black Death’ was the most devastating of many out-breaks of plague. Although its origins are uncertain, it is believed to have come from the Far East and to have been carried Westward to Europe by merchants, pilgrims and other travelers. It spread especially fast along the sea trade routes, transmitted by the fleas of rats in board ship. The particular virulence of this epidemic may have been due to the presence of the more deadly pneumonic variety of plague, the only form that can be directly transmitted from one human to another (by sneezing, for example). It is estimated that as much as one-third of the population of Europe and the near East died as a result of this outbreak in less that twenty years. The above mentioned description of the Black Death that began in mid-14th century, leaves one in no doubt that Persia which falls in Near East and was close to both the silk route as well as sea route, might have also experienced the effect of this great human tragedy.

Shah-i-Hamadan was known for his outstanding spiritual energy which was so strong that he could bring all the people of the Valley into the fold of Islam\(^1\).

In this very context Allama Iqbal said about Shah-i-Hamadan, “the leader of the leaders, Commender of the non-Arab Muslims: his hands were the builders of the fate of Islamic Communities”\(^2\). Shah-i-Hamadan based his teachings on the concepts of Tawheed, Taqwa, Ikhlas and Unity\(^3\).

Shah-i-Hamadan also known as Amir-i-Kabir\(^4\) laid immense and profound impact on Kashmir; its economy, society and culture. The influence of Shah-i-Hamadan is also deeply engrossed in the lives of the people of the valley that still people of Kashmir read and understand the tenets of Islam on the lines marked by Shah-i-Hamadan which had already been drawn by the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS)\(^5\).

Even before his entry, many other Muslim missionaries tried to inspire the people and more specifically Sultans\(^6\). Bulbulshah\(^7\), a Muslim missionary of great repute was not able to popularize the faith; although he succeeded in

---

1 S. M. Saeed, \textit{op. cit.}, p.129.  
2 Dr. G.M.D. Sufi, \textit{Kashir}, Lahore, 1948.  
3 Sayyid Ali Hamadani, \textit{Zakhiratul Muluk}, Lahore, 1321 AH.  
5 \textit{Islam in the Modern Age: Problems and Prospects}, Iqbal Institute, Kashmir University, Srinagar, pp. 209-10.  
7 Abdul Ahad, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
acquiring state patronage for the new faith by successfully converting King Rinchina to his creed.

It is a recorded fact that due to the single efforts of Hamadani and his Saadats, he transformed Kashmiris to new pattern of life. It is also a remarkable fact that inspite of the apparent hardships of the people emersed in polytheism he succeeded in spreading the blessings of Islam and there is no denying the fact that his hands were the builders of the fate of Islamic communities. Credit goes to Shah-e-Hamadan that he established a model Islamic Society wherever he went, particularly in Kashmir valley.

Shah-i-Hamadan opened a new chapter in the history of Kashmir with over 37000 conversions to Islam within a short span of time. Since Shah-i-Hamadan was a great scholar, he being the theologian, sociologist, proved a genius by contributing profusely on varied subjects like ethics, science, philosophy, jurisprudence, theology, poetry and prose.

Saiyyid Ali Hamadani’s impact is quite clear on the economy, culture and society of the valley because the economy was declining due to the failed political policies; wrong taxation policies; feudal system; reduced participation in agriculture and degradation in morals. The rulers and subjects were disintegrated and foreign forces were intensifying the confusion by forcibly owing the state land.

---

1 S. M. Saeed, op. cit., p. 129.
2 P. N. K. Bamzai, op. cit., pp. 483-84.
4 Kalhana, op. cit., p. 273.
The end of the 10th century A.D., thus, saw the socio-political equilibrium of the valley so intensely disturbed that life became extremely difficult and after the Mongol invasion, "Kashmir became almost a region before creation; a vast field with few men without food and full of grass".

Even after 1320 the newly established Sultanate was disturbed at all ends and was not able to devise alternate modes of living besides failed in renovating the economic system of the valley.

Thus the conditions prevailing in Kashmir were favourable enough for the assertion of Shah-i-Hamadan and his ideology which he brought from Central Asia in the shape of Islam. His creed filled the religious and ideological void which had been created by frustrating socio-economic situation prevailing in the valley at that time.

