

# *Reshian-e-Silsila* and the Sufi Stages in *Shruks* of Nund Rishi

**Amandeep Kour**

## **Abstract**

Islam is an act of faith that establishes a relationship with the Almighty (*Allah*), which allows human beings to set out on a spiritual enterprise for peace. Sufism, the esoteric realm of Islam, revives the true Islamic spirit through awakening the self to the Absolute Truth. Nund Rishi is unequivocally recognized as the Standard Bearer of Kashmir, who fiercely fought to preserve the cultural ethos of Kashmir. He changed the terminology from *Sufism* to *Reshism*. The article expounds on the *Reshian-i-silsila* and the Sufi stages in the *Shruks* of Nund Rishi. Reshi-Sufis aspired to purify the baser self (*Nafs*), which led to self-realization. The basis of Nund Rishi's philosophy of life was love and intense devotion to God. He upheld Islamic precepts while simultaneously supporting Kashmir's traditional way of life. Henceforth, Nund Rishi was not only a protector of local customs but also influenced the lives of the natives as a spiritual guide through his poetic verses. Nund Rishi's poetics of self, *shruks* are a perpetual source of guidance for posterity, irrespective of religion.

**Keywords:** Islam, Sufism-Reshism, *Reshian-i-silsila*, Sufi stages, *Shruks*-the poetics of self

## **Introduction: Sufism-The Mystical Nucleus of Islam**

Islam is an act of faith that establishes a relationship with the Almighty (*Allah*), which allows human beings to set out on a spiritual enterprise for peace. Islam is derived from the Arabic word *sa-la-ma*, which implies peace, a voluntary and conscious human act of faith towards God. "O! You, who have attained to faith! Enter wholly into peace (of God)"<sup>1</sup> as Islam teaches humanity to seek peace in every aspect of life. Islam springs from an ancient Abrahamic tradition of monotheistic faith. It is a three-fold science of the truth, comprising three cardinal elements: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. It requires complete submission to the Supreme will and acceptance of Divine injunctions as written in the Holy Scripture, *the Quran*. Iman (*Faith*) necessitates belief in the written word of the scripture, faith in the existence of God, angels, devils, prophets, the last day, and submission to the Islamic creed (*Al-Qidah*). Ihsan (*Excellence*) implies devotion towards God, where the seeker strives for perfection by praying to pay profound obeisance to the Divine as if the seeker is perpetually under the presence of God. Like every religion, Islam has two interconnected realms: the exoteric realm of Islamic law (*Shariat*) and the esoteric realm of the spiritual path (*Tariqa*). Both domains assist in unveiling the Truth (*Haqiqa*), and by following these two realms, one can truly understand the message of Islam. The mystical enterprise gives meaning to the act of belief in

---

Amandeep Kour is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Panjab University, Chandigarh India. Email: tanuaman24@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Islam: The Essentials* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2017), p. 52.

God as “The aspiration to peace with God, with his creation, and with oneself (*Salam-e-nafs*).”<sup>2</sup>

Sufism dates back to the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), through whom the Divine word, *the Quran*, was revealed. Titus Burckhardt, in *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, refers to Sufism as “The inward (*Batin*) dimension of Islam.”<sup>3</sup> The essence of Sufism is to live and experience Islamic tenets, and its source lies in *the Quran* and the prophetic traditions. Central Asia, Iran, and Arabia witnessed mystic movement between the 8th and 13th centuries<sup>4</sup>. The rise of the gulf between politics and religion led to the separation of the three dimensions of Islam. Sufism emerged in response to the rule of the Umayyad dynasty, as the ruling class did not act by Islamic law (*Shariat*). The early Sufis chose an austere life and focused on the heart and soul of the body rather than serving and flattering the ruling class. Therefore, in this period, the faithful and pious adherents of Islam undertook a spiritual enterprise, leading to the formulation of Sufism. Sufism, also known as *Tasawwuf* or *Sufi-gari*, drives its mystical knowledge (*Ma'rifat*) from *the Quran* and the Prophetic tradition. Sufism involves the assimilation of ethical values, the practice of Islamic piety, the cultivation of humility, the embrace of voluntary poverty, and the embodiment of love. Sufis are also known as faithful companions (*Sahabi*), the highest title conferred on the followers of the Prophet. The terms used for the Sufis in *the Quran* are “*muqarrabin* (Friends of God), *sabirin* (Patient men), *abrar* (Virtuous men), and *zuhhad* (Pious men).”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the genesis of the teachings of Sufism was crystallized into various spiritual orders (*Tariqas*) or spiritual chains (*Silsila sing. Turuq*). The Sufi orders disseminate Islamic principles by providing insights into the literal words of *The Holy Quran*. The spiritual mentor (*Murshid/Shaykh*) imparts the mystical knowledge to the disciple (*Murid, Salik*). The chain of transmitting spiritual knowledge traces its history in the tradition of the Prophet, who first revealed the Divine word and bestowed this right on his companions. Sufi orders are a testament to the idea of brotherhood and the inseparable link they share with the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his companions. The institutionalization of various Sufi orders began in the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., primarily by Persian founders. Qadri silsila was the first Sufi order founded by Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1071-1166), followed by Abu'l Najib's Suhrawardi order (1098-1168) and Khwaja Baha'ud din's Naqshbandi order (1318-1389) to name a few, that continue to inspire people on the path of righteousness and self-discovery. A. Q. Rafiqi, in *Sufism in Kashmir*, quoted R. A. Nicholson's view on the mystical path, “The tariqas or mystical paths by which Sufis seek God are in number as the souls of men and vary infinitely, though a family likeness may be traced in them all.”<sup>6</sup> The Chishti order, established in 1236 by Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, is the first Sufi order in India. Its inception led to the transmission of knowledge to various Sufi orders in the country. The Sufi fraternities are believed to have originated from the teachings of the revered Prophet Mohammed (SAW), with spiritual mentors and disciples responsible for continuing Sufi traditions. Confraternities

