



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 8.4  
IJAR 2021; 7(6): 44-47  
[www.allresearchjournal.com](http://www.allresearchjournal.com)  
Received: 11-04-2021  
Accepted: 15-05-2021

**Sumaira Jan**  
Research Scholar,  
Department of Humanities and  
Languages, Rabindranath  
Tagore University, Bhopal,  
Madhya Pradesh, India

## Evolution of rituals in Kashmir: A case study of Khanqah-e-Moullah

**Sumaira Jan**

### Abstract

The Kashmir Valley is considered to be the centre of Sufi traditions. The Sufi traditions, on the one hand, represent the success of Islam as well as creating a niche for itself, while on the other, the ritual components associated with these traditions are condemned as 'puritanical' examples of contemporary Islam. However, these become helpful for the scholars who analyse and identify various elements of the process through these rituals by which the people of the Valley accepted Islam. In this context, the paper attempts to analyse the evolution of the rituals in the valley of Kashmir in the context of Khanqah-e-Moulla. The paper also investigates historical analysis of Khanqah-e-Moulla and the beginning of rituals in Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Rituals in Kashmir, Khanqah-e-Moullah

### Introduction

The Khanqah-e-Moulla was constructed in the memory of Sufi saint Mir Ali Hamdan by Sultan Sikander in 1395 and later reconstructed in 1732. Mir Syed Ali Hamdan's stay in Kashmir is considered to be the instrumental in spreading the message of Islam in Kashmir. It is believed that this Khanqah contains "the Secret of Allah". This shrine is an excellent example of wood architecture which not only draws inspiration from the Islamic styles but also from the Bhuddist and Hindu Styles as well. This indicates the syncretic culture of Kashmir.

Although the first Khanqah was founded by Sultan Sadruddin in the honour of his spiritual teacher, Shaikh Sharafuddin Suharwardi, alis Bulbul Shah at Bulbul Lankar in Srinagar, but this Khanqah could not attract as many devotees as the Khanqah-e-Moulla of Mir Sayyid ali Hamadani.

The prominence of Khanqah-e-Moulla among the people of Kashmir is signified by the very name given to it. The Khanqah-e-Moulla played a vital role during the formative stages of Islam in Kashmir and no other Khanqah achieves such prominence among the local populace as that of Khanqah-e-Moulla. There are certain factors that contributed to such popularity of Khanqah-e-Moulla. This is the abode of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani popularly known in Kashmir as Shah-i-Hamadan. Such is the devotion of people in Kashmir towards Shah-i-Hamadan that Prof. Shamsuddin Ahmed remarks that "It was a divine act that Saiyid Ali was Not buried in Kashmir (his tomb is in Khatlan in present day Transoxiana), or he would have been worshipped as God himself".

The popularity of Khanqah-e-Moulla is not only because of the spiritual personality and historical role of Shah-i-Hamadan but more importantly with the place he stayed at during his stay in Kashmir. This has become a place of reverence and holiness for the murshids of Saiyid Ali Hamadan for there is something sacred about it in the minds of his devotees hence the reason for revered Sufi's abode becoming an object of veneration. It is incredible that the rituals that first evolved at the shrine of Shah-i-Hamadan are focused on the place sanctified by him.

### Historical Overview of Khanqah-e-Moulla

The Khanqah-e-Moulla is primarily a mosque where people have been offering regular prayers since the very day of its foundation. A temple formerly occupied the place where its edifice stands today. Sultan Qutubuddin (1373-1389 A.D.) utilized the stones of the temple