Shah-i-Hamadan was quite aware of the benefits of the trade, commerce and other means of earning livelihood. So he introduced the pattern prevailing in then Central Asia. Shah-i-Hamadan’s keen interest inspired Sultan Qutb ud Din (1374-1389) to introduce modes of life befitting the Muslim court and society. The Sultan therefore earnestly strove to re-model the socio-economic

---

1 Ibid., pp. 304-308.
2 Abdul Ahad, op. cit., p. 2.
3 Idem
5 Idem
6 P. N. K. Bamzai, op. cit., pp. 531-36.
system of Kashmir which had brought ample material prosperity to that region\textsuperscript{1}.

This modeling was based primarily on introduction of arts and craft, a technique in Central Asia, and secondarily on the mineral resources and renovated irrigation system meant to improve the lot of the masses\textsuperscript{2}.

Shah-i-Hamadan made Sultan Qutb al-Din to start the shawl industry in Kashmir on the pattern of Central Asian \textit{Karkhana}\textsuperscript{3}. This way he reorganized the industry system\textsuperscript{4} in Kashmir, thereby bringing the economic lines of the people on the growing front and restructuring the Kashmiri society under the influence of Islam\textsuperscript{5}.

He shaped the economic system on the concept of labour division and apart from employing skilled labour, these Karkhanas imparted training to Kashmiris in various techniques of manufacturing what was required by the people\textsuperscript{6}.

Now after production, the goods were to be distributed and the \textit{Karkhanas} necessitated the establishment of markets which further intensified the process of urbanization and gave impetus to trade and commerce. This was the real turning point in the history because markets had no existence before

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 532.
\item[2] Dr. Abdul Ahad, \textit{op. cit.}, p.162.
\item[4] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 442.
\item[5] Dr. Abdul Ahad, \textit{op. cit.}, p.163.
\item[6] Abdul Ahad, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 53, 66.
\end{footnotes}
since there were no such commodities available. Steadily, the markets gained popularity because of the highly skilled commodities and the volume of trade increased with every passing day. This resulted not only in example material prosperity of the people but also in considerable artistic activity which ultimately, especially in the reign of Sultan Zain al-Abidin, attracted the attention of foreign customers. Consequently the valley began exporting its products to foreign countries where Kashmir's craftsmanship excited wonder and evoked tremendous praise and appreciations.

Shah-i-Hamadan also introduced the concept of Muslim architecture by constructing Khanqahs, mosques and tombs on the pattern, which was totally new to Kashmir. This also enhanced the opportunities for employment.

Thus the Karkhana system and the Muslim architecture adopted by the Sultans under the influence of Hazrat Syed Ali made it easier for artisans and craftsmen to earn their livelihood and sustain themselves more comfortably and honourably than their predecessors in the field.

It was not only that the introduction of new patterns of earning livelihood was taken care of but the agricultural, irrigational and industrial system was also revived by introducing new techniques. The canals were dug to meet the irrigational requirements which otherwise had made people to quit

---

1 Islam in the Modern Age: Problems and Prospects, op. cit., p. 213.
2 Idem
3 G.M.D. Sufi, op. cit., pp. 358-60.
4 Dr. Abdul Ahad, op. cit., p.164.
5 Idem
agriculture. Among other land reforms mention must be made of reduction in taxes\(^1\) which used to be so heavy as not to allow Kashmiris to afford an essential commodity like salt\(^2\). It was after Shah-i-Hamadan’s successful economic strategies that unlike other Muslim missionaries, Islam was popularized in the valley with more vigour and enthusiasm. Only when Kashmiris realized these benefits, of Shah-i-Hamadan's strategy, directly affecting their day-to-day life that they accepted Islam as their faith\(^3\).