<sup>2</sup> Ramandan, *Islam*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (World Wisdom: Bloomington, 2009), p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Fida Muhammad Khan Hassnain, *Advent of Islam in Kashmir* (Gulshan Books: Srinagar, 2016), p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah, *Islamic Sufism* (Gulshan Books: Srinagar, 2015), pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafqi, *Sufism in Kashmir* (Gulshan Books: Srinagar, 2015), p. xlii.

promoted these orders to counter hypocrisy (*Nifaq*) with a focus on promoting values such as silence, voluntary poverty, humility, love, and peace.

Furthermore, Sufism encompasses different ways to attain the goal of communion and employs self-realization techniques that lead to purgation on distinct levels. It begins with “purifying a man's baser self and depraved behaviour, followed by release from attachment, and ultimately purging at the level of qualities by assimilating Divine attributes over baser ones.”<sup>7</sup> Influential Sufis disseminated the Sufi doctrines and described spiritual stations and spiritual states. As enumerated in the Sufi manual *Kitab al Luma*, a seeker must conquer the path's seven spiritual stations, also known as the seven stages, before entering a spiritual state. Each stage is a milestone that challenges the baser self, testing the seeker's intention (*Ikhlas*) and assisting to liberate their baser self from the fetters of earthly desires. A seeker must put in earnest efforts (*Mujahada*) to pass through these stages and attain perfection in one phase before proceeding to another. Successfully passing each stage helps the seeker overcome ignorance and fight a holy war with oneself, ultimately leading to a morally elevated self.

The spiritual stations are the foundation of a mystical quest towards a conscious and fulfilling life. The spiritual stations are as follows: “repentance (*Taubah*), fear (*Wara*), renunciation (*Zuhd*), poverty (*Faqr*), patience (*Sabr*), trust in God (*Tawakul*), and satisfaction (*Rida*). After successfully passing through the stages, a Sufi feels blessed with ten mystical states (*Ahwal*, sing. *Hal*).”<sup>8</sup> These spiritual states are beyond the seeker's control and are called Divine gifts. Hence, the spiritual stations help to raise the lower self (*Nafs*) to higher states of consciousness. After passing the stages and acquiring Divine knowledge, a seeker earns the title of a knower or gnostic. As the saying goes, “A spiritual journey is fruitful when the knowledge, knower, and the known are one.”<sup>9</sup>

Sufism is an itinerary of imperfection to perfection. The core objective of Sufism is to attain Oneness (*Tawhid*), attested with the Islamic precept of “There is no god but God.” It revives the true Islamic spirit and seeks to awaken the self to the Absolute Reality by concentrating on and conforming to it. Sufism guides humanity on a transformative journey toward their higher self by detaching the lower self from all material desires and strengthening their selves through the precepts of the *Holy Quran*. Henceforth, Islamic mysticism aids individuals in cultivating the spiritual attributes necessary to realize the Divine and this forms the core of Sufi philosophy.

### **Reshism: The Indigenous Sufi Order of Medieval Kashmir**

Sufism was a well-defined philosophy in medieval India, and it had a well-defined structure under the Chishti order before its dawn in medieval Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir, a union territory in India, is renowned for its heterogeneous nature regarding its religion and culture, as it is an amalgamation of distinct religions. “Kashmir was inhabited by the Nagas before it was subjected to Buddhist influences in 300 BCE and was an abode of Saiva philosophy till

<sup>7</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North California Press, 1975), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Farida Khanam, *Sufism: An Introduction* (Goodword Books, 2009), p. 202.

<sup>9</sup> Reynolds Nicolson, *The Mystics Of Islam* (World Wisdom, 2002), p. 22.

13<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>10</sup> The advent of Islam as a religion in Kashmir was not under the sword's power, as “Islam made its way into Kashmir not by forcible conquest but by a gradual conversion.”<sup>11</sup> The dawn of Islam at the hands of Sufis in Kashmir provided relief in an atmosphere of intolerance and oppression.