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Sumaira Jan**  
Research Scholar,  
Department of Humanities and  
Languages, Rabindranath  
Tagore University, Bhopal,  
Madhya Pradesh, India

to make a kind of platform. A special chamber for Sayyid Ali Hamadani was constructed on its northern corner. Initially, the neo converts to Islam, led by their preceptor Sayyid Ali, offered prayers five times a day on this stony platform. In 795 A. H. (1392 A. D) Sayyid Ali Hamadani's son, Mir Muhammad came to Kashmir and stopped at this place. He granted permission to Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413 A.D.) to raise walls on the flat raised structure. Thus the platform raised in the presence of Saiyid Ali Hamadani remained unaltered and an imposing superstructure was erected upon it in a new form. Primarily, it was a single storey structure and the work was completed in two years. Mir Muhammad Hamadani was of a royal descent and hence the mosque was constructed at his own expenses. In addition to it, he also purchased the land adjoining both sides of the Khanqah-e-Moulla. He bestowed a gem of Badakshan to Sultan Sikandar. The Sultan, in return, out of the three parganas of Shavar, Martand and Wular, donated the three villages of Wachi, Nunvani and Tral for its maintenance. The tax which was collected from these villages was to be appropriated for the developmental works and maintenance on the Khanqah-e-Moulla as well as the langar. Moreover, the helpers were supported financially for the rest of their lives out of the income that was generated. Maulana Saiyid Ali was appointed its trustee (Sajjada nishin).

The management of the affairs of the Khanqah-e-Moulla was carried on in an efficient manner. However, there were some sorts of shortcomings when Sultan Hasan Shah (1472-1484 A.D.), the great grandson of Sultan Sikandar, in 885 A. H. had to re-purchase the surrounding land. Again, in 887 A. H. 1482 A. D., Salih, the queen of Sultan Muhammad Shah and the sister of Kaji Chak, acquired the suburbs and re-wrote the Waqfnama. In order to safeguard the rights of the Khanqah-e-Moulla, from any interference in the future by the authorities of the time, she got the waqfnama signed by the Sultan and thus attested and confirmed it officially. This Waqfnama was delivered to Saiyid Muhammad, the superintendent. The Waqf seems to have been a precautionary measure against the high handedness of the Chaks or to thwart their activities against the *Khanqah-e-Moulla* and prevent it from mismanagement. It could also have been a revival of the old Waqfnama that might have lost its significance. In 1480 A.D., Allaudinpur went up in flames. The Khanqah-e-Moulla was also scorched. Sultan Hasan Shah requisitioned the entire area. The Khanqah was rebuilt keeping its earlier base intact. Qazi Hamiduddin, the father of Qazi Ibrahim penned its date in these words:

It comes to 885 A.H. 1480 A.D. In 885 A. H., the roof of the mosque caught fire. Restoration work was carried out with the support of Queen Salih. Another storey was added to the Khanqah. The date of completion of the project is that corresponds to 899 A.H. 1493 A.D. In 971 A. H., Hussain Shah (1563-1570 A.D.), the Chak ruler, took possession of the jagir of the *Khanqah-e-Moulla*. But a threatening letter from the Mughal emperor Akbar kept his intentions under restraint. It is stated that Saiyid Ali, one of the descendants of erstwhile *Sajjada Nishin Maulana Saiyid*, met Akbar and sought the reinstatement of the jagir. The emperor paid heed to the cry raised in lamentation. The Jagir was restored and Husain Chak's intent subdued. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ordered an investigation into the alleged embezzlement of the Waqf. He decreed, as a sequel to his enquiry, that the payments be made in cash directly from the

State Exchequer. Further, he demanded a report from the governor Nawab Saif Khan on the revenue yielded from the land granted. It was found that the profit was much greater than the reimbursements. Consequently, the extent of jagir was reduced to one half of its original. The Khanqah caught fire in 1144/1731. The fire is dated that is the same as 1144 A.H./1731 A.D. It was almost reconstructed and repairs to the mosque were completed under the supervision of the deputy Mughal governor, Nawab Abul Barkat Khan. In 1146 A. H. 1733 A. D., the mosque was badly burnt in the blaze again. People tried to douse the fire but all the helpers (khuddam) could manage to save were the relics. The fire's date is penned in these words:

In 1218 A. H 1803 A. D., Sardar Abdullah Khan Halkozai, the Afghan governor, got the roof of the *Khanqah-e-Moulla* repaired and donated a munificent sum of money for its sprucing up. During the Afghan regime, an annual amount of Rs. 2000/- was sanctioned for the conservation of this sanctuary. This practice continued till the advent of the Sikhs who stopped it altogether. During the rule of Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-85), Saiyid Yaqub Khan, the Yaqand envoy, in his endeavour to trace his lineage to Saiyid Ali Hamadani, and to avail himself of the benefits of its jagir, succeeded in taking some valuable documents from the Khanqah-i-Mu'alla. He produced them to the Viceroy of India and got an annual pension of Rs. 12000/= conceded. Accordingly, the British Government annulled the rights on the jagir. In 1302 A.H./1884 A.D., Nawab Ahsanullah Khan of Dacca lent an amount of Rs.1000/-, through governor Laxman Das (1884-1886 A.D.), for its flooring. In 1324 A. H.1906 A. D., Mufti Abdur Rahim in association with a Kashmiri businessman, Ghulam Samdani, then residing in Peshawar, undertook the restoration work of the mosque. Now, whenever the need, patching up and embellishment are executed on the *Khanqah-e-Moulla* from the funds received from public and the rent collected from shops and houses belonging to it.

### **The Rituals and their evolution**

Rituals are part and parcel of every religion and every society which are followed by the people in letter and spirit. Kashmir is the cradle of many holy sites belonging to different religions. Different rituals evolved over the period of time. One of the most important rituals which helps the scholars of history to reconstruct the early history of the conversions to Islam in Kashmir is the practice of the loud recitation of *Aurad-i-Fathiyya* in mosques and shrines throughout the length and breadth of the Valley. This prayer was compiled by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani who was a Kubrawi Sufi belonging to Persia. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani visited Kashmir in the early eighties of the fourteenth century. During the recitation of *Aurad-i-Fathiyya*, it can be seen that the Muslims of the Valley kneeling with their faces towards the holy site which is symbolised as a sacred palce. In addition to it, the Muslim devotees of the valley can be seen, during the recitation of *Aurad*, bursting into tears, cries, and lamentations. The manner in which the Muslims of the valley recite the *Aurad*, distinguishes them from other Muslims of the subcontinent. The glimpses of this unique ritual could be seen in the mosque of Mir Sayyid ali Hamadani, which is popularly known as Khanqah-i-Moulla. He prescribed this prayer to his disciples. But there is a strong belief among the Muslims of Kashmir that the group recital of the prayer was especially meant for them. It is

further believed that it had the *batini* (recondite) sanction of the Prophet (SAW). Considering the importance of *zikr* in the Quran and consequently in all the Sufi orders, there is nothing novel about the prescription of the same by Saiyid Ali to his disciples in Kashmir. He had asked the disciples to read it aloud in congregation. From the Quranic viewpoint, *zikr* is permissible. However, the historical and sociological significance of the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* lies in its mode of intonation. Its echoing recital continues to be practiced by the devotees even now. This historical and social fact has actually turned its recitation into some sort of a ritual that not only raised the eyebrows of Saiyid Ahmad Kirmani, a venerable Sufi, during the initial stage of spread of Islam in Kashmir but, also, in recent history has caused a good deal of concern to the modern politico-religious reformists. To revert, in the sixteenth century, when Saiyid Ahmad Kirmani found that the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* was orally repeated in a loud tone in every mosque of Srinagar, he barred the people from its resonating usage. After a while, he decided to leave the city and started moving towards Baramulla. He reached *Upalhakmarg*, near the *Buniyar hamlet*, and spent the night there. After offering *fajr* prayers, he went into a meditative trance. Saiyid Ali Hamadani appeared with a piece of reed in his hand and showed signs of throwing it towards Saiyid Ahmad Kirmani. "What offence have I committed?" asked Saiyid Kirmani. "The despicable deed is that you have dissuaded people from the *wird* (recitation) of the Prophet (SAW). It was by means of the recitation of the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* that Islam reached out to the masses of Srinagar," replied Saiyid Ali Hamadani. On hearing this, Saiyid Kirmani, in all penitence, left the place and, walking barefoot, headed back to Srinagar. He went to every street, lane, alley and mosque. He implored and instructed the people of Srinagar to recite aloud regularly the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* after *namaz* in the mornings and the evenings.