Shah-i-Hamadan’s impact was profound in the valley because of the unity that he stressed a lot with the result of which his team was dedicated for the cause of Islam\(^4\). Some prominent and important members of his team included Khwaja Ishaq Khatlani, an ‘\textit{alim}, to whom Saiyid wedded his own daughter\(^5\); Shaykh Qawam-al-Din; Saiyid Hussain Simnani\(^6\) who is said to have accompanied Tajj-ud-Din\(^7\) before the visit of Shah-i-Hamadan to Kashmir and is said to have influenced Sultan Shihab-ud-Din\(^8\) (1354-73) and Sultan Qutb-ud-Din\(^9\) (1373-89); Saiyid Kamal, who taught Shariat to Sultan Qutb-ud-Din, Saiyid Jamal al-Din who was a Muhaddith\(^10\); Muhammad

\(^1\) G.M.D. Sufi, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 358-60.
\(^2\) \textit{Idem}
\(^3\) Dr. Abdul Ahad, \textit{op. cit.}, p.164.
\(^5\) Mohi ud Din \textit{Miskin, op. cit.}, p. 82.
\(^8\) P. N. K. Bamzai, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 315.
\(^10\) A person with sufficient knowledge about the traditions of the Prophet (SAW).
Kazim also known as Saiyid Qazi emerged as Chief Librarian: Saiyid Muhammad Baihaqi; Saiyid Muhammad Ainposh, Saiyid Baha-ud-Din and Saiyid Muhammad Balkhi.

Shah-i-Hamadan’s team was full of intellectuals, Ulama, artisans, craftsmen and other technical personalities who besides religious ideals brought economic prosperity of Kashmir.

The team was peaceful¹ and all historians are sure of the fact that none used any means of violence or power to spread the message of Islam. Although they had been able to maintain healthy relations with the rulers but they never rendered to the military or forcible assistance, which otherwise they could easily adopt.

With the decreasing economy of the valley, the people were getting involved in morally corrupt practices like prevalence of castes and sub-castes in society, exploitation of common people at the hands of the traditional Brahmin, frequent inter and intra group civil wars between various sections of society, confusing faiths and lawlessness prevailed in the society which had practically rendered had rendered common people helpless. Common man was eager for a healthy change² in the system and thus the percentage of people coming to Islam was increasing which was a milestone to achieve in the 14th

---

century because the tide of history of Kashmir was now in the hands of Muslims.

Sayyid Ali Hamadani did not confine his assistance and message to downtrodden and Muslims alone but he equally attracted the privileged class of the society including Sultans, nobles, Brahms and some non-Muslims specifically Hindus.

Shah-i-Hamadan was held with great reverence by Sultan Qutb al-Din in and outside his court but there is not a single evidence mentioning direct or indirect participation of Shah-i-Hamadan in politics. Although it is said that he laid great impact on the Sultans through timely teachings, advices, theories, justifications, decisions and principles of Quran and Sunnah. To some writers this is the reasons that Shah-i-Hamadan devoted major part of Zakirat al-Muluk for the discussion of Islamic politics.

Shah-i-Hamadan’s mission was successful because of his personal practical life which was full of integrity and truthfulness. He was a great profounder of earning one’s own livelihood and rejected the traditional means of a patronage and support open to religious men. This has evidence

---

2 Ibid., p. 114.
5 Hakim S. M. Kamaluddin Hussain, Sahib-i-Muwaddatul Quraba, Nasik, 1984, p. 12; K. A. Nizami, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics during the First half of Thirteenth Century, Delhi, p. 240.
when he rejected the idea of charity for religious men or orders because he hated the concept of parasitology and himself earned his living by cap-making and encouraged his *murids* (followers) to do the same\(^1\). He desisted from staying away from the society and feared that isolation would stop him from spreading the message of Islam to common man. He was himself also an expert *sozan kari* (needle worker)\(^2\). He is credited with the establishment of handicraft industry in Kashmir. When he came to Kashmir he brought along with him hundreds of disciples who were painters, calligraphers, shawl-makers, etc\(^3\). There is no mention, for example, of the shawl industry before the time of Hamadani\(^4\).

Hamadani's influence is also said to have on the famous Kashmiri poetess and mystic Lala Ded born in the middle of 14th century A.D.\(^5\) It is recorded that due to Hamadani's influence she rejected the caste-system and criticized idolatory\(^6\). Hamadani's influence is evident in her assertion that asceticism was not necessary for intimacy with Allah; householder could achieve this as well as a hermit, provided he performed his duties selflessly\(^7\).