The Rishi tradition has deeply permeated the soil of Kashmir, making it the rightful title holder of Resh wa'er - the land of the reshis. Pre-Vedic time marks the inception of the Reshi tradition in Kashmir. Legend has it that Kashmir was a wet area called Satisar (Lake of Sati), and it was named after an ascetic, “Kashyap Reshi, who killed a demon residing in the water of Satisar. He made the land fit for habitation, and it was named after Kashyap Reshi as “Kashyap Mar, Kasheer, and, later, Kashmir.”<sup>12</sup> Describing the ancient reshis, Master Ghulam Ali, states,

The most chaste, pious, disciplined, and reserved people settled in the dense forest. They dwelled in caves and were called reshis in the local parlance. They rarely attended civil society. They have had fruits or wild vegetables as their food. People venerated them so much.<sup>13</sup>

The reshis were known for their non-discriminatory approach towards caste, sect, creed, and religion. They endeavored to develop a humanistic vision and advocated universality among the masses. Hence, the word Reshi was in vogue long before the advent of Islam in Kashmir, signifying their importance and influence in the region.

### The Etymology of Reshi

The Sanskrit word Reshi means a sanctified saint or a highly venerated sage who is spiritually elevated. In Rig Veda, a reshi is a “Singer of sacred hymns in praise of the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> It connotes that an ascetic who devotes his entire life to the remembrance of God. The Kashmiri word for reshi (*saint*) is ‘*Reosh*,’<sup>15</sup> a morally and spiritually elevated saint who sincerely dedicates his life to meditation and serves the Almighty by extending his service to humanity. The word Reshi acquired myriads of meanings down the century. Abdul Wahab Nuri of the eighteenth century asserted “the Persian origin of the word Reshi (*Raish*), which means a wound.”<sup>16</sup> In the spiritual realm, it means a seeker who abstains from serving self with pleasures and strives for the evolution of self—their pious personality springs from pure devotion and enduring suffering.

The Reshi cult was a significant aspect of Kashmir's ancient heritage, which had deep roots in the region's thriving Hindu and Buddhist cultures. According to historian Mohammad

---

<sup>10</sup> Irfan Ahmad and D. P. Saklani, ‘Evolution of Kashmiriyat: A Case of Socio-Cultural Assimilation during 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Century’, *Remarking An Analisation*, vol. 1, Nov. (2016), p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> B. N. Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Delhi: Photo Litho Works, 1984), p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> G. N. Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought* (Kashmir: Gulshan Books, 2009), pp. 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> Master Ghulam Ali, *Succession of Muslim Rishism in Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2016), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Manzoor Fazili, *RyshWa'er: The Valley of Saints...* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2015), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Fazili, *RyshWa'er*, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> H. N. Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir: A Study of Prominent Sufis and Rishis* (Srinagar: Book Palace, 2015), p. 179.

Ishaq Khan, “the Arabic term for the same class of a man is Sufi,”<sup>17</sup> and in Kashmir, Sufis are designated as Reshis. Reshism was the prominent indigenous Sufi order in the valley, apart from the foreign Sufi orders in Kashmir. It flourished under the supervision of Nund Rishi from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century AD. Nund Rishi gave a new dimension to Reshism and attributed universal importance to it by incorporating the precepts of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and changing the nomenclature of Reshi-cult to ‘*Reshian-i-silsila*.’<sup>18</sup> Nund established medieval Reshism to connect it with a civilized society, as the ancient ascetics shunned the association with civilized society. Muslim Reshis cherished remembering God living amidst the people and serving them by directing the natives toward the divine path. The reshi-Sufis took the role of social reformers by becoming the voice of the underdogs and rooted out caste-ism, oppression, animal slaughtering, and injustice with the egalitarian philosophy of Islamic monotheism in the vernacular. With Parimoo writing that “Nund Rishi's approach was more down to earth, and it not only made the impact of new culture soft and meaningful but also guaranteed the continuance of very Kashmiri way of life.”<sup>19</sup>