Hence, *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* continues to be a popular form of *zikr* in all the shrines of Kashmir to this day, despite the fact that during the period of recent turmoil in Kashmir it could not be recited in several shrines and mosques due to the opposition of the politico-religious reformists. Its intonation in a reverberating manner may be regarded as the spiritual dimension of Islam (in Kashmir) and cultural legacy of the Kashmiris. Situated in its proper historical and contemporary perspective, the extreme importance of the loud group recital of the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* to the Kashmiris during periods of their religious evolution merits careful analysis. This phenomenon may be explained in terms of several factors:

- a) Elitist.
- b) Social.
- c) Emotional.

*Awrad-i-Fathhiya* begins with a prayer seeking the forgiveness of Allah for one's sins. Allah is praised for his attributes (*siffats*) like *Hai*, *Qayyum*, and *Salam*. Hence Allah's help is also invoked for the grant of peace to the believers. The emphasis of the prayer is on the Oneness of Allah and Transcendence. Further, emphasis on the 99 attributes of Allah and the invocation of Allah through several other prayers contained in the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* clearly bring out its importance as a primary source of Islam in Kashmir. Also, the *Awrad's* stress on the fundamental Islamic belief in the finality of the Prophethood in

Muhammad (*khatm-i-nabuwat*) in addition to the strong belief in the Oneness of God deserves special emphasis. This is not to deny the importance of the five pillars of Islam for the neo-converts in Kashmir during the sojourn of Saiyid Ali Hamadani to Kashmir. Given the religious as well as historical importance of *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* in the syncretic Hindu-Buddhist environment of Kashmir, the argument needs to be discussed at some length. *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* was essentially a *wazifa* bestowed on his royal murid Sultan Qutubuddin and a small number of his Muslim compatriots. The history of Islam in Kashmir cannot be understood simply on the basis of statements of general nature contained in the Persian sources. We need to capture the essence of the source material, both literary and oral through critical examination and creative imagination. So, one ought to delve deep into the history as well as religious psyche of the earlier converts to Islam in Kashmir. Without an iota of doubt, the early converts to Islam in Kashmir were followers of a syncretistic religious ideology. At the head of the small Muslim community in Kashmir was the king who flagrantly violated the rules of the *Shari'ah*. He had kept two sisters as his wives, participated in the religious ceremonies of the Brahmans and performed even the *yagna*. A closer evaluation of the source material makes it clear that Saiyid Ali Hamadani first addressed himself to the primary task of reconverting the ruler and a small number of neo Muslims rather than the Kashmiri masses.

The *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* must have been simply recited as a *zikr* by the *Kubrawi Sayyids*, during the time of *Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani* or even *Sayyid Muhammad Hamadani*, in Srinagar. However, with gradual conversion of the local population to Islam, the innate mode of social behaviour began to soar so much so that the manner in which the *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* is vocally echoed in all major shrines and numerous mosques of Kashmir, points to its recitation as a distinctive feature of Islam in Kashmir.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the rituals in Kashmir have evolved over the period of time and hence have certain religious overtures as well. The ritual of reciting *Awrad-i-Fathhiya* started by *Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani* has religious connotations and was used by him as a means in order to reach out to the masses with the message of Islam. This led to the conversion of the people of Kashmir to Islam over the period of time. This ritual is followed in letter and spirit by the people of the Valley to this day. It is in this context that the holy shrine of *Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani* known as *Khanqah-i-Maollah* is revered by the devotees. This shrine is considered to be the epicentre of Islam in Kashmir and it is because of this Saint that the people started moving towards *slam day by day* in the earlier times.

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