\(^2\) *Idem*

\(^3\) Rashid Nazki, *Tammaduni Zindagi main Sadat ka Hissa, Hamara Adab - J&K Academy of Arts, Srinagar*, pp. 194-95.

\(^4\) Mohibul Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 262.


\(^7\) *Ibid.*, p. 239.
Hamadani introduced the concept of *dhikr* in the valley, which was a step to bring different sections of the society together without reference to their wealth and property. It is also noted that Sultan Sikander (1389-1413 A.D.) under the influence of Hamadani (born in 1372 A.D.) banned all intoxicants, the customs of 'Sutee' and other evil social practices in Kashmir¹.

Historians also note that Sultan Qutubud Din (1373-1389)² who had married two sisters in contravention of the Shariat, went to the extent of divorcing one of them at the urging of Hamadani³. Further at the instance of Shah-i-Hamadan, Sultan Shihabud Din established the first Madrasatul Quran. Schools were also established to teach the basics of Islam in important villages of Kashmir⁴. According to sufi, "under the influence of the great Syed, the Sultan (Qutubuddin) devoted time to meditation and prayer and became a great Sufi poet. Farishta says that Sultan Qutubuddin was remarkable for his keen interest in public business, which he personally transacted in person and generally with justice and moderation"⁵.

We also know that Sultan Sikander (1389-1413), who succeeded Qutubuddin was, as a result of Hamadani's writings, more inclined towards religion than many of his predecessors. He attempted to introduce Shariat law

---

² Shamsuddin Ahmad, "Hazrat Shah Hamadan ke Char Khutut - Chand Badshahon ke Nam", *Danish*, Srinagar, 1993, pp. 6, 9.
n his Sultanate\textsuperscript{1}. Hamadani was, at the same time, careful about keeping a personal distance from State to preserve his independence. When Sultan Qutubuddin invited him to stay with him in 1378, he declined and stayed in a sarai (resting place) till such time as his murids (followers) built him a suffa (plinth) after which he began living there\textsuperscript{2}. Hamadani's Dhakirat ul-Muluk was a favourite book with the scholars during the pre-Mughal period in India\textsuperscript{3}. This is borne out of the fact that most of the orientalist libraries contain manuscript copies of Dhakirat ul-Muluk while this is not the case as far as Fatawa-i-Jahandari, or the Fatawa-i-Firoz Shahi is concerned. The copy available in the National Museum, New Delhi, bears the seal of Aurengzeb's Qadiu'l Qadat, which shows that the Qadi had the book in his personal collection. Its importance illustrated by the number of languages that it was translated into.

One of the Hamadani's impact of great significance was the emergence of a network of Khanqahs which served as great centers of proselytisation especially at Hindu rich centers like Pampore, Awantipora, Bijbihara, Shahabad and Tral and which still exist at these places.

The local response to Hamadani's teachings came in the form of emergence of an indigenous religious order, the rishism. The following verses

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Idem}
\textsuperscript{2} Mohibul Hasan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{3} G. M. D. Sufi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 90.
of Shaikh Nur ud-Din (Nund Rishi) the founder of this order, bear testimony to the influence of Hamadani and his son Mir Muhammad Hamadani¹.

*The first rishi was Prophet Muhammad (SAW)*

*The second in order was Hadrat Ovais*

*The third Rishi was Zulkhi Rishi*

*The fourth in order was Hadrat Pilas*

*The fifth was Rum Rishi*

*The sixth in order was Hadrat Miran*

*The seventh (me) is miscalled a Rishi*

*Do I deserve to be called a Rishi?*

*What is my name?*

Allama Iqbal beautifully pays tributes to Hamadani and declares him chief of Sadat and maker of the destiny of the Muslim Ummah².

In fact the increased cultural contacts between Central Asia and Kashmir during the medieval period were largely result of the missionary activities of Sufi saints from Persia and Central Asia like Saiyyid Ali Hamadani, Bulbul Shah, Mir Shamsuddin and many others³. Hamadani's singular achievement was to rescue Sufism in the valley from other

---

worldliness and quitism. His influence continues to be felt more than six hundred years after his death.