### Seven Sufi Stages in *Shruks* of Nund Rishi:

Shaikh Noor-ud-Din was one of medieval Kashmir's most revered saint poets, and his parents called him Nunda, the pious one. Nund Rishi was born in Khee village in Kulgam. Nund Rishi was born during a phase of religious transition in Kashmir to Salar and Sadra Sanz. A famous legend surrounds his birth. As an infant, Nund refused to suck his mother's milk for three consecutive days. On the third day, Lal Ded happened to cross their house and heard the cry of the infant. She took Nund in her arms and whispered the following words into his ears, which are worth mentioning: “Thou hast not felt shy of taking birth; / Why dost thou feel shy of tasting the pleasures of the world?”.<sup>20</sup> Upon hearing Lal Ded's words, the infant immediately responded by sucking the milk. Lal Ded's words nourished the infant, and she said to his mother, “Let thee take care of my spiritual heir.”<sup>21</sup> Shaikh was a child prodigy, quite intellectual, and “a born sage”<sup>22</sup> who cherished long hours of solitude and deeply contemplated the Divine. Nund, in his formative years, learned spiritual lessons from different occupations, weaver and land tiller. Nund learned how to cultivate the land and the importance of hard work, labor, sincerity, and honesty. He acknowledged these attributes as a part of righteous living. Nund Rishi's poetical composition is a discourse of his experience of the inner self. The metaphysical foundation of his poetry is on Islamic monotheism, knowledge of divine love, love for the creator and his manifestation, Prophet-hood, lower self, and accountability of deeds in the afterlife. Eulogizing Nund Rishi as a reshi-Sufi and a social reformer in *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, G. N. Gauhar, states: “He not only revolutionized the religious life of the Kashmiris but also changed the course of history and founded a new cultural concept in Kashmir.”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Fazili, *Rysh Wa'er*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity*, p. viii.

<sup>20</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 52.

Nund's poetical composition is in the form of *shruks*. The word *shruk* is derived from "the Sanskrit term *Sloka*"<sup>24</sup>, meaning "a knot or a puzzle."<sup>25</sup> It is a Kashmiri form of Shlok. He also composed "watsuns, qitas (*Quatrains*), naat (*In praise of Prophet*), and some of his verses are in mathnavi form."<sup>26</sup> His verses were written in old Kashmiri with the rhyme structure of a-b, a-b (Smith 24). *Shruks* are the "words of wisdom"<sup>27</sup> underscoring the sovereignty of the Divine and one's ultimate surrender before the Absoluteness of the Divine. Nund dedicated his *shruks* to Baba Nassr, one of his four vice-regents, who represented humanity. He used his poetry as a medium of social reform, and through it, Nund disseminated a message of peace, love, and harmony among the different classes of people.

Nund's poetry earned the name "*Koshur Quran*,"<sup>28</sup> *Quran* in Kashmiri. His life provides ample evidence that he was not merely a preacher of theoretical precepts of Islam but also implemented the teachings of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in his own life before advocating them to the masses. He declared, "I perfected my belief in the kalima by acting upon it."<sup>29</sup> Nund devoted himself to the Divine's service by preaching God's oneness, as attestation of the oneness of the Almighty (*Tawhid*) is the foremost pillar of Islam. Nund conveyed the true spirit of Islamic monotheism and asserted the oneness of the Almighty with the following:

There is no god, but God often I did recite: / Then I became absorbed so completely in it. / In it, I put my heart of stone day and night. / I was gold from ashes by being deeply in it.<sup>30</sup>

Nund affirmed one of the kalima from *the Holy Quran*, which signifies the Almighty's absolute and uncontested position. *The Quran* states, "Allah is the creator of all things, and he is the guardian and disposer of all affairs."<sup>31</sup> He expressed the state of his heart as the heart of stone which undergoes corruption in the earthly life. However, he engaged himself in divine contemplation (*Dhikr*) and meditation (*Muraqaba*) to nourish his heart, and he posited, "I was gold from ashes."<sup>32</sup> Nund urged "seekers of truth to persist through adversity and pursue the objective of liberty relentlessly."<sup>33</sup> He spent his childhood ruminating on God, with meditation and remembrance of God being essential spiritual practices in the spiritual quest. Although he received spiritual guidance from different spiritual mentors, he was never formally enrolled in any mystic order. His first spiritual initiation was from Lal Ded, who taught him the first spiritual lesson of love. Lal Ded nursed him; in this regard, she was acclaimed as Nund Rishi's foster mother. He felt greatly indebted to the Saiva mystic and he eulogized Lal Ded for her

<sup>24</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> Mir Mohammad Hanif, 'Kashmir, Kashmiris and the Literary Tradition', *Imprints of English on Modern Kashmiri Poetry* (Srinagar: Jay Kay Books, 2016) p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 195.

<sup>27</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 195.

<sup>28</sup> Fazili, *RyshWa'er*, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 193.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Smith, *Nund Rishi: Life and Poems* (New Humanity Books, 20120, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Quran* (King Fahd Complex: K. S. A., 1998), p. 627.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 264.

spiritual attributes and wisdom. He posited, “This One is for Lalla Ded of Padmanpura / Who in abundance drank the nectar, Divine. / In that great Saint's lap, saints slept there, / O my Lord, let such grace always be mine.”<sup>34</sup> It can be inferred from the above verse that Lal Ded and Nund had a close relationship akin to that of a mother and a son. Moreover, the foreign missionaries recognized Nund's spiritual potential. Syed Hamadani, one of these missionaries, acknowledged Nund's spiritual capacity and called Nund a *Zahid (Seeker)*. To further hone Nund's spiritual abilities, he entrusted Syed Hussain Simnani to provide him with spiritual lessons. Nund's mother, Sadra, greatly respected Simnani, who was impressed with Nund's poetry and guided him towards devotion. Despite this, Simnani did not take on the role of a spiritual mentor to Nund but instead called him Noor-ud-din, meaning enlightened one.

The second important pillar of Islam is Prophet-hood. The Sufi orders, prevalent in many parts of the world, emerged under the spiritual guidance of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW). The descent of Prophets on earth occurred periodically to provide proper guidance to humankind. It is written in *the Holy Quran* that “And there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them.”<sup>35</sup> A Prophet is endowed with numerous attributes that qualify him for his role, including perfect knowledge, possessor of spiritual insight, humility, piety, love, refined behavior, good moral character, and compassion. “The objective of the Prophets is to instruct humanity to live according to the Almighty's will,”<sup>36</sup> as stated in *the holy Quran*. Prophets guide humanity to ponder about the benefactor who bestows myriads of blessings in their life and they guide humanity about their rights and duties, ensuring a morally just society.

Prophet Mohammad (SAW) was Nund's murshid (*Guide*), and he was his talib (*The guided*). According to the tradition, the spiritual mentor guides the disciple in his quest for spiritual enlightenment. The concept of murshid-Talib originated from the tradition of the Prophet, taught by an invisible spirit (*Gabriel*) in the cave, Hira. Nund had unflinching faith in the Divine, and his belief in the leadership of the Prophet as a guide helped him to surrender himself entirely to the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), who showed him the path of Truth. Nund was a devoted lover of the Almighty and his messenger, Prophet Mohammad (SAW). His life epitomizes the profound impact of the relationship between murshid-talib in the spiritual journey. Nund said, “Master's guidance is pears and sugar. / That is if you are accepting and loving. / Ask for a blessing when with the Master, / so that your heart will find it calming. / All confusion of mind will disappear. / And only that One you will be discovering.”<sup>37</sup> Nund Rishi emphasized the importance of seeking guidance from a spiritual mentor to overcome the confusion of duality and reach the Absolute Truth. He belonged to Owais Qarni's Sufi order, which traces its roots back to Owais Qarni, an ardent devotee and a lover of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) who received direct spiritual guidance from him. Owaisi Qarni of Yemen was a contemporary of Prophet Mohammad (SAW), who never met the Prophet in his lifetime. Likewise, Nund sought direct spiritual guidance from the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and was thus a member of the Owaisi Sufi order. In one of his verses, Nund mentioned the names of his predecessors. He wrote:

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Quran*, p. 584.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Quran*, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 96.

First Rishi was Mohammad Rishi: / Second, Uways Qarani following, / The third Rishi was the Zalak Rishi/ The fourth Hazrat Palas followed. / The fifth Rishi was Rumi Rishi / The sixth Hazrat Miran followed. / Seventh, never as advanced was he: / I am no one, and my name is nothing!<sup>38</sup>

In his *shruk*, Nund expressed his love and devotion for the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), whom he revered wholeheartedly as a spiritual mentor. Nund paid tribute to his predecessors, who were accomplished in their spiritual quest, and took them as his inspiration for his spiritual journey.

Nund was overwhelmed by the spiritual yearning and retired to a cave quite early. He spent twelve years in a cave, using the time to sincerely repent for not utilizing every moment to remember the Divine. He found a cave as “a celestial home.”<sup>39</sup> Nund's spiritual quest commenced with repentance, the first spiritual station in the journey toward Truth, crucial in the heart's purification. It means to seek the Almighty's forgiveness for misdeeds and establish a pure relationship with the Almighty by lighting the lamp of love of Allah in the heart. Dhun Al’Nun told his disciples, “A pleasant life in the next world is a life of repentance in this.”<sup>40</sup> Despite prolonged hours of prayers in a cave, Nund “repented and felt ashamed for his time in ignorance of the Divine.”<sup>41</sup> He opted for repentance as a sign of resigning from worldly entrapments. It is stated in the Holy Quran that “O ye who believe turn to Allah with sincere repentance.”<sup>42</sup> Etymologically, repentance means to return. It is to turn away from the things Allah has forbidden in *the Holy Quran*. This spiritual station has three stages; in the first stage, “a repentant regret his disobedience. In the second stage, he promises not to commit any sins. Lastly, he is firm in his resolve not to sin again; therefore, he sincerely obeys divine commandments. A seeker (Repentant, *taib*) regrets due to fear (*Wara*) of Allah for he acted against what has been forbidden by the Divine. As a repentant (*Munib*), he “becomes aware of his evil actions and feels shame as Allah is omnipotent.”<sup>43</sup> Nund instructed to purify the body of the evil through repentance and prayers. “Why don't you dirty body be washing...Clothes of a dervish...beads for prayer.”<sup>44</sup>

Repentance is an essential aspect that must be followed before supplication, for instance, Moses rectified his evil acts by turning toward Allah stating “To thee, I turn in repentance.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, “There is no right worship without repentance because Allah hath put repentance before worship.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is essential to turn in repentance towards the Divine for the sins committed in ignorance before the practice of supplication. The spiritual station of repentance arises in fear (*Wara*) of the Almighty's existence. Nund preached to remain in constant fear of the Divine so that an individual is liable to explain his deeds before the

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> Muhammad Ashraf Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery: Kashf Al-Mahjub* (Kitab Mahal, 2016), p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Quran*, p. 769.

<sup>43</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 343-45.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Quran*, p. 220.

<sup>46</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 94.



Almighty on the day of resurrection. He devoted his whole life to advocating the Absoluteness of the Divine. Nund's powerful words continue to inspire and guide people towards the path of righteousness as he remarked, "I gave up evil acts for the world I feared: / I devoted my whole life to the only One. / Then in Truth's water, I, my body, purified. / And I wandered finally to sit in seclusion."<sup>47</sup> For Nund, cave-dwelling was a crucial phase to subdue the evil self (*Nafs*). According to him, an individual sinful self throws a person into the ditch of darkness and despair. In the following verse, he pointed out the evil of anger and how it can be destructive. He asserted, "If that anger inside you does not let go, / In your actions, it will appear, and soon: / If you do not wipe out inner strains, know that, / your efforts will be inopportune."<sup>48</sup> Nund devoted himself to entirely worshipping the Divine, who assists in spiritual evolution. He restricted himself to the minimum necessities of life to stay focused on his goal, and strictly adhered to the sincere remembrance of God to experience a more fulfilling life. Nund affirmed,

Think of the One and constraint be having: / You will find grace when you eat less. /  
All the anger and greed in you will be dying, / And pride and hate will be genuinely  
useless. / Fruitful is if one is detached when acting. / Then your empty jug will be filled  
to excess!<sup>49</sup>

Prayer (*Salat*) is a powerful act of devotion in remembrance of the Divine that nourishes the soul and purifies oneself from within. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) regarded prayers as a "Meeraj for a sincere believer"<sup>50</sup> that empowers the mind to distinguish between right and wrong. Prayers guard a man against committing immoral and evil acts, enabling individuals to maintain a virtuous and fulfilling life. As Nund's verse suggests, prayer is not just an obligation but an opportunity to embark on a spiritual journey that leads to inner peace and enlightenment. Nund mentioned the importance of offering prayer and its impact on an individual's spiritual growth in the following verse, "Hundreds of prayers I offered during the day: / At night I stayed awake; vigil did I maintain. / My prayers may you now accept this. I pray, / If not, O my Lord, like a stray dog, I will remain."<sup>51</sup> In the verse, Nund posited that offering daily prayers makes existence meaningful, and in Islam, it is an essential practice to connect with the divine and gain spiritual strength. Nund's prayers were not just a ritualistic act but a profound expression of his faith and devotion. He affirmed offering prayers daily and at night as the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) guided him. He humbled himself before the Divine, showing his complete submission to the Divine will as commanded in *the Holy Quran*, recognizing his limitations and seeking guidance from the Almighty. In his supplications, he implored the Almighty to accept his prayers and bless him with divine grace and mercy, lest he become lost like a stray dog. Through his devotion, Nund found solace and inner peace, as it gave him a sense of purpose and direction to face life's challenges with resilience.

Moreover, Allah commands "And be steadfast in prayers"<sup>52</sup> as a means of remembrance of Allah and obedience to his decree. Prayer is a powerful meditation technique that involves

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 205.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 352.

reciting the ninety-nine names of Allah (*Taqlidi*), each representing an attribute of the Almighty and the verses of *the Holy Quran*. It is typically performed using a rosary (*Tasbih*). Prayers can be offered personally or under the guidance of a spiritual mentor, which is a key to salvation. In the following verse, Nund reminded humanity to be steadfast in prayers and seek the Almighty's guidance on the right path. He remarked, "You'll be born again if prayers you offer: / Cream from milk by praying is separated. / Prayers help in this world and the other: / The door to paradise by praying is parted."<sup>53</sup>

Prophet Mohammad (SAW) emphasized the significance of worshipping and asserted, "Worship God as thou see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you."<sup>54</sup> Nund made a crucial point about incorporating the remembrance of the divine in our daily lives, an essential aspect of meditation. Another *shruk* pertinent to the theme of remembrance of divine and meditation, "God's name goes on repeating and repeating: / By things of this world will not be fascinated. / All through each day, God be remembering: / Stay alive for that One, do not ever be dead."<sup>55</sup> "My earth cannot contain me nor my heaven ... only the Heart of my believing servant can contain me"<sup>56</sup> emphasize the importance of believing in a higher power and acknowledging its presence. Nund asserted that by forgetting the Lord, a man creates his hell, making it crucial to practice meditation always, as "Your foremost duty is to remember God."<sup>57</sup> It is the food of a yearning Sufi and a soul-enriching exercise in the ascending journey of a Sufi. Constant meditation leads to a stage of annihilation of self (*Fana*), followed by perseverance (*Baqa*) and ecstasy (*Wajad*). Nund said, "Meditation is to be from hell protected / Meditation is the path the Prophets went on. / Meditation means both worlds are fed / Meditation is the fragrance to rely upon. / Meditation: if one is in it, established / In the two worlds, respect is given to one."<sup>58</sup> One of the most effective ways to invoke the Divine is to chant the *Shahadah*, "There is no god but God" (*Tawhid al uluhiyyah*).<sup>59</sup> This powerful statement represents the seeker's unwavering devotion to God, indicating that the seeker yearns for nothing but God. "The first stage in remembrance is to forget the self, and the last stage is the effacement of the worshipper in the act of worship followed by total absorption in the object of worship."<sup>60</sup> The practice promotes a sense of Unity of creation and provides spiritual insights to the seeker.

Nund, as a reshi-Sufi, staunchly believed in voluntary poverty as a significant stage in the path of Truth. Worldly riches obstruct the spiritual itinerary, and he rejoiced in the phase of voluntary poverty by dwelling in a cave as a blessing of the Divine in his quest. By enduring poverty with patience and perseverance, Nund gained proximity to the Divine, highlighted by *the Quranic* verse, "For Allah is with those who patiently persevere."<sup>61</sup> It signified that he gave no importance to worldly assets and sincerely submitted to the Absolute Truth. He owned nothing, nor did the ownership of things captivate his mind. Ali B. Uthman Al-Jullabi Al-

<sup>53</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Khanam, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 210.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> O. P. Cyprian Rice, *The Persian Sufis* (George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> Khanam, *Sufism*, p. 206.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 84.

<sup>59</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> Khanam, *Sufism*, p. 206.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Quran*, p. 31.

hujwiri's in *The Revelation of Mystery / Kashf-al-Mahjub*, quoted Shibli, a renowned Sufi, who remarked that "Poverty is an ocean of trials, and all trials for the sake of the Divine are glorious. A seeker bears and endures the tests and tribulations with patience."<sup>62</sup> The phase of poverty helped Nund to practice purity of thought and intention as he remembered the Divine always and endured the tests and tribulations with patience. This spiritual station of poverty releases an individual from the hunger for desire by assisting him in remaining content, which is why an individual who practices voluntary poverty is called "*Sahib-i-Sadiq*" (Friend to the Truth).<sup>63</sup> Nund emphasized "the importance of washing off the impurities and bowing in humility before the Divine,"<sup>64</sup> as he believed it was essential to achieving proximity to the One. He said, "Clay is my foundation and all around me: / Clay is in me, and Clay is my destination / Clay is a part of me, not separate from me, / I use clay utensils for cooking and eating; I rely on them."<sup>65</sup>

It is stated in the *Holy Quran* that "And the servants of Allah, most gracious are those who walk on the earth with humility and when the ignorant address them they say peace,"<sup>66</sup> reminding humanity to strive to be gracious and humble in our dealings with others, even in the face of ignorance. Nund apprehended his state of being; therefore, he asserted that clay is my foundation and all around me. Clay is a powerful metaphor emphasizing the importance of staying grounded and connected to the earth. The spiritual station of voluntary poverty (*Faqr*) is a shield that waves off the fire of hell. Nund patiently endured each stage of his spiritual journey with complete submission to the Divine and trusted the process of spiritual evolution as essential for one's growth. He said, "I depend on you here and there: / The whole of the day I spent seeking you! / Absorbed in You as I meditate / There, I discover bliss inside because of you!"<sup>67</sup>

Repentance is a pre-requisite condition to attain purity. As a seeker, Nund, in the spiritual itinerary, followed the footprints of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), which includes repentance, fear, offering of prayer, the practice of poverty, sincerity of devotion towards the Divine, absolute surrender to Divine commandments, and practice of purity of intention, humility with utmost faith in the Almighty. Hence, Nund crossed the seven stages of his spiritual journey and wholeheartedly believed that these principles are indispensable for achieving spiritual purity and enlightenment. He posited, "Satisfaction Act like a friendly pet, an obedient animal: / The straight path walk, avoid the wrong turns. / One often removes the field weeds, / Sees God everywhere, contentment learns."<sup>68</sup>

Nund was resolute in his belief that "Salvation is a guaranteed pleasure in both the worlds for the one who strictly followed the footprints of the Prophet."<sup>69</sup> Nund's decision to spend time in a cave catalyzed the mastery of his lower self and strengthened his resolve to seek the Absolute Truth. Through asceticism (*zuhd*), Nund gained a profound understanding of life's true objective, and he constantly practiced remembrance of the Divine to attain perfection in meditation and contemplation. According to Nund, the outer realm of Islam serves as a

<sup>62</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Nund Rishi*, p. 63.

<sup>69</sup> Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, p. 202.

foundation, while the inner realm of Sufism involves purging evil traits through virtuous living and repentance.

For Nund, the period of seclusion in the cave profoundly impacted his perception of life, empowering him to work on his lower self and improve himself. However, he acknowledged the limited scope of voluntary seclusion, as he realized that abandoning the world to experience Truth is against the tenets of Islam. He admitted that to learn the Truth, one must embrace the world and learn the significance of humans as social animals and the creation as a manifestation of the Divine. Therefore, he acknowledged his mistake of dwelling in the forest. Although the practice of cave-dwelling assisted him in gaining knowledge about the Truth, he realized that forest dwelling is for the animals. Nund said to Baba Nasar, his disciple, that true devotion to God is to live a householder's life and offer selfless service to his creation. He asserted, "Imperfection leads me to conifers O, Baba Nasar. / Conceiving that monastic life is the path to extol me. / See, not thee, great infamy did it prove. / Uprightly, His track routes through human habitation."<sup>70</sup>

Nund learned to refrain from the unlawful practices that primarily obstruct attaining higher spiritual stations, recognizing that "Desire, anger, time, and senses"<sup>71</sup> proved too influential for him. He lived a simple life to save himself from worldly entanglements and recognized divine blessings through his hunger, practicing gratitude for the countless divine bounties. As an ardent devotee of the Almighty, he spent time remembering the Divine (*Dhikr*) and successfully conquered his animal instincts, acknowledging the importance of living a moderate life. Mohammad Ishaq Khan, in *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century)*, states,

Nund's religious career falls into three main stages: the first is that of an orphan struggling to take out his mundane existence; the second is that of an ascetic who withdraws himself from worldly affairs to know the religious Truth; and in the third and the final stage, he gives up the life of a recluse to advocate ethics of a dynamic and positive nature this division helps us to perceive in a clearer light the shifts and changes which are natural to the evolution of the career of a mystic such as Nuruddin.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, Nund, a religious preacher and social reformer, became an active missionary in the name of the Divine. His cave became the center of spiritual preaching, where he taught that life's true objective is through the inward journey. He understood the welfare of his fellow beings as a most outstanding service in the name of the Divine. Nund's humility and piety led him to surrender himself to social service, and he performed his duties toward humanity with great devotion and sincerity. Through his teachings and actions, Nund founded the Rishi-Sufi order. Nund traveled throughout the valley, advocating the tenets of Islam and instructing the natives to lead a pious life through his verses. He guided the masses to act sincerely following *the Qur'anic* injunctions and Prophetic traditions. As Nund states "Tilling the land is reading *the*

---

<sup>70</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 340.

<sup>71</sup> Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity*, p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century)* (Manohar Publisher, 1997), p. 97.

*Quran* correctly,”<sup>73</sup> affirming the importance of righteousness and deeds. He also emphasized “the significance of penance for misdeeds,”<sup>74</sup> as it is a way to establish faith in the Divine and the only path toward salvation.

Nund Rishi was a humble servant of the Divine and emphasized the paramount significance of humility. According to him, “Who so ever bows his head with humility like a servant exalts his state in both the worlds.”<sup>75</sup> He extolled the essence of the Divine, who governs the heavens and the earth; he is the dispenser of all affairs. His teachings and actions were focused on promoting peace, harmony, and love among all beings and working towards the betterment of society.

## Conclusion

The core concept of Islam revolves around peace (*Salam*) and encourages humanity to attain peace with God. Sufism assists in comprehending the Oneness in the entire cosmos. It is a journey from ignorance to knowledge of the Oneness of God and acknowledgment of the primordial bond between the creator and his creation. Nund Rishi was a prominent reshi-Sufi within the cultural ethos of Kashmir. He earned the title of “rishi mol,”<sup>76</sup> the crown of the sages. Nund aspired to reform Kashmir through Islamic spirituality and his poetry was instrumental in bringing a socio-religious revolution to Kashmir. His verses exhibit the universal spirit of Islamic religion, the relevance of Islamic monotheism, the importance of virtuous living, his sophisticated approach in addressing the masses, a message of Truth (*Haqq*) to humanity. Nund’s *shruks* act as a medium of instruction in a seeker's spiritual path, and they instruct us to rise above the prejudiced opinion against any religion. His verses are an antidote to the perpetual problems of life that a man encounters daily. Nund’s mission was to inspire the sincere practice of religious tenets, and his *shruks* played a significant role in spiritual evolution.

---

<sup>73</sup> Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity*, p. 193.

<sup>74</sup> Rafiabadi, *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 202.

<sup>75</sup> Javed, *The Revelation of Mystery*, p. 96.

<sup>76</sup> Amin Pandit, *Alamdar-I-Kashmir: Standard-Bearer Patron-Saint of Kashmir* (Gulshan Books: Srinagar), p. 26.